

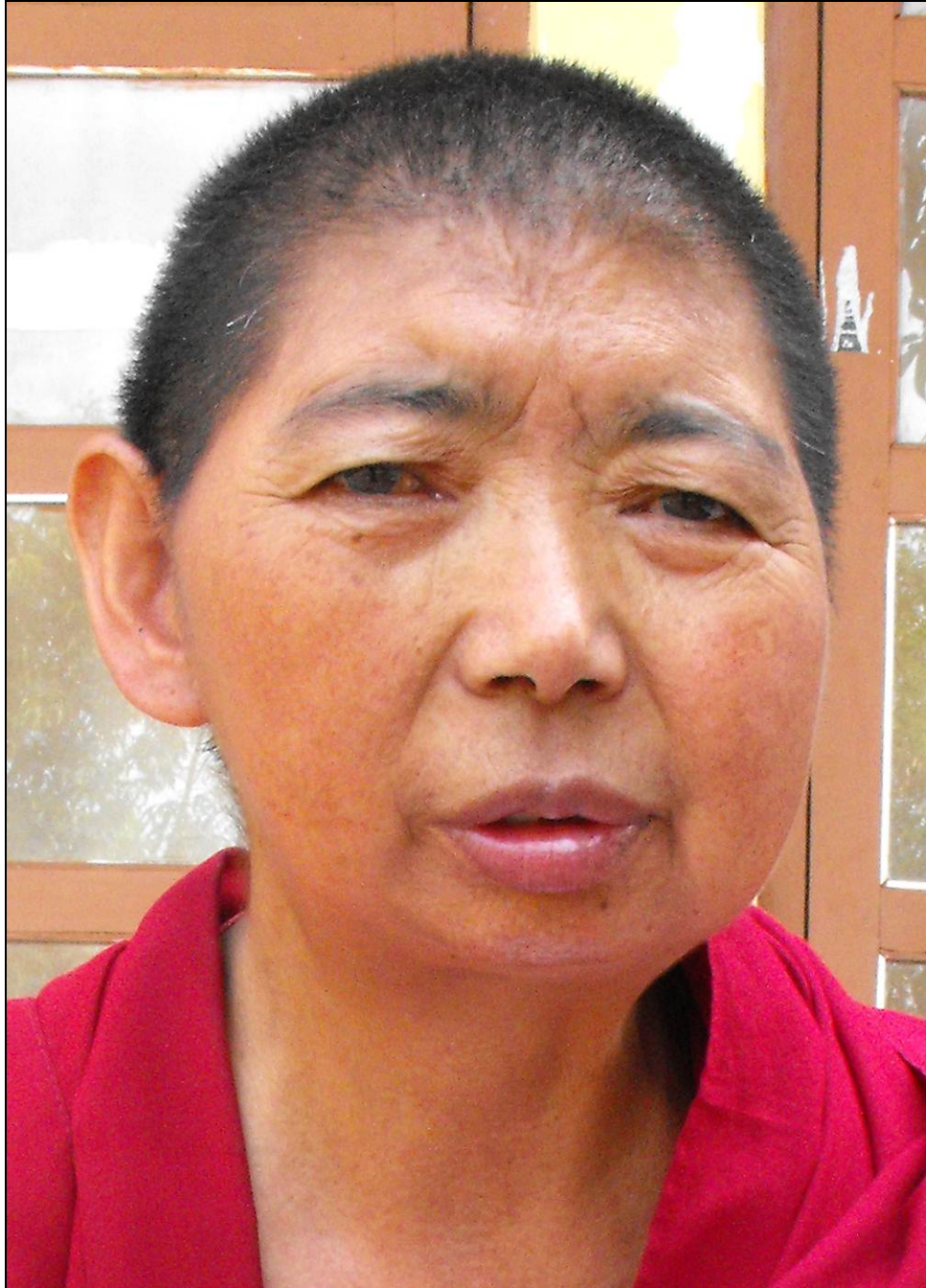
Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #70M – Tenzin Sangmo (alias)
April 14, 2010**

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #70M
2. Interviewee: Tenzin Sangmo (alias)
3. Age: 58
4. Date of Birth: 1942
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1985
9. Date of Interview: April 14, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp No. 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 36 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Since her childhood, Tenzin Sangmo and her family suffered under Chinese rule in Tibet. She describes the resistance put up by her father and all the men in her village who were above 15 years old. They were defeated by the Chinese and many were killed. She talks in great detail about the sufferings of her uncles who were torture and imprisoned by the Chinese for being monks and practicing Buddhism. Many other villagers were also tortured and died as a result.

Tenzin Sangmo secretly took the first step to becoming a nun at the age of 30 during a pilgrimage to Lhasa. There were no nunneries in her village and dreamed of seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama in person so she vowed to risk her life to escape to India. She pretended to go back to Lhasa on pilgrimage then embarked on a very long journey to reach India. She escaped with a fellow nun and two young monks climbing over the mountains without knowing the way. Eventually they crossed over the border into Nepal and found a bus going to Kathmandu.

After working for some time in Kathmandu Tenzin Sangmo was able to travel to Dharamsala, India, and meet the Dalai Lama. She requested that he let her be ordained as a nun and joined a nunnery in Mundgod. She made one final journey back to her village, during which she was imprisoned on the way and then closely monitored at home, but she eventually returned to India.

Topics Discussed:

Life under Chinese rule, resistance fighters, brutality/torture, oppression under Chinese, thamzing, escape experiences, life as a refugee in Nepal.

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Interview #70M

Interviewee: Tenzin Sangmo [alias]

Age: 58, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 14, 2010

Question: Could you please tell us your name?

00:00:19

Interviewee #70M: Tenzin Sangmo.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans, to share with the younger generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and the people in the outside world and your memories of Tibet are going to help us to document the true history and experience of the Tibetan people.

#70M: Okay. These days it is a bit better, but when I was in Tibet the Chinese caused a lot of hardship.

Q: Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use your interview?

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: If you want to take a break at anytime, just let us know.

00:01:26

#70M: Okay.

Q: If there's a question you don't want to answer, just let us know that too.

#70M: Okay.

Q: Thank you very much and I appreciate your coming to talk to us.

00:01:43

#70M: Okay.

Q: So first of all, why didn't you leave Tibet in 1959 when so many other people were leaving?

#70M: I was a very small child at that time and I could not go. I could not go in '59. My parents were there and we did not know.

Q: Do you know why your parents didn't go?

00:02:35

#70M: It was never the custom in my region to go outside the village. My parents could not go as they had children and owned a lot of cattle. We were little children and I suppose they could not escape carrying the little children.

Q: How was your family affected by the Chinese back during that time in 1959, '60 and the early '60's? How were they affected by the Chinese presence there?

#70M: All the fathers of the families and boys above the age of 15 from our village ran away into the mountains. They could not come back and encountered the Chinese, whereby many horses and men were killed. All those people of our village were not able to come back. They battled the enemy, facing each other on the mountains. The Chinese fired at them and the Tibetans fired back. Many people got killed in that way.

Q: What specifically happened to your family?

00:04:26

#70M: When the Chinese first arrived, the Tibetans confronted them and fought them. Then the Chinese fired on them. Finally the Chinese won and the Tibetans were defeated. The Chinese said, "Those who are on the mountains, come back and we will not kill you." Then the Chinese came to our village and settled in our monastery. Tibet lost her territory. When the Chinese initially came, the Tibetans resisted them and tried to safeguard their land. When they resisted them, the Chinese won. The Tibetans were no match for the Chinese and we lost our country.

Our people did not flee when the Chinese came, but decided to resist them at the risk of their lives and started firing. During the battle, the Chinese won and we returned [to the village]. After the Chinese won, our region was such that we could not flee.

Q: So how did your life change from before to after? When you say everything was under the Chinese, how did the life change?

#70M: The Chinese said, "We will not cause you suffering. Those [hiding] in the mountains should return. Live in your own village." They deceived us in that way. After we returned, they destroyed our monastery; the monks and other religious practitioners were imprisoned and beaten. However, the killings were not done by the Chinese. They made the Tibetans to beat and kill them. Some were beaten with sticks.

My uncle was a monk; all my mother's brothers were monks in that monastery. He was beaten a lot and imprisoned. He was hit here [gestures at head] by an axe and bled for two or three days and later he died. My other uncle was also imprisoned and he witnessed the beatings. He might have thought that he would also meet the same fate. I do not know if he thought that way or not, but upon witnessing the beatings he removed his waist band and hung himself.

Q: Was he your paternal uncle?

00:07:16

#70M: He was my maternal uncle.

Q: Where did he hang himself?

#70M: In my village.

Q: Where in your village?

00:08:35

#70M: Take Mundgod for example. The Chinese office where the meetings took place was like Gaden Monastery here. People from all the camps gathered at the Chinese office. He [my uncle] was imprisoned and he died. My other uncle was tied by a rope on the neck and beaten continuously. His face was swollen and when he was almost out of breath, he was brought home. He lived for about two days. He could not speak and died.

Another uncle of mine was tied; the rope had a knot and it went like this [gestures rope running around both arms] and his hands were tied together and he was hung like this [shows both arms tied at the back and suspended]. His body [weight] dislocated his shoulders. So three of my uncles were killed and one injured.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So she's talking about one uncle who hung himself, after witnessing his brother; so one uncle was killed with the axe and the other brother hung himself; and then this is another uncle, a third uncle who was tortured...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...who was tortured very badly and tied by both hands and hanged from a tree and beaten very badly and was brought in her house.

Q: He was brought to your house and paralyzed?

Q: Was the third uncle who was continuously beaten brought to your house?

#70M: Yes. The uncle I told you about who was tied with the rope was not killed.

Q: Was he brought to your house?

00:10:30

#70M: Yes, he was. The ways in which three uncles died were: one uncle committed suicide, one was beaten with sticks and tied with ropes, and one was hit on the head with an axe.

Q: Did you have four uncles?

#70M: I had four uncles and three were killed.

Q: One hung himself, one was killed by an axe, one died under torture.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: One was not killed but tortured very badly.

Q: Two were tortured and one is still alive?

00:11:25

#70M: Now he is dead. He is no more.

Q: Were your uncles very active in resisting the Chinese that they received this kind of treatment?

#70M: The reason for torturing them was that the Chinese had proclaimed that we were not allowed to practice dharma nor were there “causes and effects” [as believed by Buddhists]. They [the Chinese] claimed, “What is the use of practicing the dharma?”

My uncle was tortured on account of being a monk at the monastery. They [the Chinese] were accusing him. During illness we go to the monastery with meat and butter. The monastery teaches, “Do not kill animals, it is sinful. Light lamps, it will earn you merit.”

They [the Chinese] were forcing the monastery not to give teachings. They told the people, “Show us the man who is sinning and the man who is earning merit.” The main accusation was that we were practicing our religion. My mother's brothers were monks and they were accused of practicing the dharma, reciting the *mani* mantra [of Avalokiteshvara], using the rosary and reciting prayers. They were charged with devouring the fruit of others' labor. They [the Chinese] demanded of the people, “Show us the man who is sinning and the man who is practicing the dharma.” In that way they over powered the people and killed them.

Q: Around what time was this going on? What year? If you do not know the year, how old were you?

00:13:47

#70M: 1959, '60 or '70; I do not know what year it was. I cannot say.

Q: Did you witness all that?

#70M: We were both nomads and farmers. The nomads lived a long distance away. I was herding the animals a long way away [from the village]. For example, if the Chinese office is Gaden Monastery [in Mundgod], the village is like the camps of Mundgod. The lands are here and I am away at the nomadic region. When I returned home, my mother told me that my uncle was tortured at the Chinese office and brought home with hardly any breath left in him and died two days later.

My uncle was beaten with sticks and his face became swollen. Still he did not die. There was movement in his ribs and he was brought home. He too died about two days later. My [other] uncle witnessed the beatings while in prison and committed suicide. So, three of my

uncles were dead. I saw my other uncle, who was not dead. His shoulders were injured. I did not witness it [happen] because I was grazing the animals.

Q: The uncle who was brought to the house after having been tortured, can you describe his physical condition?

00:15:44

#70M: His shoulders were dislocated while he was suspended. He used to recite his prayers. Not a prayer was allowed to be said or a scripture allowed to be seen in our houses. The [Chinese] officers went around and searched the rooms for such things. He [uncle] had a small prayer book and used to recite his prayers. The children were warned, "Keep quiet or we will be killed." He used to go to the hills and perhaps he was seen [by the Chinese]. I do not know if he was beaten but his shoulders were dislocated. His arm was like this [raises right arm at an angle].

Q: And what about his mental condition?

#70M: He did not seem affected. Perhaps he was not beaten. He was suspended for an hour and brought down. I think he was not beaten.

Q: His mental condition was the same? He was okay mentally?

00:17:23

#70M: He had become tense and angry, unlike his earlier self.

Q: How long did he live with you?

#70M: After I reached here [India], they told me that uncle had died. He was living then, when I left home. Because of the misery of the people and as I grew older, I made my escape to the mountains when I was 34 years old. I did not want to live in my village. It was not just my family in the village, but the whole village who suffered and many people were killed.

Q: When did your uncle die?

00:18:16

#70M: After I reached here, I received a letter telling me that he had died.

Q: And the uncle who hung himself, where did he hang himself?

#70M: He did not go anywhere to kill himself. He was in the Chinese prison.

Q: He died in the jail?

00:18:38

#70M: Yes, he was in the jail.

Q: After having seen all of this happen to your family who were all monks, why did you decide to become a nun in this kind of atmosphere?

#70M: My whole village was rendered like this: All the people would be crying, having learned about the death of a person that day. The deaths occurred due to severe beatings. Some were killed in the forests and some died due to torture. Some were held by the hair and dragged about and beaten with sticks. The hair came off and half the head did not have any hair.

The whole village was rendered in this condition. In some cases, the father was killed and the mother looked after the children and in other cases, the mother was killed and the father cared for the children. All the wealthier families were made so. Therefore, I did not want to live [in the village] and made my escape.

[Question is repeated.]

00:20:06

#70M: I was very young in my village and there were no nuns there. I gave my “hair offering” [ceremonial commitment to becoming a nun] to a lama when I came to Lhasa. I did not go back to my village. I had come to Lhasa on pilgrimage. My parents sent me on pilgrimage and I met the lama in Lhasa. I saw that there were monasteries and lamas in Lhasa, while in my village all the monasteries had been destroyed.

I offered my hair and took the vows. Then I did not go back [home]. I made enquiries because my mother would always cry day and night praying to the Gyalwa Rinpoche [His Holiness the Dalai Lama]. She used to chant Jowo Yeshe Norbu ‘Wish-fulfilling Gem’ [Tibetans name for His Holiness the Dalai Lama]. People in Lhasa refer to [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] as Jowo Yeshe Norbu.

There is the Jowo Yeshe Norbu [a statue] in Lhasa. I enquired from some old people in Lhasa if there was a real person. Here [in India] people say Gyalwa Rinpoche, but there [in Tibet] people called him Yeshe Norbu. I was told, "Yes, he is a real person. Yeshe Norbu lives in India." I thought, "Let me freeze to death or die of starvation but I will not return to my village and I must go to see the Yeshe Norbu in India." So I did my prostrations and went in search of a route to India around the mountains and then I came here.

Q: How old were you when you became a nun?

#70M: I was 30 years old when I first became a nun.

Q: Which nunnery did you join?

00:22:54

#70M: There were no nunneries.

Q: So you went to Lhasa as a pilgrim and did you go by yourself?

#70M: I had visited Lhasa once earlier. I did not want to go back but my parents insisted. So I returned and lived in the village for three years and then came again [to Lhasa]. I was 30 years old when my parents sent me on the pilgrimage.

Q: Were you not a nun at that time?

00:23:31

#70M: I was 30 years old at the time I came to Lhasa and met a lama called Gen Rinchen Gonpo and gave my “hair offering” and went back to the village. I lived in the village for three years from the age of 30 to 33. I asked to be sent to Lhasa again. My parents told me not to go, but in my heart I had a great determination to go to India. I felt very sad for my parents, and my fellow villagers advised me, "You are alone and will face difficulties in case you fall sick. Do not stay long in Lhasa but return home." I replied yes to them.

Once I reached Lhasa, I just did not want to go back to my village. I wished to go to India to see His Holiness, who was called Yeshe Norbu back there. When I was very small and could chase and call after my parents, I was very cute but I fell ill. I had pain in my ear and here [points near left ear] and became paralyzed. Never mind walking, I could not even wear my clothes. Since then, I have been sick my whole life. While I did my prostrations at the Jokhang [Central Cathedral] in Lhasa, I made my decision that I would go to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India and not return to my village.

I met a man who was going to India to trade. He was accompanied by a nun from his village. He said that he had been to Dharamsala, while I did not know anything about India. So he hired a vehicle meant to transport goods, which took us to Shigatse and from there to Dam. He had told me that he would be working for a family [at the border] and take us [to India] around August or September. I asked him where I should get down. He said that I should get off at Nyelam, but I requested him to take me wherever he was going. He said, “Do not even move your body; otherwise they will seize my vehicle.”

The vehicle was covered and we hid in the empty space. He was a good man. He charged only 10 *yuan* for the journey. When we reached the border, he went away saying that his vehicle would be seized [if we were found with him]. I did not know that there was a large Chinese office nearby which an old woman with a tea pot waved at me. I approached her and she asked me where I was going. I told her I was going to go to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She advised me not to mention that because I would be imprisoned. She asked me to stay in a run-down shed and gave me some tea. She advised me, "Say that you are going on a pilgrimage to Nepal. You will not be able to go to India." I had never ever heard of Nepal! She further said that if anyone questioned me, I was to reply that I was on my way to Nepal on pilgrimage and I was to say that I was from Dhingri.

00:26:32

Dhingri is on the border and its people were engaged in constructing roads for the Chinese. After receiving their wages from the Chinese, they visited Nepal on pilgrimage and returned once again to work for the Chinese. So I was told that I might be able to get through if I mentioned this. I stayed a few days with the lady. Everybody who came there

were surprised and told me, "This is February. A person from Tibet will surely become sick in India from the heat. Insects will bite you."

He [the trader from Lhasa] was accompanied by a nun from his hometown and said that he would take me also along [to India]. He said he was going towards Thoe Ngari and that he was going to spend the summer working for a family and would take us along with him [to India] in the winter. I told the trader in anger, "I do not want you to take me [to India in the winter]. If it was work I was looking for, I have enough to do in my village. I wish to see His Holiness and will go [to India] even if insects bite my flesh and my bones or even if I die from the heat. I am not going to work anywhere. Take the nun wherever you want."

Q: The people who were discouraging you from going, did you feel that they were doing so because they were concerned for your safety or that they wanted you to stay there and work for them?

00:32:56

#70M: When I look back, I see that he was being honest with me. [I was told] "It is very hot in India and the water turns cold in winter. You will be bitten by insects. You will die of fever." He meant that I will be bitten by mosquitoes. He said that it was very hot [in India] at that time and I would catch a fever. I think he meant to say that the cold weather would suit a Tibetan. That was one reason and the other was the nun from his hometown. He asked me to take her along with me. This nun's relatives lived in Dharamsala.

The trader was accustomed to traveling to and from India on business, as well as bringing people with him. He said he was not going then and asked me to take the nun with me. He offered that since we did not know the language he would take us with him, but that we should spend the summer working as a servant for a family in Thoe Ngari and save some money, for we did not have any money with us.

He promised to take us [to India] in the winter months of September or October. However, I told him that I did not want to work for others. There was enough work to do in my village with my parents. My family owned animals and agricultural land and thus, there was a lot of work to do. I left behind my parents and relatives; and if I wanted to work, I could have stayed home with my parents. I did not want to work as a servant for others in an alien place. That was what I told him.

Q: So then you left in the summer. Was it a difficult journey as they said?

00:35:49

#70M: The poor Chinese was there at the border, holding his gun. The old lady [at the border] had advised me, "Say that you are poor people from Dhingri. And that you are on pilgrimage to Nepal, which will get you through, as that is normally undertaken by us. If you say that you are from Tibet and on your way to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama, you will not get through [the border]."

So the other nun and I set out together. The lights were burning that night and the Chinese watching the border were walking up and down. I do not know what time it was, as I did

not own a watch. It was at the time of the rooster's first call and there was nobody around. If you looked up, you saw the rocks and if you looked down, you saw the water. Except for the road, you could not see anything. There was no one to lead us. We looked and saw a house and everything was quite.

We ran past while the Chinese sentry held his gun. The area was mountainous and there was a path where the man stood holding his gun. He was standing but very sleepy and almost falling over. There was no way for us but to run past him. I ran but he saw me. He called us and took us with him. He kicked at a big iron door, calling out and holding me here [gestures to shoulder] but nobody opened the door. He said something in Chinese, which I could understand.

Both of us went that way [the way we had come] and he took his earlier position. The nun and I waited there. He guarded the way until daylight broke. In the morning, a Tibetan interpreter who was a Chinese, came and asked us where we were going. We told him that we were going to Nepal on pilgrimage. He asked us if we had passes and we replied in the negative. He told us that we would not be allowed without passes and said we had to go back.

00:38:03

The nun started to cry and they beat her. A little further away was a man sitting on a chair. He hinted at me to come to him. "Where are you going?" he asked me. I went close to him and he asked me to sit down. He told me that he was a sentry for the Chinese. I told him that I was going on pilgrimage to Nepal. He advised me not to be persistent and that if I could get through one check point, I would not succeed at the next. "Go around the mountains and you will find one check post manned by the Chinese and one by the Nepalese. Walk around the mountains and avoid the three or four check points and you will come across a small iron bridge. There are families living there and you will be able to get through to Nepal. Do not be stubborn here. In case the Chinese questions you, tell them that you are my relative and you have come to meet me." He was a Tibetan and he showed me the way. So that was how I came later. That evening the Chinese came and we spent two days. Then the trader came and told us to come back with him. I told him that I would not return and that I wanted to practice the dharma and not work, just as I told you.

The next day I learned that many monks of Gaden Monastery had tried to escape through the mountains, but they were intercepted by the soldiers and were being taken away. I saw them and asked where they were going. They replied that they tried to go to India but were unsuccessful and were going back [to Tibet]. They asked about me and I told them that I intended to go to India.

So we set off and saw an empty Chinese vehicle, which was left facing towards Lhasa. I lied to the Chinese who were escorting us, "We have already hired this vehicle as we cannot walk." We got on the vehicle but the driver was not there. They [the escorting Chinese] believed me when I said, "We will be leaving at 5 o'clock in the evening. He [the driver] has gone to eat food. We are going back [to Lhasa] in this vehicle. We no longer wish to go to India." So they said, "Get in the vehicle." The monks believed what I said to be the truth and they all got into the vehicle. Then the Chinese soldiers went away.

00:40:49

When night fell, the driver did not come and so we spent the night in it [the truck]. At around 9 o'clock, they [the Chinese soldiers] came to see if the vehicle had left and found us sleeping there. They asked, "Why have you not left?" and I lied once again, "He [the driver] said we shall leave at 3 o'clock tomorrow. He has gone to stay at a hotel." Once again they believed me and left. A person had already advised me about escaping through the mountains. I asked the monks about the path they had taken and we started a conversation in the vehicle. They said that they had come from the region of Ba. Except for two children aged 11 and 12, the rest were youths. They said they were two or three days in the mountains and encountered the Chinese that day. The [Chinese] soldiers were hiding in the forests, where we could not see. They said that they had failed in their attempt to go to India and were returning to their monasteries. I told them my plan.

Q: Then what happened?

#70M: While we talked in the vehicle, they said that they took the route through the mountains. There were two children aged 11 and 10 with the youth. As we lay in the vehicle, I told them that I intended to take the route through the mountains before dawn the next morning. I told the trader, "Take the nun with you. I do not require a companion. If I happen to die, it will be just one person. Please do not argue with me. I am going to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and do not have any wish to work [at Thoe Ngari]." The trader said, "Please take the nun with you wherever you go. I do not have enough to support her. Please take her with you. You shall be together in times of nourishment or starvation. I am unable to take care of her."

I reiterated that I was determined to see His Holiness, even at the risk of my life and in no way would I spend my time working as a servant for a family. A monk [in the group of monks] said that they attempted to cross through the mountains [to India] where he was taking the younger ones to be admitted as monks. Those monks [from India] who possessed [valid] papers were able to visit their villages [in Tibet]. At Dam, only those with documents were let through, while the others took the mountain route. Since they did not succeed, they were going back [to their village]. They [the monks and the trader] started to discuss that night about the various routes through the mountains, but I did not pay any attention to the trader.

00:48:32

[The monks said], "If you intend to go, please take the two children with you. We shall not go back but will try the mountain route [again]." I replied, "I do not know the language and have only heard of the word "India." I do not know the place. It is up to you if you wish to send them [the children]." He said that if they [the children] were successful [in their escape], they must be admitted as monks at a monastery. "If I refuse to take them with me, [it is a loss] since they are joining a monastery and if I agree to take them with me, I do not know the language [of India]. It is just a guess in my heart that India must be somewhere in the south. We shall just have to move like wild animals at the risk of death from cold, starvation or whatever and consider it as our karma."

"On my part I am very determined, but I cannot volunteer to take the children with me. That is up to you to think over," I told them. Early the next morning I said, "Everyone, I am leaving. If anyone wishes to join me, he is welcome and if not, that is fine. I am setting off." The monk shook the boys awake, who rubbed off sleep from their eyes and said, "Go, go." They were wearing white shirts and blue trousers like school children and did not have anything with them. The monk hit the children saying, "Go with her, otherwise we will not take you with us. We will not take care of you." So the children came with me. The nun asked the trader, "*Gen* 'teacher,' what shall I do?" He replied, "Go with the nun and do not think of me. I will go back to trading and then to my village. I am not going to India."

So the nun and the two children came with me. That day I went to assess the route. I could not see much in the dense forest. All the Chinese were hiding in the jungle. I dirtied myself with mucus dripping from my nose and went in the forest as if looking for firewood. Since it would be difficult to find a path in the night, I judged the location for the next day's escape. The whole day I moved in the forest, assessing the location of the river, the bridge and the routes in the mountains. The next morning I left, telling the group of people that I was leaving and whoever wished could join me. The two children and the nun came with me.

00:51:12

As we walked in the mountains, I was very worried that they would be captured by the Chinese. I did not know what to do and felt that it was my karma from my past life. [If caught] the nun was older and could go back to Lhasa and then to her village, but I feared greatly for the children. Due to the grace of God, we managed. There was a huge boulder and we could hardly find a path. The children lagged behind and I had to help them down from the mountain, one by one. Gradually we made our way around the mountains.

I had in my possession some *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' a kettle and some wheat flour. Except for these things, I had nothing else with me. I did have some clothes but it was difficult to carry them. In the forest, I made a small opening in the bushes, stuck my head in and then crept as I just could not find the path. When it was wet [points to arms], I did not feel the pain but later there were cuts and bleeding. For the children, I took some water in my palm, made *pa* 'dough made from *tsampa* and (usually) tea.' They ate it and looked up at my face just like puppies. I felt very sorry for the children.

That's how we moved on our way. When we reached the top of the mountain as directed by the man earlier, a black cloud hovered right above us, while the sky was blue everywhere. There was thunder and lightning; the sound rang in our ears. Pieces of hail this big [shows size of half a finger] started falling when we were on top of the mountain. The region filled with water.

Q: You said that you hid them in the bushes during the day and then you would go out and look around and see what direction to go. What information did you use to decide which direction to go next?

00:57:08

#70M: We were together in the forest. The children could not catch up with me. There were rocks and I would go down holding the hand of one child, while the other would be up there. So I would leave him there, climb up and bring the other one down.

Q: Did you go during the day or night?

#70M: During the day. We had started from there before dawn that morning. We walked that day and reached the top of the mountain. I told you now about the black cloud and the rain. On the upper part of the mountain were the rocks [shows the different levels of the mountain on palm of hand], then the forests and below that a Chinese army camp. It started raining when we were almost at the top. We wanted to climb up higher but were unable to do so because of the hail.

00:58:02

Directly above the army camp was a thick forest where we hid. We could see them quite close by when we looked down, but I do not know if they could see us in the foliage. We were hiding among the bushes. Close by was a small hut which was empty. It was raining heavily. I was wearing three shirts and I gave one each to the children. The children covered their heads like this [covers head with robe] with the shirts, crying, *atsa, atsa* 'cry of pain' [from the falling hail]. I had on only one shirt now. We sat in the forest and then it was about 4 or 5 o'clock. Nobody came out of the hut. I thought we should spend the night in the hut and start our journey the next morning.

I looked in through the tiny window and inside was a man. I was amazed and called out, "*Gen*." He was startled and turned around. "Please let me stay for the night." He opened the door and then closed it. We had been seen and the Chinese camp was close by. There was nowhere to spend that night. We were all drenched and dripping with water.

I was resolute and went in. We were dripping water inside. "How did you know I was here? Who told you to go here? Where are you going?" he asked angrily. I replied, "We are on our way to Nepal on pilgrimage." He asked, "How did you know I was here and who told you to go here?" "Nobody told us to go here. When we reached this place, it started to rain and we could not go further in the fading light. I thought the hut was empty and that is why we have come here. Please allow us to stay for the night and we shall leave tomorrow." He said, "You can stay. Did you see anybody around?" I told him that we did not see anybody. Nomads had tethered their cattle further away but we did not see anyone. Below was the Chinese army camp, but except for the house we did not see a soul.

01:00:26

"You can stay if what you say is the truth," he said as he went outside. I stretched my neck out and told him, "Please help us as I have made a mistake in following the route to Nepal." He had been drinking cold black tea. He brought in some firewood and then went to his bedroom. I made a fire and prepared hot tea. The nun had some wheat flour and I asked him to lend us a basin. Carrying wheat flour is heavy because you cannot eat it like *tsampa*. I made some bread. He said I could use as much wood as I required. The children

and the nun were wet and fell asleep. The man went to his room. He asked me some questions. I told him that I came [from Tibet] and was on the way to Nepal on pilgrimage.

"Whose children are they?" he asked and I replied that they were my children. He said that the name of the area was Leshing and that he was an informer for the Chinese. The Chinese paid him and he watched out for people escaping. He would catch them and hand them over to the Chinese. He said that he had a relative in Nepal.

The previous year he had deceived the Chinese by saying that he was going to meet his relative in Nepal and had been to Bodh Gaya [Bihar, India] where His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave the Kalachakra initiation. He told me that His Holiness taught, "Be beneficial to others. Do not cause harm. Do not suppress people but be beneficial. Help others." He said since then, he had kept this advice of being beneficial to others in his heart.

Q: And then what happened?

01:05:27

#70M: The man told me that His Holiness taught that if one cannot help another person, one should not cause harm. He was being paid by the Chinese to keep a look out for people who were escaping. He had been on this job for many years but he said that that day was different. He had a colleague who suffered a severe headache the previous night and left for the hospital at Dam that early morning. If not for that [colleague's absence], we would not be allowed to stay [in the hut]. He said that the Chinese hid among the pine trees during the day. We would not be able to see them and if we came across them, we would be captured.

However, because of the heavy hailstorm, everyone scampered away for shelter and remained indoors. I felt that that was a prophecy from the Goddess Tara and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The man said that he had never seen such hailstorm and lightning. It started to hail soon after we reached near the top. He said, "Something which has never happened took place. If not for the absence of my colleague, I would not be able to let you stay. You can stay here for the night. What time are you leaving tomorrow? You have to leave before dawn without being seen, lest I be captured by the Chinese. I will be captured for letting you go. So stay here for the night.

"[Tomorrow] as you go up the mountain, there are posts being manned by the Chinese on one side and the Nepalese on the other. Further on there are fields, which are watched over by old men and women. Do not ask these people for the way to Nepal. You have to keep moving. These old people will enquire where you are heading for and if you answer them, they will invite you to their homes and give you food and tea and ask you to stay comfortably. They will stealthily go to report to the Chinese, saying that such and such people were fleeing and that they were at the house. They will ask the Chinese to come over and check. The old people report to the Chinese because of the huge amount of money they receive for doing so. If you happen to meet young people herding animals on the mountain, you can ask them to show you the way. They do not receive money, so you can talk to the young boys and girls. Do not ever speak to the old people, otherwise you will not succeed. They will hand you over to the Chinese."

01:08:29

That was the custom. The old people are put there and when travelers answer truthfully to their queries, they take us to their homes, provide food and tea and ask us to stay. While we remain there, they go to report to the Chinese. The Chinese camps were close by. There were sentries posted on the mountain, at the bridge and everywhere. So due to the grace of God, we spent the night there.

We left early the next morning. I was told that the area was called Leshing. The mountain was like this [shows palm] and the constant dragging of logs from the forest had left its mark [on the mountain slope]. I was taught to say that I hailed from Leshing because there were many Tibetan laborers in Leshing, who travel to Nepal on pilgrimage and returned. He told me that as we traveled on, we'd come across the river and the small iron bridge and thereafter the Chinese sentry posts ended and we were at the Nepali border.

So we set out and encountered a young man. I asked him the time and he said it was 9 o'clock, which was the time people left for the mountains. I requested him to show me the way to Nepal as I was going there on pilgrimage and he said, "Do not go that way, for the Chinese army camp is nearby. You should go towards that way." We took that direction but the mountain was very steep as we slid down in the forest. Then we walked past animals tethered by the nomads. At the edge was a water mill where we were told to ask for direction and stay. After that there was no further path in the mountain. That was how we came.

Q: Then what happened?

01:14:03

#70M: I told you about the person in Leshing who allowed us to stay for the night. He told me, "When you reach Nepal, you will find it difficult to find a place to stay." I had never heard of Nepal at that time. He informed me, "There is a place called Swayambudh in Nepal and nearby you will find Tibetans, so you must look for a place to stay there. You will come across a water mill [on the way] and close by is the bridge. You must take that route."

When we slid down the steep incline, we landed at the water mill, where one makes *tsampa*. Now we were in Nepalese territory and beyond the Chinese border. We found an old Nepalese and at that place, I heated water in the kettle. We ate *pa*, washed our feet and relaxed for some time. I thought, "Now we have succeeded." I made sign language so as to ask him [the old Nepalese] where we could go to circumambulate [a temple]. He did not know our language and we did not know his. He too told us about the bridge in sign language. Then we proceeded and came across the bridge [gestures showing unstable bridge]. I felt giddy and almost fell off. There was a sentry at the bridge.

01:15:34

I slowly crossed the bridge and came to the main road. We met a woman. She was a Nepalese, as now there were no more Tibetans. She asked us where we were going. She had a smattering knowledge of our language. We replied that we were on our way to Nepal on pilgrimage. She said, "My son is a policeman. If you do not give me some gift, I will hand

you over to the police." Once [the escaping Tibetans] reached Nepal, [I had heard that] the Nepalese took them back to the Chinese in vehicles. They were handed over to them [the Chinese]. I pleaded, "We are poor people and do not have anything. Please do not hand us back. We lost our way on our journey to Nepal for pilgrimage." I had a 100 currency note, which I gave to the woman. Except for the 100 currency note and a 10 unit note, I did not have anything. The children and the nun did not have anything, not even a cup with them. Just as I told you now, they were similar to students going to school. They had nothing with them. They had tried to escape through the mountains and had been captured by the Chinese.

The woman directed us to go over the mountain. I asked her to come with us [to show the way] but she refused. She said, "Go up over the mountain. I have to go [home] as my baby will be crying." [Imitates crying sound made by the Nepalese woman] We did not dare go that way because we might fall down the steep incline and break a leg. So we came down [the mountain] to the main road. Perhaps she might have passed on the message, as three or four policemen arrived there. They frisked us but there was nothing to be found on us and they let us go.

01:17:14

As we walked that night, if you looked down, there was the water and if you looked up you saw the cliffs. We lay down beside the road. We stretched our legs [over the ledge] and the vehicles passed by our heads as we lay there. Blisters had developed into sores on the feet of the children and the nun. I too could not walk. We slowly made our way. I had on a *chupa* and I made space on it for the children to sleep. We walked slowly, resting by the roadside. The next morning we reached Thathopani in Nepal. We found a sentry there. There were sentry posts on the mountain, at the bridge and at many points on the road.

Q: How far did she [the Nepalese woman] go with you? How far did she take you after giving her the 100 *rupees*?

#70M: She came with us only for a short distance.

Q: How far?

01:20:44

#70M: Like from here [place of interview] to the New Palace [in Mundgod]. Then she went back.

[Interpreter explains to interviewer that the distance is 15-20 minutes by walking.]

Q: You were wearing *chupa* 'traditional dresses' at that time and not the nun's robes?

#70M: No, I was dressed in a *chupa* with a *pangden* 'a striped apron indicating married status of woman' and long hair.

Q: But you were already a nun then.

01:21:53

#70M: I had made a symbolic hair offering, but I had not shaven my head. I did not look like a nun [during the journey].

Q: What happened after you reached Nepal?

#70M: The [Nepalese] woman had directed us towards the rocky mountain but there was the danger of slipping; only birds could have managed to go there. So we walked down to the main road where we were frisked by the Nepalese. The road was such that if you looked down, you saw water and if you looked up, you saw the cliffs; one false move and we could have fallen into the water. Then we reached Thathopani. I observed that a sentry stopped every vehicle passing on the road. I knew that was a check point and went ahead with trepidation.

01:23:34

Meanwhile the children and nun, who had not had anything to eat for a few days, had entered a restaurant, though I do not know if they had any money with them. I walked up to the sentry who was holding a gun and asked him, "Is there a bus to Nepal [Kathmandu]?" He said that there was and it would be leaving just then, at 9 o'clock. I asked him how long it would take to go by foot and he replied, "It will take about 5 days. If you go by the bus, you would reach at around 12 o'clock."

The bus was about to leave and they did not ask me to show any papers. The children and nun wanted to drink some tea in the restaurant and I shouted at them to come fast. The bus was full of Nepalese. There were empty seats at different spots on the bus and I directed each of them to a seat. I gave the 10 unit note [as fare] for all of us and begged, "We are poor people. Please take us. We have not had food for many days and I cannot even take a sip of water."

I was unable to eat and had become very thin. My spit was just foam. The children had eaten *pa* and drunken water and they fared better. I had become thin due to anxiety. I felt that it must be my karma from my past life that the lives of these three people were in my hands. I had heard stories that if one were captured, one would be stripped naked, beaten and the Nepalese would hand us back to the Chinese.

We were older but I feared the consequences for the children if we were back in Lhasa. I could not eat due to anxiety. With the grace of God, we could travel on the bus! The children could no longer walk due to the blisters and sores on their feet. We reached Nepal [Kathmandu] in the bus. [In the bus] we found a man who spoke Tibetan, while all the others were Nepalese who did not know our language.

01:25:58

The [Tibetan] man said, "We have reached Nepal [Kathmandu]." He asked me where we were going and I replied, anywhere. Everyone got down from the bus and went their way. [The bus stopped] at a large ground and there were many houses. I looked around and gathered some pieces of wood and cartons. On an upper floor, some foreigners were eating. I picked up some bricks to make a stove, filled [the kettle] with water from a tap and with

the help of the twigs and cartons [made a fire and] some tea. We sat in the open ground. The building was three storied and foreigners were eating a lot of food there. We could not follow their language and they could not follow ours. However, I was told that this was Nepal [Kathmandu].

The [Tibetan] man [on the bus] was gone and I did not know whom to ask [for directions]. I made the tea. I was thirsty and my body had become very thin. We had not eaten for two to three days and I was thirsty. I was like a zombie. I poured the hot water in the cup and drank it, one cup after the other. I am not lying if I say that I drank the whole kettle [of water].

The next day my throat and lips were burning from drinking hot water and later the skin fell off [points to lips]. I did not feel the pain at that time. The children ate some food, washed their feet and went to sleep. We were tired and I too lay down. At around 4 o'clock in the evening, I climbed up the stairs of a building—the buildings of Nepal are very tall with nine to ten floors. From the very top I could see students exercising. I watched them play for a long time and then when I looked down, I could see a person wearing monk's robes.

01:28:01

I quickly ran down and saw a beautiful nun. Just as the man who told me about the advice given by His Holiness regarding being beneficial to others, I asked her where Phakpa Shingkho [Swayambudh] was. She said, "Swayambudh is that side. Where are you from?" I replied that I had just arrived from Tibet. She told me not to stay there as there were bandits around. I requested her to show me the way and she said she would. I went to wake the others telling them that there were bandits around. When I came back, the nun was nowhere to be seen. She had vanished into thin air! I could not see where the nun had gone. I had hoped to ask her to lead us the way. I looked right and left but she was not to be found. So we put on our shoes and left. There was an intersection and we took one of the roads.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What is this place, Phakpa Shingkho? Do you know?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It is a holy place, like a lotus temple in Nepal.

Q: And then what happened?

#70M: There was a carpet weaving factory at Swayambudh belonging to the Tibetan Government. I worked at the factory for a wage of 9 Nepalese *rupees* per day. I did not have any money. I begged and received *tsampa* and money from the Tibetans at Swayambudh. I saved whatever money I received. Sometimes there were parties where I went to wash utensils. I was given about 100 *rupees* a day at such times. I also went to beg at weddings and in this way, I saved my money. I lived for about eight to nine months in Nepal. I begged and saved all the money in my room. As for food, I ate whatever was given to me. I worked at the factory to earn money.

01:35:35

To be able to go to India, I did not know the language, there were no vehicles and I could not go walking. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was giving a teaching for those coming from Tibet and others at Varanasi in the 11th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar. So I was able to go there in a vehicle. I saw His Holiness for the first time in Varanasi. Then I went to Dharamsala. There was a Reception Office at Dharamsala where they asked me what work I wanted to do. I told them that I did not wish to work but wanted to go to school. I was not literate.

In Tibet there was nobody who taught us and as I told you, the [holy] texts were banned under the Chinese. I wished I could read and write. They laughed and said that since I was 35 years old; I could not go to school. If that was not possible, I told them that I wished to become a nun. There was only one nunnery in Dharamsala and there was no vacancy. They said that they would provide me a job, whether it was sweeping the Reception Office or working in a factory. I wished to either go to school or become a nun. I did not want to work.

01:36:45

When I first left my village, then went to Lhasa, returned home and then once again was allowed to leave, I was determined to go to India. My parents told me not to go but I said, "From this day when I leave home, you will only hear about me and never see me again. You can consider me as dead. I will forget my village, my parents and my relatives." That night they questioned me and asked me to speak truthfully, "Even when we tell you not to go, you say you wish to go on pilgrimage to Lhasa. Our stopping you is coming in the way of your practice. If we allow you to go, it is like you are dead for us. Tell us truthfully where you are planning to go and what you intend to do." I wanted to go to India. I told my parents, "I am just joking. It is up to you whether you allow me to leave or not. If you are resolute that I stay back, I will. If you allow me, I wish to go."

They told me that it was up to me to decide. "I wish to go," I replied. My mother could not sleep that night and kept crying. My father cried. They cried and asked me to tell them the truth. I told them, "I am joking. I will go to Lhasa and at the most will return in about four months. I will come back soon." I deceived my parents and came. That was why when they asked me to work [at the Reception office] in Dharamsala, I reflected that I had enough work to do, enough to eat and wear [in my village] but I made my parents suffer. I felt that after seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I must either become a nun or go to school and that working in an alien land was not worth [the struggle]. I underwent extreme difficulties during my escape, but I felt even at the cost of my life I must go back to my parents.

01:38:47

Then I was given an audience with His Holiness. I had no feelings or thoughts at that time. I spoke thus to His Holiness, "You are my refuge. I offer you my body, heart and soul. Please bestow on me the dharma vows." [Becomes emotional] I could not say anything more than that. I was crying and could not speak in front of His Holiness. His Holiness said, 'What?' and again I told him, "I offer you my body, heart and soul. Kindly bestow on me the dharma vows." "Okay," His Holiness said and placed his hand like this [puts hand over head] and blew into my eyes and here [gestures to ear and cheek]. I was ecstatic.

Other people might tease me for crying in front of His Holiness but I was crying out of happiness. I remembered my parents and all my fellow villagers and felt so fortunate in having seen the Buddha in flesh. I cried thinking of the misery of my people. I came out [of the audience room] crying.

The Reception Office asked who wished to take the novice vows and there were many who wanted to take the vows. They prepared a list but the Reception staff would not enlist me saying, "You cannot become a nun. You must work." I had already requested this of His Holiness. The novice vows were to be conducted in a few days. There was a monk [at the Reception Office] who always asked me what work I wished to do. I told him I was not interested in working, but that I wished to become a nun and if this was not possible, I wished to return to Tibet. I felt what the use of living in an alien land was if I cannot become a nun. He [the monk] told me to go to the Palace and request this of His Holiness. He [the monk] asked me to get the robes ready and that he would impart me the novice vows.

Q: Then what happened?

01:46:01

#70M: Then the Reception staff enlisted my name and I was able to receive my novice vows from His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Palace. We were told that there was no vacancy at the nunnery [in Dharamsala] and His Holiness directed us to go to the south [India].

Q: Where?

#70M: They said "to the south" for Mundgod. I did not know where Mundgod was. I said okay. Staying in Lhasa and around 9 months in Nepal and another 9 months in Dharamsala; altogether it was two years since my parents heard from me. I then arrived at the nunnery in Camp Number 3, which had been newly constructed the previous year and had only a few residents. About a year later, I took some photographs of the nunnery and myself in robes and sent a letter to my parents in the village. I explained that I was in India and had become a nun and lived in the nunnery. They were not to worry about me as I did not face any problems in regard to food and clothing. I wrote that I was fine due to the grace of His Holiness and that they should recite their *mani* mantras well. I requested my three siblings to take good care of our parents.

01:47:40

My poor father was much affected by my uncles' sufferings, which I told you about. Five of my siblings had died and we were only four left. My father always used to cry and pray that the four of us should not give him any misery. He has never hit us, even a little bit. He would not even speak angrily to us but loved us so much. "Mother is sick and if you have taken the novice vows, come back. The Chinese are not causing misery any more. The monastery, which was totally destroyed, is being rebuilt."

As I told you, the older monks have either left monkhood or been killed. When I left home, my brother was small. "He is now a monk and the monastery is being rebuilt. The Chinese are not treating us like they did earlier. We are allowed to practice dharma. You should come back." I received such a letter.

However, I did not wish to go back. Come what may, I wanted to stay put. I did not go for a year or two but they wrote many times a year. One day I received a letter saying my mother had passed away. I wrote back saying that I made offerings at the monasteries of Sera, Gaden and Drepung, where there are thousands of monks and that I was praying for her and that there was nothing I could do by coming back.

01:49:01

Next I received a letter saying that my injured uncle had passed away. I made offerings [for the dead]. My sibling wrote saying that I was to come back because my father was turning crazy and that he'd developed heart problems on my account. He [father] was finding it difficult to survive and they could not take care of him. If it was difficult for me to travel up and down, I was to excuse myself from the monastery and come to meet father before his death. I thought over it and felt that parents think of their children while the children do not care. My father suffered the death of five children. He suffered for my uncle. I am alive now but will die one day. I will not be able to do anything by going back, but I hoped to make him happy before his death so I took leave and left.

Q: Then you went to Tibet?

#70M: I felt very sorry for my father, reflecting upon the miseries he'd suffered. So I requested for leave from the nunnery and left. The Abbot [of the nunnery] told me, "Do not go to Tibet, for you will not be able to come back. All those nuns who went to Tibet have not been able to return. You must stay in the nunnery. You did not know even the alphabet when you came here and now you have reached a certain stage [in your studies]. You should stay on." I replied, "I do not have a wish to go but I have received such letters. I will just meet my father and return."

01:53:59

He asked me if I would be able to return in a year and I replied that maybe not in a year, but I would return. So I was granted leave and left. When I went [to Tibet], the Chinese arrested and imprisoned me. I was in prison in '97. My father was very old. I was kept in various prisons and finally I was released from Shigatse. When I reached home, having been a prisoner, I was not allowed to meet family or friends. My father and siblings were overwhelmed and cried. My older sister, when she heard about my arrival, fainted. She could not speak. She slowly lifted her head and came to consciousness.

My father had been crying since I left, lamenting that he had lost me. I have heaped such sufferings on him. When my father had received the letters and photos I sent, he used to pray that he should see me. Every Wednesday, His Holiness' auspicious day of the week, it was the custom to climb to the hill top to burn incense. There my father used to pray that I come back. Even when it rained, my old father used to go up the hill at 9 o'clock and sit reflecting. Finally when my mother and uncle passed away, he was the only elderly person

left. He used to take a thermos of tea and go to the fields. He would not return home in the evening or eat, which was why my brother was forced to write to me. [He mentioned in the letter that] the Chinese did not cause any sufferings and they could practice the dharma. It was true because the monastery was rebuilt and my [younger] brother was a monk there. There were about 46 monks.

01:55:45

When I left [the village] there was only one monk, as the rest were wiped out. Religious practice was being allowed. When I was living there, a man's death was akin to a dog's death. Not a *mani* could be recited. When I went back later, prayers and offerings [for the dead] were permitted. The Chinese caused much suffering to those who had been to India, to either study or become a monk or nun. I was like a prisoner for one year. I could not come here and so once again I made my escape. My parents [father] would not let me go.

Q: What happened after staying in the village for more than a year?

#70M: I wished to return [to India] to which the Chinese said, "I will see how you go. What reason have you to go to a foreign country? I will put you once again in jail. If you once again wish to enter jail, you can go. You people go to a foreign country and claim that the Chinese are suppressing the monks. We are forced to do so because the monks do not abide by the rules. You move about in red [robes] while we go to China to study and then work according to the rules. In what way do you say that you will not live under us? I will put you in jail once again."

01:59:31

My root guru is His Holiness the Dalai Lama and he has advised me to live in the nunnery and I did accordingly. However, I was forced to go [back] because of the letters from my parents. I took leave from the nunnery saying that I would return after meeting my father. But I was not being allowed to return by the Chinese, as well as my father and relatives. The people of my village and everyone said that they were worried I would fall sick and asked me to stay back. My father cried and begged me not to go. A Chinese policeman watched me everyday. I found it difficult to pass each day, thinking about the nunnery [in India]. I did not want to stay back as I had met my father.

The Chinese said, "What do you aim to achieve by going to a foreign country? Why do not you live here?" There are no nunneries in my village. There were no nuns either, only monasteries [for monks]. I was desperate and though I was not angry, I was forced to answer the Chinese—as I was stopped from leaving for about a year and two months—"I do not aim to become superior by going to a foreign country." I was asked the reason for leaving initially and I answered, "I suffer from sinus problems and I thought I would get better by going on a pilgrimage and doing prostrations. I came across a nunnery in Nepal—I did not mention India—and pleaded to be admitted. I wrote to my parents about it and they wrote back telling me to return home, which is what I did. The reason why I need to go back is that the nunnery has asked me to and I vowed to return and if I did not, I was breaking my promise. I fear sickness. My root guru has advised me to live in the nunnery. I cannot go against my root guru and the nunnery."

02:01:45

They [the Chinese] questioned me, "Are you going because you do not have enough to eat or enough to wear? Who is oppressing you that you wish to leave? What is the reason for your going?" So I replied to them that the reason for my going was because I had promised the nunnery that I would return and also that my root guru had asked me to remain at the nunnery. I told them that come what may, whether I died from hunger or whatever, I was wholly determined to go. They [the Chinese] arrived from a distant place thrice to question me. They said "We have had to come three times for your sake. We have incurred expenses on gas for the vehicle. You have to hire a room [in a hotel] for us." I pleaded with them, "Please do not come from this day onwards. I am very grateful to you so far. Please do not come from this day to see me because I am leaving. You can shoot me on the chest with your gun and I am ready to give up my life. I am going."

I told my father that I could be of no use by living there and that I was going to go where I shall live according to rules. They [the Chinese] used to say, "We are living by the law while you do not abide by the laws. The monks live according to their wish. They go to a foreign land and come back as they wish in their red robes. They go to a foreign land and claim that monks are being maltreated. They have to be treated that way because they do not abide by the rules."

Q: How did the Chinese authorities know that you were planning to go back to Tibet [India]?

02:05:47

#70M: They questioned me whether I wish to stay back or return to India. I answered that I wanted to return because if I deceived them by saying that I was going to stay back, they would mistreat my family members. I told them that I had only a year's leave. They questioned the reason for my coming and leaving. The reason I gave for my going [the first time] was that I was ill and went on the pilgrimage and requested to be admitted into the nunnery and for coming back was the many letters I received to come to meet my family. I explained to them that I requested for leave from the nunnery to go and see my family and that I had promised to return, which was why I had to go back.

Q: Did you have a visa for China?

#70M: No, I did not. They will not issue a pass. I took permission [from the nunnery] and left straight away.

Q: So that was why you kept on getting arrested?

02:07:35

#70M: That is right.

Q: Then how did you escape the next time?

#70M: I had to give a lot of answers to the Chinese. They wanted to know why we, meaning the monastics, did not observe the rules. I told them, "I am going where I will observe rules. It is not as if I shall become superior if I go abroad and feel small if I stay

back. I am going there to abide by the rules. You do not have any rules. The monks [and nuns] have rules to follow. We can only wear such clothes [gestures to red robes] and keep our heads shaved. We have to live in a monastery observing its rules. After joining the monastery, one cannot stay with the parents even for a day. You have no rules. You are free to shave your heads or keep long hair. You can wear brocade or cloth of any color on your body. You are free to live with your parents. You do not have any rules. You went to China, studied hard and are doing well. When I lived in my village, from the age of 9, I looked after the animals and did not know the alphabet. Thanks to joining the nunnery, I can recite my prayers and read the scriptures. You obey your teachers [seniors] and I will go to obey my root teacher."

02:08:59

"We'll show you what will happen if you go. We do not know any religion. Are you sure [you want to go]?" they said and brought a gun. I was scared and felt it was better to be shot [dead] than pierced [injured] with it because I would not be able to go. Thank God, he did not use the gun. I was again asked, "Are you sure you do not want to stay?" I replied no.

My father was very old; he was 79. He sat crying. "Do not you feel sorry for your father?" they asked. The reason for my coming was my father. Monks have many rules to follow. Parents admit their sons as monks and then they keep telling them, "We are sick, we are dying. Come to say prayers." Parents do not let them be. The monks have to take permission from the monastery saying, "My father is ill, my mother is ill. Please grant me leave to go."

He can leave only upon availing permission and not go about as he likes. You might see the monks moving about, but we have many rules to follow. They told me to live together with the monks at the [village] monastery, but I refused citing the rules that men and women were not allowed to stay together, just like when you studied in China, boys and girls stayed separately. Then they said that I must stay back to look after my father. I replied that I cannot stay back to look after my father, in fact I was not suppose to stay even a day. If that was the case, there is no need to build separate monasteries, for sons who become monks can live at home.

02:10:36

Whether in India, Tibet or anywhere, monasteries are constructed so that monks, whether one is intelligent or not, even if one is an incarnate lama, from the day he shaves his head, he may not know the alphabet but he must live in the monastery. I lived in a monastery observing its rules and not whiling away my time. The reason for my coming [to the village] was my father. If I did not go back, I would be going against my root lama's words. I have given my promise to the nunnery not because of my whim. I had to say this.

Q: How did you make your exit?

#70M: There was a motor road in front of our house and many vehicles plied up and down. One day a driver asked me when I intended to leave and I told him that I might leave the next day or the day following that. In our village, all the people who required eye

surgery were gathered together and taken to see a foreign doctor who treated them free of cost. This driver said he was taking them in his vehicle to the hospital. I requested him to take me in his vehicle too. He thought I was ill because I had this swelling on my cheek [touches left cheek]. So he agreed as he was taking all the sick people. When I said I was leaving in a day or two, all my relatives started crying.

02:13:49

Then the vehicle came around this time [time of interview], my father was at home while the others were out working in the fields where I could see them. They did not know I was leaving. The vehicle stopped near my house. I told my father, "I am leaving now. Please do not make me feel sad. If you do that, I will not succeed and might get killed by the Chinese."

[Earlier] I had told the Chinese, "I am determined to go even at the risk of my life. It is not a simple task to go to India as one has to go over mountains and across the sentries posted at the passes and the bridges. One must trek through forests day and night. Please do not force me to stay, which will mean I am breaking my promise to my root guru and the nunnery. I will journey over the mountains, as one cannot travel luxuriously to India in a vehicle. Come what may, I am determined to go even at the risk of my life. I am ready to take your gun shots on my chest. Please do not trouble my family when I am gone." They asked me if I really did not wish to stay and I replied that I did not. Though I was not locked up, I was not allowed to move about and felt like a prisoner in my village.

Q: Were you able to escape in the vehicle?

02:15:15

#70M: He [the driver] thought I was sick and thus I was able to get away. When I reached Lhasa, once again I trekked over the mountains and fled. Due to the blessings of the Gods, I was able to succeed.

Q: What happened when you reached Lhasa?

#70M: I escaped through the hills after I reached Lhasa.

Q: Did you have companions?

02:17:11

#70M: There were many people. A man was engaged by 72 escapees to lead the way over the mountains. I joined the group.

Q: Was that to Nepal or to India?

#70M: We traveled to the Nachu area and through the mountains to Dhamshung. We journeyed for about three months on foot. I do not know the regions, as we took detours.

Q: Did you reach India or Nepal?

02:17:49

#70M: We traveled from Lhasa towards Nepal. It [the mountain] was called Gyalha. There were many people and I joined them.

Q: I want to go back and just ask a few questions to make sure I understand everything about your story. You became a nun at the age of 30 in Lhasa and then you stayed in Lhasa for three years as a nun and then went back to your family. You said when you managed to escape into exile that you'd only had a small part of your hair cut and that your hair was long. So for those three years, did you not have your head shaved?

#70M: I did not have my head shaved. One was not allowed to shave [her head]; one was not allowed to become a nun.

Q: So it was actually like a secret ceremony that happened in Lhasa when you went to become a nun?

02:19:27

#70M: Yes, that [“hair offering” ceremony] was done in secret.

Q: Why did you go back home the first time after that?

#70M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] If we did not offer our hair in secret and became nuns [openly]—at that time monks and nuns were subjected to misery. I told you just now that I received my novice vows from His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: Why did you go home from Lhasa after three years?

02:20:07

#70M: I came to Lhasa on pilgrimage and returned home after four months. I went back to my parents.

Q: After three years, you went back to visit your family but then you ended up staying because they asked you to stay? Did they ask you to stay?

#70M: During my pilgrimage to Lhasa, as I related just now, I asked if there was a real Yeshe Norbu and I was told that he lived in India. So I decided that I would go to my parents and live with them for two or three years and then request them to allow me to once again go on a pilgrimage. I was determined that I would then go to India. That was my decision and that was the reason for my coming here.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay. So she did plan to stay with the parents for sometime, but then she decided to go back to Lhasa. Yeshe Norbu, was that like a secret name for His Holiness?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not secret. It's normal. All the Tibetan people...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They usually use it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: People usually use it.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay.

Q: You went without permission from your parents as they didn't want you to go the second time.

02:22:09

#70M: My parents did not allow me. Well, sort of because when I told them I wished to go on a pilgrimage to Lhasa, they asked me to think it over. So I told them that if it was up to me to think it over, "I shall go. [You] will not see me, only hear about me. I will forget my village and my parents." I escaped after that.

Q: On your journey out with the children and the other nun, were you praying for guidance?

#70M: I did pray. The two boys have completed their Geshe Lharampa 'Senior Master in philosophy' degree from the Jangtse Datsang [of Gaden Monastery]. Their teachers are very happy that I brought them with me while their own people from the village left them like dogs. They [the boys and their fellow escapees] had been caught by the Chinese as the boys were not able to keep up with them during the journey. My companion, the other nun lived at the Duthop Monastery at Swayambudh in Kathmandu. She developed some medical problems with her eyes.

Q: Were you praying to His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

02:24:46

#70M: I always believe it is due to His Holiness the Dalai Lama that I was able to escape and have the opportunity to study the scriptures.

Q: Who did you pray to when you were on your escape journey?

#70M: I prayed to His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: Did you have any special dreams on the journey?

02:25:31

#70M: I did dream at times. I dreamt about women dressed in peacock feathers who were leading me. I did not dream about Gods or lamas, except women.

Q: What did she [the woman in the dream] look like?

#70M: I wanted to leave my village, but I could not ask my parents' permission time and again as I had gone [to Lhasa] once before. I knew my parents would not allow me to leave. So I lived for three years in the village and sought their permission again to go to Lhasa. My parents gave me their permission when I made them believe that I would return after four months in Lhasa. When I lived in the village after my pilgrimage to Lhasa—earlier I

loved meat and dairy products but I developed a dislike for them. I felt unhappy back in the village.

I dreamed about being led by a few women, who were the protective deity, Palden Lhamo, to an alien country with lots of buildings. I also dreamed about being guided in the forest by a man in white. I felt very unhappy and left. When I reached Nepal [Kathmandu] and saw the tall buildings, I thought I had reached the place of my dreams. I dreamed such a dream before I left my village.

Q: When you were deciding which way to go, did you feel that you kind of somehow knew which way to go because of the dreams you had?

02:28:51

#70M: When I trekked through the forest, I would fall asleep even as I took a short rest. The children would cry, "I want to go to my mother." I used to think and wonder which way I should take; where would that way lead? So I would imagine the way as directed by the man and proceed.

Q: What happened when you came back and tried to re-join your nunnery?

#70M: When I reached Nepal, I did not have any money. So I begged and saved enough to reach here [Mundgod]. When I arrived here, the nunnery had formulated a new set of rules, which said that a nun from Tibet who goes on a long journey to see parents are granted a leave for one year and if she does not return within a year and seven days, she would be expelled from the nunnery and no excuses of sickness or death would be entertained. [The nunnery authority said], "You have not rejoined at the proper time and so you cannot stay here." I pleaded, "I did not have the freedom to come as I wished because of the Chinese. I could not come at the proper time and you can penalize me for that. I do not have a place to stay and request you to please allow me to rejoin." I was told, "The rules have already been made." So I had to live outside [the nunnery] as I was not able to rejoin at the correct time.

Q: Can you explain why it took you more than one year to get back?

02:32:32

#70M: On my return journey here, it took me three months to travel through the mountains. I was a year in the village. I was imprisoned for two months on the way [to my village] and detained in my village for one year.

Q: By whom?

#70M: By the Chinese as well as my parents [father] who did not wish me to go. The Chinese watched my movement everyday. I could not come freely but had to attempt an escape.

Q: What happened to you while you were in jail? How were you treated?

02:33:35

#70M: I was not beaten. I was imprisoned but not beaten.

Q: Thank you. It was fascinating to hear your story, an amazing story. Thank you so much.

#70M: Okay.

Q: Can you say what it was like to talk about your experience?

02:34:05

#70M: I have had the chance to relate my experience. When I was in the nunnery, I could not talk about it much as nobody would listen. There was a lot of work to do and people might get bored listening to a long story. Also there was no time. I feel happy that I could tell my story. I have had the chance to relate it to you.

Q: If this interview were shown in China and Tibet, would it be a problem for you?

#70M: I do not know if there will be any problem. I have three brothers there and they are very happy that I have reached India. Everyday my father prayed that he should meet me again and cried. The neighbors say that I have caused such suffering to my parents by becoming a nun. The Chinese came to know about it [my escape] and questioned and troubled my father and siblings a lot. They told [the Chinese] that I did not return even after repeatedly writing to me. I had made a second escape and I used to communicate [with family] through letters and phone calls but are not allowed to do so now.

Q: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW