

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #28N – Ngawang Chunyi
April 7, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #28N
2. Interviewee: Ngawang Chunyi
3. Age: 69
4. Date of Birth: 1946
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Ruthok
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 7, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 43 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Palden Tsering
14. Videographer: Henry Tenenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Ngawang Chunyi was born in Ngapring Ruthok in Utsang Province. She was the only child of her parents. They were accomplished practitioners of *tsalung* ‘channels and energy [yogic methods].’ *Tsalung* is part of the Nyingma tradition and the families root guru was Tulshi Rinpoche. Ngawang Chunyi received many *wang* ‘empowerments’ and *lung* ‘spiritual oral transmissions’ but she never received a proper education.

Ngawang Chunyi’s great grandfather was the King of Ruthok, who surrendered his kingdom to the Tibetan Government and was then given a vacant plot of land nearby in Choeling. Her grandfather was a very wealthy and revered person, who remained in a special state of meditation after his death. Ngawang Chunyi’s family lived in the Palace of Ruthok, an elaborate five-story building. Her grandfather gave them some land and her parents established a monastery for *ngagpa*, ‘practitioners of tantra’ and a small number of nuns.

When the Chinese occupied her hometown Ngawang Chunyi’s parents feared they would be arrested so they decided to escape. Her arduous journey to Nepal included being stranded for 12 days on a snowy mountain pass without food. Once settled in Nepal, she learned how to inscribe wooden templates of scriptures and studied traditional Buddhist painting.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, Buddhist beliefs, customs/traditions, escape experiences, life as a refugee in Nepal.

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Interview #28N

Interviewee: Ngawang Chunyi

Age: 69, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 7, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:08

Interviewee #28N: My name is Ngawang Chunyi.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#28N: Yes, it can be used. Thank you and [I] am very happy. We are deeply grateful to your coming here for Tibet's cause. [I] am very happy.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us.

#28N: Okay. Of course].

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#28N: Okay.

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

00:02:20

#28N: It is okay to show the pictures and such because I do not have any contact with the relatives in Tibet. They are separate [from me] and I will have no problems. They already have the written story about Grandfather.

Q: So we're honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#28N: Okay. [I] wish to thank you more for spending your time, which is for the cause of our Tibet.

Q: *Ama-la* 'respectful term for mother,' can you please tell me where you were born?

#28N: I was born in Ngapring Ruthok in the north, in the palace of Ruthok.

Q: And what part of Tibet is that?

#28N: It is in Utsang Province.

Q: What year were you born, *ama-la*?

#28N: I do not know the Western calendar but my mother said [I] was born on the 25th day of the 9th lunar month in the year of the hog.

Q: How old are you today, *ama-la*?

00:04:31

#28N: [I] am 69 years old now.

Q: When you were born, *ama-la*, who was in your family? How many people in your family?

#28N: We are five members in the family: three children, my husband and I.

Q: Two daughters?

#28N: A daughter and two sons.

Q: These are your children?

#28N: Yes?

Q: Your elder brothers and elder sisters?

#26N: I do not have any elder brothers or elder sisters. I am an only child.

Q: When you were born...who was in your family when you were born?

#28N: [Speaks before question is translated] My father and mother were accomplished practitioners and due to *tsalung* ‘channels and energy [yogic methods]’ I was the only child born. We were practitioners. They [interviewer and videographer] may know about the practice of energy.

Q: When you were born, your mother and father...did you have any siblings?

#28N: There was not anyone else that was born. Because of their dharma practice, [my father and mother] did not have other children.

00:06:15

We Tibetans call it *tsalung*. When one practices *tsalung* deeply, one does not have many children. Normally one would give birth to more than one child.

[Interpreter interprets as: In Tibet we say it's like vow taken in the name of like wind energy...that kind of energy since...once a person takes that vow they're not able to give birth to a child.]

Q: So who took the vow, your mother or your father?

#28N: Both of them were accomplished.

It is not *chod* 'spiritual practice of "cutting through the ego;"' it is *lung* 'energy' like wind through the channels.

Q: Wind energy vow. In what sect is that? Is that Nyingma...?

#28N: Nyingma, Nyingma; it is Nyingma. Nyingma Tulshi Rinpoche.

Tulshi Rinpoche and my mother received teachings together.

Q: Your mother and you or your mother and your father?

#28N: Mother and Father. Tulshi Rinpoche is my root guru.

Q: What monastery was he connected with in your area? What was the name of the monastery?

#28N: It is Zaringpo in Tibet, which is located behind Mt. Everest.

Q: Za...?

#28N: Zaringpo.

Q: Was it a large monastery and did you visit there often?

00:08:33

#28N: It used to be large in the past.

Q: Have you visited it?

#28N: I have been there at the age of 5 and can remember a little bit.

Q: Do you have...Can you explain a little bit if it is possible or permissible about what wind energy vow would be? What would be the purpose of taking a vow regarding wind energy?

#28N: Regarding *tsalung*, one must receive *ti* 'spiritual guidance' from a lama. [The lama] will give an explanation beginning with the *ngondro* 'preliminary practice.' Once this is completed, guidance regarding *lung* is imparted. We practice *lung* while the guidance is being given. Then there is the *lung tungkor*, which is levitating, up and down.

There are the five branches of *tsa* ‘channel’ wherein one exercises the hands and such. In the past these used to be taught secretly. However, these days there is no secrecy. They are being shown on television. Well, I am not able to give a detailed explanation.

[The five exercises are movements that work with five chakra locations within the central channel of the body: the crown, throat, heart, navel and secret chakra corresponding to the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind and void]

Q: Is it to do with tantra?

#28N: The tantric system may also be like that.

00:11:08

#28N: One cannot practice before studying for a long time. They study for a long time. My mother stayed at Zaringpo for 12 years.

Q: Was that a practice...did your parents study that practice for a long time?

#28N: [They] studied for a very long time. Not just 12 years, they practiced it every day until death.

Q: Were their parents...can you tell us something about their parents and the lineage of your family?

#28N: About my grandfather?

Q: Yes.

#28N: About my grandfather...but for Mother’s father [I] do not have any story to recount about Father’s father. Grandfather is the one in the picture here [shows off camera]. Grandfather hailed from Thoe Ruthok that he surrendered to the Tibetan Government. Then we moved through Jang Ngapring to Choeling *pomo* ‘old man and old woman’ where an old man and a woman owned a vast area of land. This land was given to the King of Ruthok in substitute of the other. [Grandfather] lived in the place called Jang Ruthok.

Q: Your grandfather...please repeat that.

00:12:50

#28N: Grandfather was the King of Thoe Ruthok, King of Thoe Ruthok. The King of Ruthok surrendered his kingdom to the Tibetan Government, offered to the Tibetan Government. At Jang Ngapring was the Choeling *pomo*. The Choeling *pomo* did not have any children and the land was vacant. So the land was given to the King of Ruthok.

Q: What did the Tibetan Government give to the King of Ruthok?

#28N: The King of Ruthok had his kingdom in Thoe Ruthok, which is in the direction of Ngari. [He] offered the kingdom to the Tibetan Government, to the Tibetan Government.

Q: The King of Ruthok offered it?

#28N: The King of Ruthok was Grandfather's grandfather and not him. I do not know how many generations it has been.

After giving up [the land in Thoe Ruthok], a little distance away from Ngapring was the place called [Jang] Ruthok. This land belonged to the Choeling *pomo*. Choeling *pomo* was an old man and an old woman.

Q: There is a...what is that in the north? A Choeling...?

Is that a town? What is that?

00:14:46

#28N: Choeling *pomo* is an old man and an old woman that owned the land; house and land.

Q: And are they still alive?

#28N: Of course not. It was many generations ago. After they were gone the land was vacant and it was given to the King of Ruthok.

Q: Are they in this picture?

#28N: My grandfather is in the center of the picture and those flanking him are like the bodyguards.

Q: Your grandfather, was he a very wealthy man?

#28N: The family was very wealthy. [He] was the king of that region, a descendant of Songtsen Gampo [founder of the Tibetan Empire who ruled Tibet between 630 AD to 649 AD].

Q: Do you know any stories about your grandfather?

00:16:22

#28N: [I] do not know any other history but there are a few stories.

Q: Oh, please tell us the story.

#28N: The story is that Grandfather had to make many *thangye* 'offerings to each monk' on account of *yasor tripa* 'official rank' at Lhasa, *yasor tripa*.

Q: *Tripa*?

#28N: [Grandfather] made offerings on account of *yasor tripa* in Lhasa.

Q: What does *yasor tripa* mean?

#28N: *Yasor tripa* is something like a *geshe* ‘monk with Buddhist philosophy’ degree when a great offering has to be made.

Q: Can you have any idea what year that would have been?

#28N: I might have been around 6 or 7 years old then but I am not sure of the age.

Q: Who was the Dalai Lama then?

#28N: It was the present one. His Holiness knows everything.

Q: The Dalai Lama knows your grandfather?

#28N: [His Holiness] was little and though [he] may not recognize [Grandfather] but will know the name.

Q: Was that unusual for someone in your family to get a *geshe* degree like that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Unusual?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Unusual, rare, doesn't happen very often.

00:18:34

#28N: [*Yasor tripa*] was rare among the government officials. It was very difficult for a great many offerings had to be made. Only senior officials could afford it.

Q: So your grandfather was a descendant of the founder of Tibet? Are there any other stories you know about your grandfather?

#28N: I do not know many other stories because I was a little child then. His subjects in Ruthok accompanied [the King] from Thoe Ruthok. Other people were not allowed to groom his hair except for certain people. Grandfather wore the [hairstyle] called *pachok*.

Q: Were these very elaborate hairstyles or hairpieces?

#28N: It seems to have been an elaborate affair of the head. [The *pachok*] cannot be worn by everybody except the royals.

Q: You were very little but do you have any memories of your grandfather?

#28N: My mother always used to tell [me].

Q: Do you have any memories of grandfather?

00:20:52

#28N: [I] have no memories of seeing [Grandfather] but Mother always used to tell [me].

Q: Are there any other stories you remember hearing about your grandfather?

#28N: [I] have. Grandfather once visited Nepal on pilgrimage. At that time Grandfather was holding the post of Administrator of Kyerong District. It seems the Tibetan Government appointed [him] as leader in various districts. [He] was in Kyerong District. During that time [he] visited Nepal on pilgrimage. It is said that the King of Nepal made every arrangement. It seems there was a guest house within the Boudha stupa [complex]. Arrangements were made [for Grandfather] at this guest house. There was a vehicle—perhaps it was an English-made vehicle then—and a truck for his travels.

00:22:36

My mother was with [Grandfather] then.

Q: So she remembers seeing this experience?

#28N: Yes, [mother] remembered everything and told me.

Q: So your grandfather was very renowned by people even in Nepal?

#28N: Yes, [Grandfather] was very renowned.

Q: Was he famous because of his...a king or was he famous because of his spiritual development?

#28N: Basically, he was famous because of his royal ancestry but [he] was also a very gentle person and deeply spiritual. [Grandfather] was a very good man.

Q: We're talking about the Nyingma tradition.

#28N: Yes, Nyingma.

Q: In the Nyingma tradition, have you ever heard of any practice called...or related to crystal skull? You know, like crystal, the word crystal and skull is the shape of the head. Do you know of any practice like that in the Nyingma tradition?

00:24:40

#28N: [I] am not able to talk about the meaning of such things. However, I have received a great many *wang* 'empowerments' and *lung* 'spiritual oral transmissions' but [I] have not had much education. In order to explain the meaning...since [I] have not studied much I cannot say. However, [I] do understand a little of it in my mind.

Q: So is the crystal skull used?

#28N: The skull is there, yes. There is a skull, a mirror and a crystal used during the ritual practice.

#28N: And a crystal.

Q: So there's a crystal skull, a mirror and what else?

#28N: Mirror, mirror. First a skull is placed...at the base is a ritual vase and a skull placed on top of it. Then a mirror is placed on [the skull] and on top of the mirror is a crystal.

Q: Crystal?

#28N: It is a white crystal.

Q: And another crystal? Did you have any understanding of the meaning of that would be or why that would be important?

00:26:36

#28N: [I] do not know how to explain.

Q: *Ama-la*, do you know...would there be any monasteries around here that might practice that tradition or that spiritual practice with the crystal skull? Do you know anything nearby?

#28N: It is difficult to say these days. Although there are many lamas like Choe Nyima, it will be difficult for us to get a chance to meet them. Choe Nyima has very good knowledge about it.

Q: Choe Nyima?

#28N: Choe Nyima of Sheto Monastery [White Monastery]. Choekyi Nyima Rinpoche, my root guru.

Q: In White Monastery? Say his name again?

#28N: Choekyi Nyima Rinpoche.

Q: And is the White Monastery here in Kathmandu?

#28N: The White Monastery also called Sheto Monastery is right here. It is also known as Kanying Sheto Choekhorling.

Q: Do you know him, *ama-la*?

#28N: [I] know him well but he is very busy. It may be difficult to see him. Perhaps [he] may or may not be there at 10 or 11 o'clock.

Q: Yes, I understand. Thank you.

00:28:14

#28N: [I] left out some portion about [Grandfather's] visit to Nepal.

Q: Okay, please.

#28N: During [Grandfather's] visit to Nepal, the Tibetan Government...the Tibetan Government had handed over a present wrapped in white cloth—it was not known what was inside—for the King [of Nepal]. The Tibetan Government gave this [to Grandfather] in Tibet. This was presented to the King and in return the King gifted a tiger skin complete with head and limbs to the Tibetan Government.

Q: Oh, that was a very special present.

#28N: Yes, a very important [present].

Q: Did he bring it back to your home or to his family?

#28N: No, it has to be offered to His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Tibet.

Q: Do you know if the Dalai Lama received it?

#28N: [Speaks before question is translated] The Dalai Lama had sent the present to the King and the return gift must also be...

Q: Did you ever see it?

00:30:15

#28N: How would [I] see it? I was not even born then. Mother was around 20 years old. My mother was in the 20s.

Q: So that was a very, very special family story.

#28N: Yeah.

Q: Just to clarify what was the gift that your grandfather gave to the Nepalese king?

#28N: It seems [the gift] sent by the Tibetan Government was wrapped in a white cloth.

Q: What was inside of it?

#28N: It would not be known what was within for it was tied with a cloth.

Q: Something special. I thought I missed it but now I understand. Any more stories about your grandfather?

#28N: Other stories about Grandfather...when he was living in Lhasa...

Q: Yes, please...

#28N: When he was living in Lhasa, the holiest of Khampa lamas like Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Chadrel Rinpoche, Dudjom Rinpoche and my root guru Dipo Rinpoche always stayed at his house and he listened to the teachings.

Q: And these were all famous teachers in themselves?

#28N: [These teachers] were his root gurus that stayed at his residence.

Q: Was there any special teaching that your grandfather was very noted for, very appreciated for, something that he understood very profoundly?

00:32:56

#28N: He practiced the dharma himself but did not teach other people. He practiced very well. Many people would come with grievances. They would stand afar and instead of settling the dispute immediately grandfather spoke about the dharma.

Q: Is there any more stories that you want to share?

#28N: If [you] want to ask about my birthplace and the monasteries, [you] can.

Q: I want to know maybe more stories about you. What happened...if you don't have any more stories about your grandfather, if you do I would like to hear them. If you...I would also like to hear the story more about your life and how you grew up.

#28N: That is it about Grandfather. At the time of passing away [Grandfather] was in *thukdham* 'meditation after death.' Later when we made prayer offerings... I was in my fifth year when grandfather passed away.

Q: Even though you were only 5 at the time, can you tell us what kind of a state that meant, what kind of a trance state? What word is that you used?

00:35:19

#28N: My root guru Dipo Rinpoche was there then. My mother and the others knew [about the state of *thukdham*] and talked about it. We made many offerings for prayers in Lhasa and also in our hometown at the monastery of Jang Riwo Datsang, which is very holy. The Guru Rinpoche's statue in there was said to be *sungjon* 'speaking statue.' We offered a dress called *gyalshi choedak* for the Guru Rinpoche statue and made offerings for prayers and stayed there for long. [I] can remember that.

Q: Anything special [you can] mention about the *thukdham*?

#28N: There is nothing special to explain about the *thukdham*.

Q: So now maybe we...with the ending of your grandfather's life, maybe we can now turn to your life.

#26N: [Laughs] There is nothing much about me.

Q: I think you have some stories. Come on.

#28N: [Laughs]

Q: Tell us what are some...when you were a little girl, you're the only daughter, the only child, what was it like when you were growing? Do you have any memories of Tibet, even a little bit?

00:37:19

#28N: As a little child, until the age of 5 I grew up in the *gyalshi* 'king's palace with fields and servants.'

Q: *Gyalshi*?

#28N: [I] grew up in the Palace of Ruthok.

Q: How were you treated in the palace?

#28N: We were treated most dearly in the palace. There were many attendants and workers. The palace had five floors.

Q: Really! What city was that in, please?

#28N: Ruthok, Jang Ruthok.

Q: That was in Utsang, western Tibet?

#28N: That was the region he was given.

Q: Was that a palace that had been in the family for sometime?

#28N: The palace belonged to the Choeling *pomo* earlier. It was a large and old palace.

Q: In the family...in the tradition, is the lineage through the son or through the daughter of the king?

#28N: It passes to the son.

Q: The son will inherit. Okay, and that's in the Nyingma tradition, in the king, in the royalty, in the royal family, correct?

00:39:28

#28N: It is present in the Nyingma tradition. Dudjom Rinpoche is Songtsen Gampo's...there are many descendants. [Dudjom Rinpoche] says he is. However, I cannot claim to be of royal lineage. Most probably Dudjom Rinpoche is one [of the descendants of Songtsen Gampo].

Q: Some lamas too and then there are some government officials?

#28N: [Speaks before question is translated] There are many in Thoe, Grandfather's relatives. There are many relatives of Grandfather in Tibet.

Q: So tell us about you then. Do you have any memory of leaving Tibet?

#28N: [I] have memories of leaving Tibet and of living there.

Q: While leaving...

#28N: It was very difficult on the way here. The memory of it is clear.

Q: What can you remember?

#28N: The memories...while on the way from Tibet...since I was 5...Grandfather had given us a large area of land. There was an old nunnery that my father and mother renovated. The root lama of this monastery is Dipo Rinpoche. [I] can recall that Tulshi Rinpoche was invited to this monastery and gave teachings.

Q: Was it in Tibet?

#28N: Yes, in my hometown in Tibet. The name of the monastery [nunnery] is Jang Dekyiling Chupsang.

[Interpreter interprets as: When I was 5 years old, my grandfather has given my parents a nunnery Jangchup Dekyiling Choeling...]

00:41:42

It is not [Jangchup, it is]...Jang Dekyiling. The land belonged to Grandfather. Grandfather owned a huge area of land.

[Interpreter interprets as: Jang Dekyiling Choeling is a...]

#28N: It is not Choeling. Say Dekyiling. There is the Chupsang Monastery close by.

Q: That monastery was in Tibet?

#28N: [Speaks before question is translated] Since I was 5 until 12, my father built the monastery and also a large residence for Rinpoche. Then Dipo Rinpoche arrived and gave

many teachings. I can recall all of that. I received all the empowerments and oral transmissions.

Q: Really! What do you remember, *ama-la*?

#28N: [I] remember the empowerments and the lama coming there.

Q: And so...

#28N: All the practitioners in the monastery were *ngagpa*, 'practitioners of tantra' those that were not celibate but with spouses. All of them were *ngagpa* and the group was called Dorjee Daktsar.

Q: Was Jang Dekyiling Choeling a nunnery?

00:43:26

#28N: It is not Dekyiling Choeling. Dekyiling is the name of the place. My hometown is called Chupsang.

Q: And then?

#28N: [To interpreter] You did not mention Chupsang.

Q: What?

#28N: Yes?

Q: Please repeat.

#28N: The place where the monastery was built...the land that grandfather gave my mother is called Dekyiling Chupsang. Dekyiling is where the village was and the monastery where we...is called Chupsang.

Q: The practice is about tantra, right?

#28N: Those that practice tantra are called *ngagpa*. There are [separate] monasteries for monks and *ngagpa*.

Q: And so your grandfather gave it to your parents, gave that nunnery to your parents?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He gave that place and her parents...

Q: And your parents built the nunnery?

#28N: Yes, my father and mother built it.

Q: The land was given by Grandfather.

#28N: ...given by Grandfather.

Q: And the monastery was built by...

#28N: ...my father and mother.

Q: Did your father and mother want to train the nuns in tantra or were they just the sponsors? Were they going to be the teachers or sponsors?

00:45:27

#28N: My father and mother were the sponsors and also taught.

Q: Do you have any memories about the monastery being built or did you ever see women coming to join the monastery?

#28N: [I] have memories [about the monastery being built].

Q: Were there new nuns joining?

#28N: During the day they tend to their houses and duties. On festival days—we have many festivals like the 4th day of the 6th lunar month [Buddha's turning of the wheel of dharma of the four noble truths], Guru Rinpoche's *teldha tsechu* '10th day of the monkey month' and *choekhor dhuechen* 'great festival of turning the wheel of dharma' in the 1st lunar month—there were prayer assemblies and everybody participated.

Q: How many nuns do you remember came to live in the monastery, nunnery?

#28N: There were no nuns then but the Dorjee Daktsar, the men came. Around the time [we] left eight nuns were admitted but there was no time to practice the dharma for [we] had to flee Tibet. Earlier Tulshi Rinpoche was invited. Tulshi Rinpoche is the root guru of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: What Daktsar?

00:47:13

#28N: Dorjee Daktsar.

Q: Dorjee Daktsar. What's he?

#28N: It is an association.

Q: Name of an association?

#28N: Yes, name of an association. Like here in Kopen Monastery we have the Gelugpa. We called it Dorjee Daktsar and it consisted of people from the region, all men.

Q: There were around eight nuns when [you] fled Tibet?

#28N: There were eight nuns when [we] fled and including the *ngagpa* there were 20-30.

Q: What happened to them?

00:48:08

#28N: The monastery was completely destroyed after the Chinese arrived.

Q: Did the nuns and the tantra practitioners...did they escape with you?

#28N: [The nuns and] tantra practitioners did not escape for they had committed no offense. They were not engaged in working for the Tibetan Government but were [ordinary] citizens. They would face no problems. However, the distance is great and difficult to escape. [They] did not flee but remained in Tibet.

Q: Was it...for a woman to want to be a nun, tell me about that. Was that acceptable in families for a girl to want to be a nun?

#28N: I did not become a nun.

Q: What was it like in general in Tibet?

#28N: There were no objections. You were free to decide.

Q: Anybody can be a nun. How do families usually accept if their daughter wants to be a nun? Is that something a mother and father would accept easily or would there be a problem?

00:49:56

#28N: [The family] will not raise any objection. In Tibet one had the freedom to practice dharma. The parents will allow them to leave. It was not necessary to run away to do so. That is what I remember happened in my hometown. There were many nuns [disciples] of Tulshi Rinpoche. There was a nun with me when I escaped.

Q: *Ama-la*, you said there were a lot of hardships when you left Tibet. Where did you go when you and family escaped from Tibet? Where did you go?

#28N: Initially we reached...[we] escaped once from our hometown and stayed for many months at a place called Shung.

Q: Shung?

#28N: Yes, a nomadic site where [we] stayed for about a month.

Q: Yes, please continue.

#28N: When we fled—the people of Dekyiling loved my father and my mother very much—though we were fleeing in the night, all the people of the village came to see us off.

We brought along things that [we] needed and gave away or left behind the rest. [We] were driving around 12 yaks.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you escape before Lhasa was invaded or after the Dalai Lama left?

00:53:01

#28N: The Chinese had appeared and were implementing reforms in our hometown. The Chinese had come to our hometown. It was said that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left, which is why we fled. If [we] did not escape, in the beginning the Chinese may treat [us] well but later we were sure to suffer arrest. So we fled due to fear.

We had gone to Shung and stayed for a long time. Meanwhile the Chinese were creating problems for the people of the hometown for having let us escape. A person from our hometown came to us to say, "Please come back. Do not go away." My father said, "It is okay if I am put in jail. It is difficult if all the people of the hometown suffer hardship." Being spiritual my father was kind hearted. So instead of fleeing, [we] returned to the hometown for 5-6 months.

Q: Five months, right?

#28N: Five months and then we fled at night and it took us a month to reach Solukhumbu.

00:55:36

[We] slept during the day on the mountains without food. Making a fire would mean people noticing the smoke. [We] slept hungry the whole day and thirsted for water. [We] underwent great hardship.

In the night when [I] felt thirsty and reached water, [I] could not drink due to the cold weather.

Q: Do you remember what month it was, season? Was it wintertime?

#28N: It was autumn.

Q: Autumn? It was cold. How many days did it take, *ama-la* to escape?

#28N: It took a month until Solukhumbu.

We could not walk far during the night and it snowed on the Khumbu Gangla pass where we were stranded for 12 days. There was no food for the *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' ran out during the journey.

Q: Did anyone fall ill and die?

00:57:28

#28N: Due to the grace of God nothing happened. Presently, I feel very happy that nothing had happened to my hands. I am very happy.

The inhabitants of Dhingri were traveling with a lot of *tsampa* on yaks for they lived close by and could reach Solukhumbu in 2-3 days. They could not see and were unable to move on. Thank God our eyes were not affected. Though I was only 12 years old, [I] brought a man along by holding his hand. There were my paternal aunts and others with us who put [me] over a yak and provided *tsampa*. They put some *tsampa* in [my] bowl and I begged for water.

Q: How many people were in your party in this escape that took a month? How many?

#28N: We were six people.

Q: Only six?

#28N: We were only six people that fled from there, my father, mother, a maternal uncle and two paternal aunts, one of whom lives in the Home for the Aged presently. [She] lives in the Home for the Aged.

00:59:37

The others carried our finer belongings while mother and I could not and walked empty-handed. The *tsampa* that the two paternal aunts brought ran out along the way. Maternal uncle and Father carried our finer belongings.

Q: Earlier in the story you said you had something like 12 yaks laden with goods. Where were you going with those yaks? I thought that was your escape. That was just a move?

#28N: That was when we had to return to the hometown from the place called Shung. "Please come back or the Chinese will put us in prison. [The Chinese] accuse us of having helped you escape," [the messenger] from hometown had said so. Then we went back home driving the 12 yaks.

Q: So when you left Tibet the yaks stayed?

#28N: [Laughs] [We] had nothing.

Q: My goodness! So what happened next when you arrive? You arrived in Nepal, right? What happened then?

01:01:25

#28N: After coming to Nepal, it was an alien land and we knew nobody. It was difficult but my root guru Dipo Rinpoche had arrived earlier and he...

Q: Was it in Solukhumbu?

#28N: Yes, in Solukhumbu. He had suggested us to escape together in Tibet. However, he had left earlier and we reached later. [Dipo Rinpoche] said the three of us could live with him but my father and mother remarked that it was not good to live on the lama's *kor* 'monastic fund.' There were many dharma colleagues of mother in Solukhumbu who said

that joining the settlement would be difficult and suggested moving to a place inhabited by Sherpas where there was a relative. Thus we lived in Gulila for around six years.

Q: Where?

#28N: Gulila in Solukhumbu.

Q: Gulila?

#28N: Yes, Gulila.

01:02:58

Q: What did your father say [about living with Dipo Rinpoche]?

#28N: Father said living on the Rinpoche's *kor* was not good.

Q: Where is Gulila, in Nepal?

01:03:28

#28N: Gulila is a mountain pass away from Thupten Choeling [a monastery in Solukhumbu]. It is close by, a day's journey.

Q: So you went to stay there with the family?

#28N: It was the three of us. The two paternal aunts who were nuns of Tulshi Rinpoche lived at Thupten Choeling along with maternal uncle. They were a monk and nuns.

When we were living at Gulila, I had a great desire to go to school and attended a Nepalese school for two months.

Q: So you would have been about 15, 14, what age, *ama-la*?

#28N: I was around 13, 14.

Q: And you attend a Nepalese school?

#28N: Nepalese school. Then my mother fell sick and I had to take leave for seven days to attend to mother. After seven days [I] went to school taking 6-7 eggs for the teacher. As a child you feel embarrassed and I leaned against the door and could not go inside.

Q: [You] stopped going...

01:05:17

#28N: When I started reading the Nepalese alphabets *ka, kha, ga*...mother used to shed tears. Poor thing, [we] had come to an alien land. As I was not going to school, [my parents] said, "You should read the scriptures, read the scriptures." I was made to read the

scriptures and not sent to school. [I] insisted on going to the Tibetan school but both the parents refused. Therefore, I have no education.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: So you went to a Nepalese school and then?

[Interpreter interprets previous statement from interviewee]

Q: Do you think that your mother was sad that you wanted to study Nepalese and you might lose your Tibetan heritage?

#28N: [Mother] might have thought that or missed their lama, I would not know. When I read *ka, kha...* mother shed tears but did not say anything.

Q: So you never went back to school after that?

01:07:10

#28N: [I] never went back to school. Then I learned to inscribe wooden templates and painting deities.

[I learned] *thangka* ‘traditional Tibetan Buddhist paintings’ painting. At that time there were no computers and so [I learned] to inscribe wooden templates. [I] inscribed many scriptures, many scriptures for Dipo Rinpoche, Tulshi Rinpoche and Khyentse Rinpoche.

Q: For people who might not know about that, describe what that is, a wooden template?

#28N: The wooden template is an oblong piece of wood similar [in shape] to our scriptures. [Letters] must be engraved on it, then covered with ink and a paper pressed over it. Then it is printed. That was how all the old scriptures of Tibet were printed.

Q: And you covered with ink and then put some paper on and you have a page. I see, printing, printing scriptures. *Ama-la*, could you read the scriptures?

01:09:13

#28N: I know the scriptures well.

Q: Where did you learn how to read Tibetan?

#28N: My father and mother taught me how to read Tibetan. However, a child does not study much. So I was sent to learn from my maternal uncle up on a high mountain in Tibet.

Q: It sounds like you wished you could have been a student much more, a greater opportunity.

#28N: Yes.

Q: Was that because education was not seen as important for women as it was for men who could become *rinpoches*?

#28N: It was not like that. My parents were very spiritual. So if [I] practiced the dharma and was taught the scriptures well...at that time we did not have any particular interest in education, in the community. There was not any living one could make through education. Moreover, not only was there no income through education, it was said that an educated person wasted ink and pen. [Laughs] It was our tradition.

Q: Do you hold that view today for your children?

#28N: No, that is not my view. It is a Tibetan saying.

Q: In the past education wasn't given.

#28N: Not much...

Q: Do you hold that old view today?

01:11:47

#28N: Of course not. At present I feel [regret] not having had the chance to study. I wasted my time from the ages of 12-13 until 17-18. I feel a great loss for that time.

Q: So *ama-la*, what happens to you now? Your mother is sick; does your mother ever get better?

#28N: Mother became well.

Q: Does she recover?

#28N: Yes. [Mother was ill] for only seven days. It seems I was not destined to study. [Laughs]

Q: What happened next? Your mother recovers. Does your father ever become a teacher again? What happens to your little family?

#28N: Father and Mother...[Father said,] "I do not wish to continue [ordinary] life. I strove for seven years constructing houses and monasteries in Tibet, inviting Tulshi Rinpoche and Dipo Rinpoche, initiating empowerments and oral transmission and making many offerings. [I] managed to amass wealth and properties. However, these are useless for [I] had to leave everything behind." So my father and mother stopped doing anything in life but were devoted to spiritual practice.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you say that your parents, when they came Nepal, began to put more energy into their spiritual practice rather than developing monasteries and nunneries?

01:14:37

#28N: That is it. [My parents were devoted to] spiritual practice.

Q: And did not do anything else like earning a livelihood like common people?

#28N: [My parents] did not do that, never did it.

Q: How did that choice on their part, how did that affect your life as a teenage girl? Were you required or encouraged to pray more or were you still allowed to go out and be an adolescent?

#28N: I was not affected in any way. I was taken to see various lamas and received teachings. In those days there were no *sheta* ‘seminaries’ for us to receive spiritual instructions according to the scriptures but Rinpoche taught the preliminary and other practices for the mind. Due to the benevolence of my parents until now I have been mentally very happy. We did not have to indulge in any worldly affairs.

Thanks to the parents [I] have received many empowerments, oral transmissions and spiritual instructions from many lamas. Presently I feel very happy, as I believe I have been fortunate. These days nobody can get teachings from the likes of Dudjom Rinpoche, Khyentse Rinpoche and Tulshi Rinpoche, but I have received each and everything that they taught, which is due to the benevolence of my parents.

01:16:36

[Also teachings from] Ogyen Tulku Rinpoche.

Q: Your destiny was to have more spiritual teaching than secular teaching?

01:17:18

#28N: That is it.

Q: So *ama-la*, what happens in your life? Do you marry? Do you stay single? What happens next?

#28N: When I was 31-32 years old, Mother arranged marriage with my husband. [She] did so because [I] had no siblings and would face hardships. My husband is an aristocrat of the Panchen Rinpoche’s *ladang* ‘grand lama’s residence.’

Q: Was that age 31 or 32, is that a little older than typical for getting married?

#28N: Yes, this age is old [for getting married] but until then I was doing practice. I had not taken probationary vows like monks or nuns and had been a *ngagpa* since young. [I] was not one that used to wear robes like monks and nuns and then defrocked.

Q: Was the match...why was this man picked as a partner for you? Any special reason?

01:19:27

#28N: The reason was that I am not very short-tempered. [He] is a little younger than me. He is a little short-tempered though kind-hearted. That is why...

Q: Because you would be calm and he would be short-tempered?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, to balance.

Q: Did you know him before you married him?

#28N: I did not because he arrived later from Tibet in the year '80. We came to know each other through my mother.

My relatives in Tibet and he were very close. One of my maternal aunt's husband was a *rimshi* '4th rank official' of the Panchen Rinpoche.

Q: What's *rimshi*?

#28N: *Rimshi* is a very high rank.

Q: How much younger was he, *ama-la*? What age?

#28N: [He] is younger by six years.

Q: You said he had a temper but did he have any spiritual training himself the way you did because that would be quite a contrast? So I'm curious. Did he study scriptures? Was he known for his interest in the dharma?

01:21:29

#28N: He does not believe in religion. [Laughs] [He] does not have belief in religion and does not go to see lamas or practice. Except for His Holiness the Dalai Lama...

[He] believes in His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: That's interesting. Did you have any children together?

#28N: [We] have three children.

Q: What did you have, boy, girl?

#28N: The elder one is a girl and then two boys.

Q: *Ama-la*, how did your life change from being, you know, able to meditate and tantra practice and now a mother with three children? Tell me about that. How was it different?

#28N: The change...life has its share of difficulties though I did not undergo any particular problems as such.

Q: Normal?

#28N: Normal. However, having received many teachings from lamas I do not have any suffering in my mind, whether I face happiness or hardship.

Q: You could understand your husband and your children?

01:23:43

#28N: They would have a tendency. Between mother and father, a father's habitual tendency has more influence. The children's belief in the dharma is so-so and their Tibetan is not that good. However, in regard to education, since I did not get an education, they studied quite well until Class 12.

Q: All the children?

#28N: All the children. I wanted the children to further [their] education but when they finished school, the general feeling in the community was, "Studying beyond Grade 12 won't fetch a job. So it is futile to study." That was [the feeling] in the community. So [they] did not study. Children like ours left after grade 12, 13. They would not [study further] and we were helpless.

Q: Who thought that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Like the social norm.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Social norms.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Society thinks like that.

01:25:08

#28N: However, my children are very good.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Went to 12th level. Because of the social norms that's what's considered as necessary. No more.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: *Ama-la*, I have a question about...you studied many years with good teachers and spiritual practice. What do you think are some of the most essential teachings of the Buddha for young children to know, for Tibetan children to know? What do you think is...and for the world children, the children of the world to know? What do you think are the key teachings that have been a help to you?

#28N: If the young children would practice the dharma, [I] believe it will be beneficial to them both in this and the next life.

Q: Are there any...those special understandings that are unacceptable or available to everybody, everybody could understand, not a Rinpoche but everyone. What are some of the core teachings that you would like children to understand or adults to understand?

01:27:26

#28N: I do not know how to explain this.

[Videographer to interviewer]: Can I just try once?

Q: What is the one thing that [you] would want children to know today about the Buddhist teachings that maybe they don't? What's the one thing that maybe children should know?

#28N: If they know the teachings of the Buddha...

Q: To put it in a gist, what is important to know?

#28N: If [the children] know about the teachings of the Buddha, it will be good for them and beneficial. Education is also important. I see both as important, dharma and culture.

Practicing the dharma will give you peace of mind, happiness and also to attain nirvana in the next life. [I] think that if one has a good education, it is a benefit for oneself and for others.

Q: That sounds like a good place for us to end this very interesting interview, *ama-la*. Is there anything that you would like to add before we finish our interview today?

01:29:35

#28N: [I] do not have anything to add. This is it.

My sons are very good. Until now [they] have never given [me] any suffering, from the time of school until now. My younger son, since school days is respectful towards elders, caring towards the young and cordial to colleagues. He has been awarded merit certificates, all my three children.

Presently my younger son is a photographer. He is famous among the children of Nepal.

Q: The youngest son?

#28N: Yes, the youngest son. His pictures...

Q: Where do we get to see his...where can we see his work?

#28N: [Speaks before translation] His name is Chime Dorjee. If [you] can extend any help later...that is my hope.

Q: Is there any work of Chime Dorjee to see?

#28N: He has them at home in the computer, at the lab. He is called Chime Dorjee.

Q: Does he have an office?

#28N: There is no office.

Q: He likes photography?

#28N: He goes to work in an office at...[not discernible] and also goes to take pictures. There is Chime Dorjee Dekyi Khangsar or something on the board.

Q: *Ama-la*, I thought I heard that there was a book that had been written about your family and you thought that there was something, some error in the book...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The error was in the picture. The book was about...

Q: You spoke about a book earlier...

01:31:56

#28N: Oh, the one about Surkhang Wangchen?

Q: You said that your grandfather's picture was in the biography of Surkhang Wangchen.

#28N: Yes, Grandfather's picture is in the book. This has disturbed me a little. [Laughs]

Q: So it should be...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The story was about Surkhang Wangchen, but the photo was of her grandfather.

Q: How was the photo identified in the book? By this person's name? I mean, it was her grandfather's picture in the book. Did it have a title under the picture that it belonged to somebody else?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, no she knows her grandfather, right? But the story...biography was about this person but the photo was of her grandfather.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...photo was of her grandfather. I see. Okay. That's a difference.

[Videographer to interviewer: So I just have a question.]

Q: Could [you] take us on a walk through the palace that [you] used to live in and describe what it looked like? The detail, try to tell us what it looked like inside that palace.

01:33:35

#28N: The palace has five floors.

Q: Please continue.

#28N: One climbed up the stairs from the eastern side. On the lowest floor is the *lukhang* ‘residence of *naga*’ where only the family members were allowed. It is a *lukhang* where *lu* ‘*naga*: powerful long-lived serpent-like beings who inhabit bodies of water’ are supposed to dwell.

Q: Is that located beneath the staircase in the east?

#28N: That was on the lowest floor, the lowest floor. Others were not allowed in for it was said that the *lu* dwelled there. Only our family members entered to propitiate the *lu*.

All the middle floors are stocked with grain, barley to make *tsampa* for our consumption. It was a storeroom to stock meat and other things. The fourth floor was where our family members lived. The family floor had a large prayer room that was filled with images. Next to it was a room. On the other side was the room called Gaden. The room on the east contained statues made of gold and copper.

Q: Gold?

#28N: Like the statues made of gold and copper in Nepal. That was the main room where grandfather lived.

Q: Was it filled with images of gold and brass?

01:35:06

#28N: Yes, filled with statues; statues and decorations. There was the room called Gaden and...all the rooms have names like Samdup...

Q: Were there many rooms?

#28N: There were very many rooms. There were many rooms and storerooms for things.

Q: On the 5th floor?

#28N: The 5th floor was where grandfather’s hairdresser made incense offerings and prayers like *lhasol* ‘offerings to divine spirits,’ and *kangso* ‘religious service propitiating and pleasing deities and protectors.’

Q: The 5th floor was where grandfather’s hair and all these were done?

#28N: Yes, on the 5th floor.

Q: What’s the name of that hat...*pachok*?

#28N: Yes, *pachok*. The race of people that made the *pachok*...were called *jo* or something. It is said that no one but they can touch [grandfather’s hair].

Q: None but the *jo* can do it?

#28N: Only the *jo* can do it.

Q: The style is called *pachok*?

#28N: Yes, it is called *pachok*. Towards one side [of the room] were the *kagyur* ‘translated word of Buddha [108 volumes]’ and *tengyur* ‘translated treatises [collection of 225 volumes of religious commentaries]’.

Q: That’s on one side of the 5th floor?

#28N: Yes. Then there were stables for horses and...the area was extensive. [The palace] had five floors. The citizens were not allowed to build more than one floor. When we looked out of the window, people bowed to us. They bowed to all of us. That is it.

Q: Thank you. Beautiful. And this is Dekyiling...say exactly where it is?

01:38:45

#28N: The palace is in Ruthok. Ruthok is what is called *sadusum* ‘triangular land’ and *namdusum* ‘triangular sky.’ *Sadusum* and *namdusum* means...when we perform *jensay* ‘fire ceremony’ there is something like this [makes a triangular shape with fingers]. This kind of land is considered bad and misfortunes could occur in the region. So in order to bring good fortune to the region, it was said my grandfather, being of high caste, was sent there to suppress it.

The region of Ruthok is triangular in shape with a river flowing this side [points to left] and a river flowing that side. If the land is triangular, the sky will also be triangular [above it]. The Tibetans call it as *sadusum* and *namdusum*. Therefore, in order to suppress that, the King of Ruthok settled there.

Q: What about the place called Dekyiling?

#28N: Dekyiling was where I lived. It is a vast region, like here there’s Yanglosho and Baktapur. It is a vast region. All that land came under the King of Ruthok. This land was distributed to the people to earn a living and a little bit of tax was collected in the form of grain. It is natural to pay something for the land you are cultivating, like here it is called *moi* or something. The Chinese comment a lot about taxes in Tibet. That was the tax.

The region was very vast with [valleys like] Chuka, Dekyiling, Pegya, Sharngon, Dotsu and Dhondu, and there were also monasteries in the upper areas. The region was very vast. It was not a small area but there were many valleys. I was given two large valleys called Damalung and Chupsang that were entire valleys. Dekyiling was one valley and then another valley called Simkhang. There were mountains and valleys like this [points to back of each finger]. If the mountain of Dekyiling is here [points to back of middle finger], I was here in Chupsang [points to back of ring finger] and then there was one called Damalung here [points to back of small finger]. I was given two areas of land.

The region was very vast with valleys like Chuka and such, each located at a distance of a day's journey. All these areas came under the King of Ruthok.

Q: What are the names of the places that were given to you?

01:41:16

#28N: [The places] given were Chupsang; Chupsang and Damalung.

Q: How old were you when it was given?

#28N: I was 5 years old when given the house. I grew up in the palace until the age of 5. Then fled at the age of 12-13 in the year '59.

Q: What do you understand happened to all this land and this beautiful palace and all material goods inside? What happened?

#28N: The material...the palace and everything was destroyed. There was one called the *nyerpa* 'steward' of Ruthok that worked under him [Grandfather] who brought a few things here. Everybody in Solukhumbu knows the steward of Ruthok. He brought provisions and things that one person can carry. The rest was distributed among the people of the region during the Reformation. The houses, the palace, everything was destroyed. There was nothing left when I went back.

Q: Did the Chinese destroy?

#28N: The Chinese get the name but it was our people that did it. The Chinese ordered the destruction. It was said that whatever is old, like old thought and such...when it was told that the "Four Olds" had to be destroyed, all the things and monasteries were destroyed. They [Chinese] did not say that old things and monasteries be destroyed, but I think it was the mistake of the Tibetans.

Would it be better not to mention this? It is not good. Better not. It is not good for it looks demeaning to our people.

Q: Okay. All right. I think this is maybe a good place to end our story and to thank *ama-la* for your time and your heart and your sharing the history of your country with us.

#28N: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW