

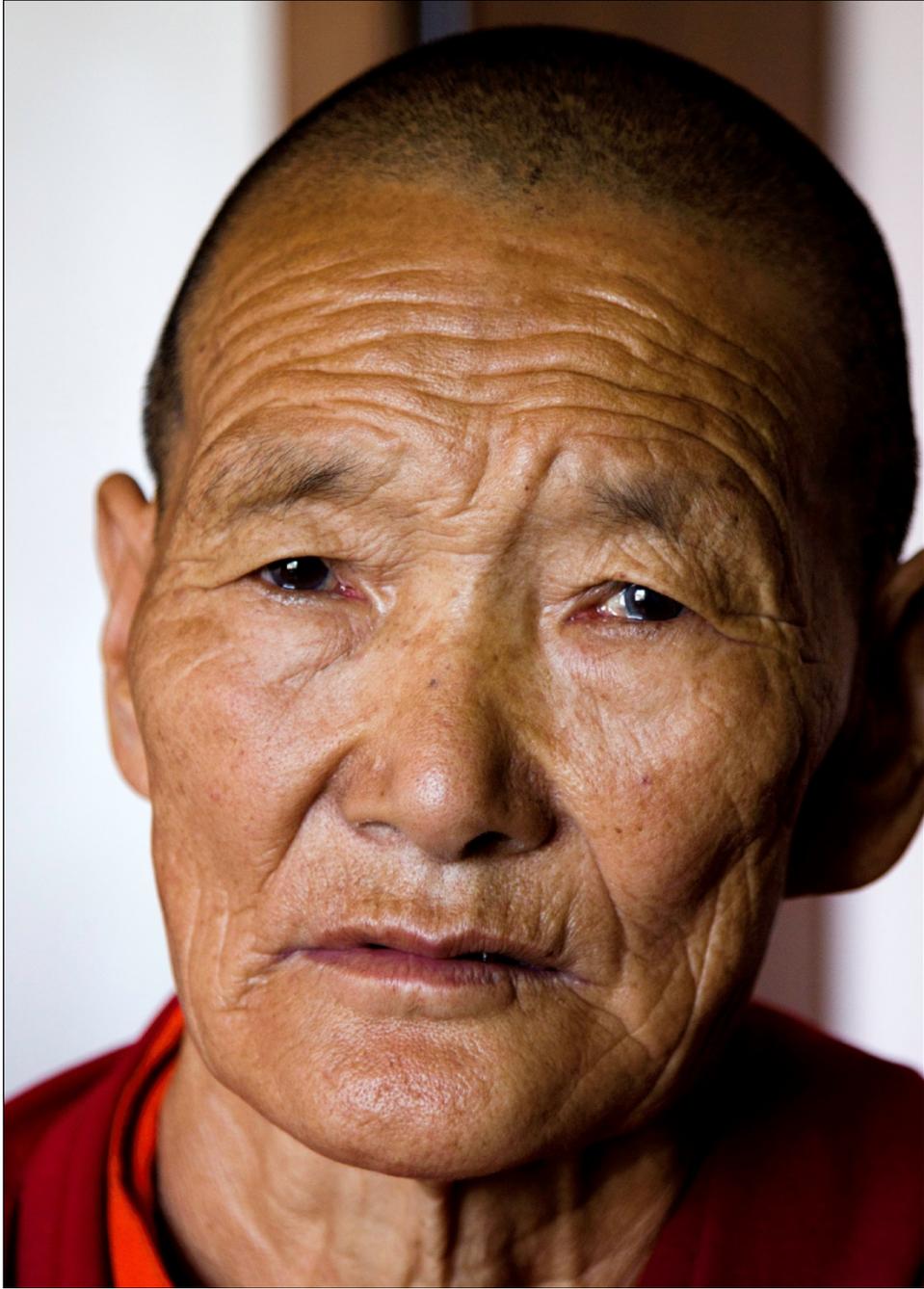
Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #73D – Tenzin Namsay
May 24, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #73D
2. Interviewee: Tenzin Namsay
3. Age: 68
4. Date of Birth: 1944
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Markham Shidong
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 2006
9. Date of Interview: May 24, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 37 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tenzin Namsay was born in Shidong into a wealthy family. They owned a large area of land and she led a very happy life until the age of 12. Her family's life changed completely after the Chinese appeared. She narrates her painful experience of running away to the mountains with all the villagers while the monks of the monastery and the men tried to resist the Chinese. Her father was imprisoned and her mother died during the first year of hiding in the mountains.

After three years Tenzin Namsay and her younger siblings returned to their village, but their property had been confiscated by the Chinese and they were forced live in a tiny shack. They struggled to grow crops in the poor soil allotted to them. Tenzin Namsay talks about the misery she faced as a messenger delivering letters to distant regions for the Chinese. She describes her suffering of excommunication and work on a road crew.

Tenzin Namsay was subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' on many occasions and recounts those horrible experiences. She speaks about how the Chinese divided the Tibetan community into different categories, how the wealthy and influential were accused on false charges, and how they were made to confess their "crimes" by force. Wanting to become a nun for many years, she was finally able to take her vows around the age of 40.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, first appearance of Chinese, destruction of monasteries, oppression under Chinese, forced labor, brutality/torture, *thamzing*, monastic life.

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Interview #73D

Interviewee: Tenzin Namsay

Age: 68, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: May 24, 2012

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:13

Interviewee #73D: Tenzin Namsay.

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?

#73D: Yes.

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

#73D: [Smiles]

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.

#73D: Okay.

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

00:02:01

#73D: [Shakes head to indicate “no”]

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#73D: [Nods]

Q: *Ani-la* ‘respectful term for nun,’ can you please tell me where you were born and how old you are now?

#73D: Shidong and 68.

Q: What kind of work did your family do in Shidong?

#73D: My family was not a family of leaders but it was a rich family.

Q: What work did [they] do at that time?

#73D: I was a small child then. I can recall from the time I was 10 years old. When the Chinese appeared in Tibet, I was 12 years old.

Q: What did your parents do for a living?

00:03:36

#73D: [They] did farming.

Q: Before the Chinese arrived, could you just tell me what was it like growing up in your family?

#73D: The family was happy and there was plenty to eat. We owned a large area of land located a little distance away from the village. Our family lived alone away from the village. There was nobody with us. The village was located on the other side of the river. We were the only family on one side of the river.

Q: How many members were there in your family, how many children and where were you in the lineup?

#73D: There were six siblings including me.

Q: Where were you in the lineup?

#73D: I am the oldest. I am the oldest.

Q: Then there were your parents?

#73D: Yes, there were the parents.

Q: What was the nearest temple to where you lived?

00:05:41

#73D: The nearest monastery was the Zowo Gonpa. I had not seen any other monasteries as a child.

Q: You said that when you were 12 years old the Chinese arrived. What happened in your life, in your personal life when the Chinese arrived?

#73D: Until I was 12 years old, there was plenty to eat. After the Chinese arrived when [I] was 12 years of age, father was put in a Chinese prison. Then mother and the rest of us fled into the mountains. Mother passed away on the mountains. [She] became ill in the

mountains due to anxiety over father's imprisonment. Mother passed away in the mountains.

Q: Why was your father imprisoned, *ani-la*?

#73D: [I] told you about the Zowo Gonpa; he was imprisoned when he went to...[not discernible]

Q: Why did he go to Zowo Gonpa?

#73D: [The monks] of Zowo Gonpa were moving as soldiers in the mountains. They did not have anything to eat in the mountains. After the Chinese destroyed [the monastery], they did not have anything to eat or wear in the mountains. [They] were moving in the mountains and [father] went to deliver food. That was the reason.

Q: All the monks of Zowo Gonpa had fled into the mountains...

00:08:01

#73D: Yes. [They] fled to the mountains after the Chinese' destruction.

Q: Had the monastery been destroyed?

#73D: Yes, the monks could not remain when the monastery was destroyed. During that time, men of the village gathered to become soldiers and tried to resist the Chinese. They could not and perished. All the men were killed. Oh, the number of men that were killed! Only a few survived. Everyone was killed.

Q: When you were 12 years old, you said the Chinese arrived. Did they destroy the monastery at that time or did it take some time for that to happen?

#73D: [The monastery] was not destroyed when [I] was 12 years old. I was 13...it might have been when I was 13 years old...13, 14...it was when I was 14 years old. [I] was 14 years old when the Chinese destroyed [the monastery]. When I was 15, we fell into the category [formed] under the Chinese and suffered assaults.

Q: You were 14 when the Chinese destroyed the monastery. What did you say happened when you were 15 years old?

00:09:46

#73D: And then at age 15 my sufferings began. There was nothing to eat and wear.

Q: *Ani-la*, who destroyed the monastery? How did that come about? What happened to the monks that were living there?

#73D: It was everybody. When the Chinese troops arrived, they...[not discernible]. The Chinese misled and advised the Tibetans, "There is nothing called religion. It is the work of

oppression. It is the work of the ‘running dogs’ of the Dalai Lama. There is no religion. It is the work of oppression.” The Chinese said like that.

Q: Was it both Chinese and Tibetans that destroyed [the monastery]?

#73D: The Chinese advised the Tibetans and both brought about the destruction together.

Q: This was Zowo Gonpa? How many monks were there and where did they go?

00:11:45

#73D: There were not many monks before I left.

Q: No, initially before the destruction of the monastery?

#73D: [I] do not know much. I was a small child then.

Q: Where did the monks go?

#73D: The older ones escaped. Due to fear of the Chinese, the older monks had fled. And those that were able to resist the Chinese resisted [them] and were killed by the Chinese. From those that fled, perhaps a few might have reached India. Some of them were killed at Tsawagon with the Gongka Lama. [They] were killed at the place called Tsawa Zagong.

Q: *Ani-la*, when the monastery was destroyed and you were 14, did you see this happening or were you made to participate in this destruction?

#73D: No, we were in the mountains and the village was a little distance away. There was a little distance like from here to Norbulingka [Institute near Dharamsala, India].

Q: You mean the monastery’s [location]?

00:13:30

#73D: Yes, the monastery’s [location] from my place. The monastery was atop a hill and we [lived] in the plains.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So that [distance from Dharamsala to Norbulingka] would be about five miles, something like that.

Q: *Ani-la*, what happened that you had plenty of food before the Chinese arrived and then after the Chinese came you said that “We had no food”? Where did the food go?

#73D: [The grains] were collected by the Chinese. Our house was big and the Chinese came and sealed the door. Sealing the door means attaching a paper with an order that it should not be opened. We were made to live in a bad house and told that [we] could not go into [our] house. We were to live in a poor small house where the animals...there were no cows or other animals. We were forced to live in a small, dilapidated house like a toilet whether we could fit in it or not. We were just the children because [our] parents were no

more. [We] were just the children. [We] did not even have clothes to wear; there was nothing.

Q: Before your mother died, did you escape to the mountains with her? Is that... You said that she became very anxious and was she in the mountains for a little period of time or long time before she died and did she bring all of the children with her?

00:16:25

#73D: Yes, all the children, and mother had a younger brother. The brother took us along. My father and mother had many siblings and their children. Recounting everything will be never ending.

Q: Your mother and all the six children reached the mountains. How long did mother live in the mountains?

#73D: While we were living in the mountains, His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped from Lhasa. Many planes flew in the sky and people said that His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped then.

Q: How long did your mother live in the mountains before [she] passed away?

#73D: [She] lived a little less than a year. [We] went there around springtime and mother passed away in summer. We stayed for around a year in the mountains. The children were in the mountains for half a year after mother passed away.

Q: Did you go with your mother and your mother's brother to the mountains after the Chinese sealed your house and made you live in the shed? Is that when you went?

00:18:44

#73D: There was nothing left after the door was sealed. My uncle was in the mountains with the Gongka Lama. Those on the mountains were destroyed. There were clashes and those that could flee, escaped to Tsawagon and those that could not, continued to live in the mountains and were captured and imprisoned by the Chinese.

I was 16 when we came down from the mountains. By then everything was over. The Chinese claimed that they were done with the killings and that the rest had surrendered. There were not many [people] left in the mountains. It was around three years since everyone fled to the mountains with nothing to eat and survived trying to avoid the Chinese. It had been around three years for all of us.

Q: The Chinese sealed the door of your home. Did you flee to the mountains after the sealing...

#73D: Yes, [we] fled after the sealing of the door.

Q: *Ani*, you were like 14, 15, 16 in the mountains. Can you remember, I know it is difficult to talk about, but can you please tell us what the conditions were like in the mountains and did your younger brothers and sisters survive?

#73D: None [of the siblings] passed away in the mountains but after coming down, a sister perished from starvation. There was nothing to eat and [she] was starving. The adults...We did not have anything to eat and in the mountains...There is the *bhupong* tree in India. You know the *bheli*? *Bheli* is a tree. There is something called the *bhedi* [berry of the *bheli* tree] that could be plucked from the trees in the mountains.

[We] gathered this and ate it. [We] prepared [it like] *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ for the children. The peel could be removed and there was something of this [gestures off camera] size within. This is found in India too as [I] saw it on the circumambulation path. [We] went to gather this in the mountains and ate them. The Chinese provided every person with a small quantity each day and we ate that. When there was nothing left to eat, [we] went to gather *bhedi* in the mountains.

We could not interact with others because we were in the restricted group. The Chinese formed categories [of the people]. There were three categories. *Ngadak* ‘leaders’ was the highest [category] and people like me were the *kutso* ‘wealthy.’ *Ngadak* were the higher ones and those like us were the *kutso*. Then there were the rich farmers, the medium and the *ulpong* ‘poor’ that were the ones they [the Chinese] trusted. [Laughs]

Q: You stayed for around three years on the mountains. What were the conditions like then?

00:23:00

#73D: At that time in the mountains, it was not the Chinese....The men were up in the mountains and when supplies arrived, there was scrambling [for food].

Q: *Ani-la*, you, your mother and younger siblings fled into the mountain and were there for around three years. What problems did you have when you were living in the mountains?

#73D: If the Chinese did not spot you, there were not many problems as you could just stay there. There was not much fear. If spotted by the Chinese, [they] would fire. Other than that, there was not much fear, but once [we] came down and the classification was done, there was terror.

Q: *Ani-la*, living around three years in the mountains meant [you] needed food, shelter and water. What did you do for those?

#73D: We did not spend the entire three years on one mountain. [We] came home. When the sealing of the door took place, I was 13 years old...14, 15, 16...When we left the mountains for home, I was 16 years old.

Q: Did you continue to come home and flee during the three years?

#73D: No, it was not like that. One could not continue to come back and flee. [We] had crossed a huge river a little distance from our village and fled into the mountains.

Q: What did [you] do for food, water, clothing and shelter atop the mountain?

00:24:37

#73D: [We] went to villages where there were no Chinese to request food.

Q: Throughout the three years?

#73D: [We] received little quantities and at times stayed hungry because food was not available like we eat here. [We] drank a little *thukpa* ‘noodle soup,’ gathered green plants and went to pluck ears of grains in the fields of the people and ate that. [We] drank soup of green plants.

Q: How many of your brothers and sisters survived those three years in the mountains without your mother? Were you looking after them?

#73D: There were numerous people with us in the mountains. The Chinese sent [people] in search of us many times. “Come and surrender. [You] will not be imprisoned. [We] will not cause you trouble.” People came in search of [us] in the mountains. Then one day we came down. [We] were supposed to register the age when [we] initially came down and I was 16 years old. I can recall that but not much else.

Q: *Ani-la*, when you were in the mountains, your father was imprisoned. Do you know how many years he was sentenced to prison? Did you know where he was, how many years and did you ever see him again?

00:28:37

#73D: [He] was 21 years in prison.

Q: Did you see father after [he] was released from prison?

#73D: [I] saw him but [he] was sick. The Chinese released him when [he] became sick and was on the verge of death.

Q: *Ani-la*, did you see your father at all before he died?

#73D: Yes. One of the children died from starvation. After we returned from the mountains, [we had] nothing to eat, nothing to wear, nothing at all, and suffered incredibly. [We] did not suffer much on the mountains. [We] underwent incredible suffering under the Chinese after [we] returned. Once you were in the restricted group, you could not speak to anyone. If you met someone on the road, you could not speak. You could not interact with anyone in the village. You could not utter anything.

Q: When you came down from the mountains, you were 16 and did you have responsibility for taking care of the rest of the children? And how did you do that?

#73D: Our maternal uncle had a daughter and she helped us. My mother’s older brother had a daughter and she helped us. I am not a capable person.

Q: *Ani-la*, what did you do with your days? How did you survive and find food and shelter? Could you tell us about the time, your life after you were 16?

00:31:52

#73D: [The Chinese] allotted us a piece of land that was rocky and upon which [we] had to lay soil and on which nothing would grow. We were allotted that type of land. [The Chinese] took away the lands that belonged to nine or 10 families and redistributed them among the families. We were allotted the worst land, one on which [we] had to lay soil on the rocky surface. For 6-7 years [we] dug earth in the mountains and spread them in the fields.

Villages were spread far and wide in the place where we lived. We had to deliver messages and letters to this [village] and to that [village] and everywhere. We lived at a place where there were not many families, just 21 or 22 families. All the villages were spread out and we had to go to deliver messages. When [the Chinese] said, “Go there” we had to go there and when they said ‘Go there’ we had to go there. We had to reach messages wherever they ordered and were not given time to earn our living. When there were messages to be delivered and when they ordered, we had to go.

Q: To do what?

#73D: The Chinese needed messages and letters to be delivered about plans to be informed. There were no vehicles in the villages. There were no roads like in India.

Q: What were you sent to deliver?

#73D: The Chinese sent [us] to deliver messages, to deliver messages. Messages and letters must be delivered to the villages.

Q: I see. Okay.

00:33:35

#73D: Whatever their plans, the message must reach the villages. Wherever the villages were located, they had to be informed. There were no telephones like these days. [Laughs]

Q: I see. So *ani-la* was given the responsibility of delivering messages.

#73D: We were given the name *kutso*. “*Kutso*, go and deliver this message.” There was a village on a mountain and if told to go there, one must go there. If it was a village located over that side that one was ordered to go, one had to go there. If it was a village on this side that one was ordered to go, one had to go there. If one was told to go to wherever a village was located, one must. Oh, the numbers of mountains [I] have climbed. One could not call out to anyone and one had to walk alone day and night. [I] have suffered incredible difficulties.

Q: Did you any ideas about what the messages were about?

#73D: They [the Chinese] must gather [people] for meetings, so it was to call them to attend meetings. And whatever the decisions reached at the meetings by the Chinese, they must be conveyed. There were no telephones like these days. So, we would be sent to reach messages.

Q: *Ani-la*, if you couldn't cultivate your own land even after working so hard to prepare it, how did you get food?

00:36:40

#73D: Even if we managed to cultivate our land haphazardly, there were collections [grain taxes] that they [the Chinese] imposed. There was one called the *wudu* and another called *lhakdu*.

Q: *Lhakdu*?

#73D: The *wudu* is supposed to be grains for the government.

Q: Was it like a tax?

#73D: Yes, that is the tax. The *lhakdu* is supposed to be the surplus grain that must be sold [to the Chinese]. However, where was there any surplus? That was just a name.

Q: [You] did get some harvest?

#73D: [We] did get a little, but they took it away like that.

Q: *Lhakdu, wudu...*

#73D: Yes, they collected it like that. We boiled turnips. You know the round ones? We cultivated [crops] twice a year and sowed turnips since nobody took it away. [We] ate boiled turnips and also the leaves. We made *thukpa* of the turnips. I have suffered as much as [anybody] can endure.

Q: *Ani-la*, were you and your siblings, were you close to starvation a lot of the time and were people around you starving because they didn't have enough to eat? What were conditions like in your village?

00:39:10

#73D: Yes, there were starvation deaths and my younger sibling died from starvation.

Q: At this time, *ani-la*, were you a nun or were you wanting to be a nun? What was your situation because you are a nun now?

#73D: I became a nun. I became a nun before I left Tibet.

Q: We're at a stage when you were a little over 16 years old, when you worked for the Chinese. Had you become a nun then?

#73D: I did not know how to become a nun then but I had shaved [my] head. [I] have never had long hair; it was always shaven. I kept a little length of hair when I was 22 years old. I had gone to work as a road crew and grew a little length of hair then. It was during the time of the Cultural Revolution when the Chinese destroyed everything.

Q: Did you construct roads for the Chinese?

#73D: Yes?

Q: Chinese road construction?

#73D: Yes, [I] had been to work on Chinese road construction once. At that time I grew my hair a little. [I] cut it when [I] did not have to go to construct roads. During the period of leniency, [I] gave *taphue* ‘hair offering’ to a lama and became a nun.

Q: *Ani-la*, when you said “I always shaved my hair,” you mean from what age were you doing that and why were you doing that?

00:41:48

#73D: I took the nun vows at around the age of 30.

Q: *Ani-la*, you said that [you] didn’t have hair from a young age. Why did [you] always shave it?

#73D: [I] did not know how to go about it since [my] parents were not there.

Q: Did [you] shave [your] head because of the wish to become a nun?

#73D: Yes, yes, that is right. I wished to become a nun right from the beginning.

Q: *Ani-la*, why did you want to become a nun?

#73D: It is said in Tibet that becoming a nun would be beneficial when one dies.

Q: What is it about being a nun, what does a nun do that assures a better next life?

#73D: A nun must observe many vows, but since I do not have an education [I] do not know much of it.

Q: To observe what?

#73D: One must give up sinning and give up the *migaywa chu* ‘ten non-virtuous actions’ [killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, harsh speech, idle gossip, covetousness, malicious intent and wrong view] and *tsamay nga* ‘five heinous crimes’ [patricide, matricide, killing an *arhat*, drawing blood from the body of a Buddha with evil intent and causing schism within the Sangha].

Q: *Ani*, are you connected to a monastery, a nunnery, right now and when did you join it?

00:44:36

#73D: One is old and cannot study the scriptures in the nunnery. When I was little, my father had taught me the alphabet. However, one cannot study when there is nothing to eat. When one does not have food, there is not time for studies.

Q: *Ani-la*, please explain to us, just to go back to your childhood for a minute, you are young adult. So, how many years did you have to do this job of delivering messages to the villages and other areas? Did that job ever change and what did you have to do next?

#73D: From the time I was 16...Let me count how many years it has been. It might have been around 30 years.

Q: You said you'd been to construct roads for the Chinese at the age of 22.

#73D: I went to construct roads but my family members were at home.

Q: Did you deliver letters until you left for road construction?

#73D: Yes, but it was not just me but all my family members.

Q: The others did, but we're asking about your story. The Chinese gave you the responsibility of delivering letters at the age of 16. Until what age did you do this job?

#73D: This...We...

Q: You mentioned that you went to construct roads.

00:47:08

#73D: That did not take a long time. It did not take a year, only six months.

Q: Did you resume delivering letters after you returned?

#73D: Yes, of course, when they ordered, one must follow it.

Q: *Ani-la*, where was the road construction and what exactly was your work?

#73D: Tamo. It was in Tamo.

Q: What did you have to do?

#73D: [We] build roads for vehicles. One must lay earth, carrying it in baskets on the back. Roads situated at lower levels must be filled with earth and those at higher points [leveled by] removing [the soil].

Q: What were the conditions like to work on that road crew? Can you tell us like what your daily schedule was and what you had to eat and where you slept and were you with other women or were they men and women? Give us some description, please.

#73D: *Tsampa* was rationed by weight. We had to make tea ourselves in pots that were available in Tibet. They [the Chinese] provided tea leaves, money and *tsampa*. The *tsampa* was weighed and distributed.

Q: And shelter?

00:49:34

#73D: They had constructed bamboo houses. You know bamboo? They were built of bamboo with plastic covers for roof.

Q: You stayed in bamboo huts?

#73D: Bamboo was tied up like this [puts hands upright]. Bamboo was tied like this and covered with plastic at the top.

Q: Were there men or women?

#73D: There were numerous men and women.

Q: Around how many workers were there?

#73D: We were around 300 people that went there. People were gathered from prefectures and villages and our village was supposed to send 12 people.

Q: About how much did you get a day? The Chinese provided *tsampa* at the road construction site, how much *tsampa* did they give per day?

#73D: [I] think it was a kilogram a day, a kilogram a day.

Q: It cannot be kilogram. *Gyama* ‘half a kilogram’?

#73D: It was one Tibetan *gyama*. [A person] was entitled to 30 *gyama* per month.

Q: Did [you] say that [you] were paid?

00:51:36

#73D: The wages per month... There were the *lero* ‘good workers,’ *letha* ‘worst workers’ and *leding* ‘middle workers.’ The *letha* received 10 currency units a month.

Q: Then the *lero*?

#73D: The *lero* must be getting a lot of money. [The others] were *leding* and *letha*. The *letha* received 10 and 12 [currency units] per month depending upon their work.

Q: Was *letha* the better one?

#73D: The worst.

Q: Received 12 currency units?

#73D: The worst.

Q: The worst received 12 currency units?

#73D: Yes.

Q: Was *lero* the best?

#73D: [I] think they received a lot in a month.

Q: You mentioned *letha* or something in the middle...

00:52:21

#73D: The *leding*.

Q: And the *leding*?

#73D: The middle ones received 25 [currency units per month]. The best ones received around 30.

Q: Did it depend upon the amount of work put in by someone?

#73D: [The Chinese] selected the people and since we were classified in the *kutso*, [we] were in the worst and not in the better [groups]. Better people were assigned to it.

Q: *Ani-la*, did you have any choice in working on this road construction or was it forced on you? If you wanted to leave, could you leave?

#73D: It was by force. One could not leave; it was by force.

Q: Could you just tell us what was a daily schedule like every day that you did that for six years?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Six months.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I thought you said 16 to 22 on road construction.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sixteen to 22, a messenger; road construction, 6 months at the age of 22 and back as messenger.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, just six months, okay. Thank you.

Q: You worked for six months at the road construction. What was the daily schedule? When did it start in the morning, what did [you] do and when did it stop in the evening?

#73D: Like here, one must arrive at 9 o'clock [and work] until 5 o'clock in the evening.

Q: *Ani*, when you went back to becoming a messenger and going from place to place, can you describe what did you see? What conditions were going on in the other villages or places? What did you notice about your country when you were delivering these messages?

00:55:58

#73D: When I went to the villages, since I was a *kutso*, there was nobody that would speak to [me] or let [me] stay for the night. I must deliver the letter into the hands of the person they [the Chinese] instructed me to and if it was nighttime, [I] must walk back the whole night. Nobody would let [me] stay for the night. They [the Chinese] would give me the name of the person in whose hands I must deliver the letter, and [I] called that person who would receive the letter. Being a *kutso* there was no one that spoke to [me] or let [me] stay overnight or give [me] tea.

Q: Were the conditions in the places that you delivered the letters, were they the same as your own village?

#73D: The conditions were the same. The Chinese were treating [them] exactly the same way.

Q: Were there any resistance fighters in your area who were trying to stop the Chinese?

#73D: No, no, no one resisted the Chinese, whatever the Chinese may say. They [the Tibetans siding with the Chinese] were worse than the Chinese. Except for training them, the Chinese did not come and hit us. They [Tibetans siding with the Chinese] assaulted us numerous times and also killed. Numerous people were killed through *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.'

Q: Was there resistance to the Chinese earlier to that?

00:58:06

#73D: There was resistance earlier. I told you about the fighting by the [monks] of the monastery and people in Tibet that formed a force by collecting one person from every family. People of the region collected monks and soldiers who fled into the mountains and did not have anything to eat. I told you that we lived that way.

Q: There was no resistance after that? Later when you were delivering letters, there was no resistance to the Chinese then?

#73D: No, there were no clashes. However, since I was a restricted one, wherever I went there were people that assaulted [me]. There were [people] that beat [us] and we were beaten because [we] belonged to a [certain] category. Being classified as a *kutso*, even somebody we met on the road assaulted [us]. One must hide while walking on the road

because should you meet a bad person, you could be assaulted. We, the *kutso* must hide while walking on the road.

Q: Did that ever happen to you? Were you accosted or stopped by people and beaten? And how would they know you were a *kutso*?

#73D: Of course, it has happened. Yes, [I] have been beaten on numerous occasions. [The bad people] even entered [my] house and assaulted [me].

Q: How would someone walking on the road know that [you] were a *kutso*?

01:00:07

#73D: Take Dharamsala [India] for instance. There would be a meeting of all the people and the family names would be identified. We had to kneel and [people] raised slogans, “Arise, poor people. Destruction to the influential.” They raised slogans and held meetings while we were put in the center.

Q: [They] would recognize you.

#73D: Of course, [they] would recognize us. We were there in the center.

Q: Were you ever subjected to *thamzing*?

#73D: Yes?

Q: *Ani-la*, were you subjected to *thamzing*?

#73D: [I] have been subjected to *thamzing* many times and have knelt on many occasions.

Q: Where did that occur, in your village or just when you were delivering messages? Can you tell us the circumstances and were you made to wear a sign or what were you accused of? You were a young girl, so what were you accused of?

#73D: [It] happened at the meeting place. They gathered the people for meetings. The Chinese called meetings every day. The Chinese held meetings every day. There was an off day like you have Sundays or Mondays here. The Chinese also observed it. Except on that day, they continuously held meetings. The Chinese carried out their responsibilities according to their practice. There were meetings constantly.

Q: Where did the meeting take place? The location?

01:02:39

#73D: It was up to the higher authorities whether to hold the meetings in a village, prefecture or county. It was their decision. One must attend wherever the location was selected.

Q: So you were subjected to *thamzing* at such meetings?

#73D: People gathered there and those of us that were to be subjected to *thamzing*, those belonging to [certain] restricted [groups] were brought among the people. Someone raised his hand and shouted, “Poor people arise. Destruction to the *ngadak* and others.” A person had been appointed to raise [his] hand and he did.

Q: *Ani-la*, what would they accuse you of and physically what did they do to you if that’s not too difficult for you to talk about?

#73D: Yes?

Q: A person should have committed a wrong in order to be made to suffer and what did [they] accuse you of?

01:04:31

#73D: We owned a large area of land and were the best [family] in the village though [we] had not held any leadership posts, yet we were economically more progressive. We were holders of the biggest area of land in the village. My parents were clever in earning a living. My maternal grandfather was clever in earning a livelihood. The family was cleverly managed.

Even here you have some [families] that are poor and some that are rich. We were smart in earning our living and though we were not leaders, ours was a wealthy family. We did not hold any posts and were just a [regular] family. The Chinese did not like the well-off families. The Chinese relegated the entire well-off families in Tibet into the *kutso* category. Some became *kutso* and some became *ngadak*. The *ngadak* were supposed to be His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s...[not discernible] and *kutso* were part of that.

Q: *Ani-la*, what was it like for you to have to go to meetings and not know if you were going to be beaten or abused in some way? What was that like because that could happen any time, so did you dread going to meetings? What was that like?

#73D: [I] thought, “Today [I] will be beaten” when [I] heard that there would be a *thamzing* that day, that such and such a person would be subjected to *thamzing* that day. If we met somebody on the road... Take me for instance, and say for example that there was another *kutso*. If we had met on the road, even if we had not spoken to each other—if one *kutso* came across another on the way, both of us being *kutso* would be accused of discussing something bad, that we had planned return...[not discernible], that we had planned to rebel against the Chinese. That was a cause for subjecting us to *thamzing* because there was not any other reason to subject us. [The Chinese] created such things to carry out [the *thamzing*].

Q: When you attended a meeting, were you already informed that you’d be assaulted that day?

01:08:00

#73D: “You have erred. [We] have heard that [you] met somebody on the road. When meeting him/her on the road, [you] would have discussed something bad. Hence, [you] will be subjected to *thamzing* today,” [I] would be told.

Q: I see. If two *kutso* had met, it was assumed that you'd discussed something bad for which [you] were subjected to *thamzing*?

#73D: Yes. That is it. Besides that there were no charges to accuse [us] of. When the Chinese called meetings and there were the beatings, such things were said since other than that, there was nothing to accuse us of. [Laughs]

Q: What did they do when they did the *thamzing* on you?

#73D: Some people pulled your ears and if one had long hair, the hair was pulled. There were ear pulling and slapping on cheeks. Some [people] kicked. Everybody is not the same; some did this and some did that.

Q: How long did that go on? Was it a matter of minutes or an hour or what period of time?

00:10:03

#73D: Everybody lined up and was told to beat this one and that one. After they were done, we were ordered, "Go". They stayed back to make decisions and we would not know what occurred then.

Q: How long did the assaults last?

#73D: The assaults lasted for a long time.

Q: Can you estimate a time?

#73D: The assaults went on for 2-3 hours. It was not as if one person carried out assaults for an hour. "What did you talk about today? What did you say? What did you two discuss?" to which I would say "I did not plan anything" because I had not done any planning. When I replied that I had not planned anything, they would insist [I] had. And then my colleague [would be questioned], "What did you two discuss?" He replied and I replied that we had not discussed anything. Then somebody else rose to ask, "What did you discuss today? You met each other. What did you discuss about?"

Q: So altogether it took two to three hours?

#73D: Yes, that is right.

Q: *Ani*, how many years did this go on in your life and what age were you when it was happening?

01:12:05

#73D: The *thamzing* stopped when I was 27 or 28 years old.

Q: You mean there were no *thamzing* from 27 or 28?

#73D: Yes, there were no *thamzing* but there was no freedom. One had to be very careful. Since the age of 27 or 28, [we] did not have to kneel [at public meetings].

Q: Would it be possible to say during those years that you were beaten, they were like from about 24 to 27? Is that what we are estimating?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: *Ani-la*, could you please say what was the effect on you as a person? How did it make you feel about yourself and about other people? How did it sit with you that you were being treated like this? What did it do to you?

#73D: [I] thought that [I] would die under the Chinese and never ever thought even once that I would come to India and see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There was not even a dream.

Q: Did you ever think of taking your own life when the suffering got really difficult?

01:14:26

#73D: Of course, there were times when [I] wanted to die. It happened many times but it was not [my] destiny. [I] wanted to leap into the river. There was a river. "If I leap into the river, what would happen to my younger siblings? What shall [I] do?" [I] contemplated numerous times. [My] stomach was empty and there was nothing to eat. [I] have struggled a lot but did not die. [I] wished to jump from the cliffs but could not. Our pathways were bad and [I] wished to jump from the cliffs but could not. [I] wished to leap into the river but could not.

Q: [You] mean [you] could not jump?

#73D: [I] could not jump.

Q: Thinking about your younger siblings?

#73D: Yes, thinking about the younger siblings. If I leap, [they] will not know where I have gone. I thought if I jumped here today, they would not know where I had gone.

Q: Were you trying to take care of your siblings at the same time as you were enduring this *thamzing*?

#73D: Even the youngest one must be taken to watch the show [*thamzing*]. When the older [sibling] was being beaten, the younger ones must watch it. They must watch the proceedings.

Q: What effect did that have on them?

01:16:43

#73D: After a few years when there was leniency and no *thamzing*, the Chinese said, “The younger people will be given equal status as everyone else. The “hat” that is sitting [symbolically] on the head is removed and now rests here [points to left shoulder]. Should [you] not be good, it will be back [touches head] but should [you] act well, it will be removed [slides down right hand from left shoulder] and [you] shall be equal with the people.” The Chinese proclaimed this at a meeting.

Q: For the younger ones?

#73D: Yes, to the younger ones. The Chinese proclaimed it just around the time we were grouped into various categories. Our “hat” was sitting here [touches head] and it could not be removed.

Q: Were your siblings, were they afraid; were they worried or afraid that they would be *thamzined* someday?

01:18:15

#73D: Yes, of course [they] were. One day they would have to endure just like us. Who would ever have thought that things would be like this, that there would be leniency? [I] never did even for one day. I always thought I would be under the Chinese.

Q: Did you ever think of escaping to Tibet at that time and...escaping from Tibet to India at that time?

#73D: We knew that that there was no escape.

Q: That there was no way?

#73D: We knew there was no way having escaped to the mountains.

Q: What happens to you next? You’re about 28. What happens after age 28?

#73D: Within that period?

Q: What happened to you after the age of 28? There were no more *thamzing*...

#73D: The *thamzing* were stopped but [the situation] was mediocre in our village. If an ordinary person and a *kutso* had a dispute, the ordinary person was the victor because we still had the “hat” sitting here [touches head]. There was no end.

One had to be tactful. We were like sitting on the edge of a knife’s blade. One must be tactful and be alert about what the Chinese would say, what charges [they] would accuse us of. One must think of being tactful. A little boy in my village stuck a poster on a house that said “Tibet is independent” and it caused such an uproar. We must live tactfully in my village and could not do just anything. There was no freedom.

Q: Do you remember what happened after he put up that sign in your village?

01:21:55

#73D: We did not know how to write. All those people that knew writing were made to write, but [the Chinese] could not locate a similar handwriting. They made everyone write but the handwriting did not match. The Chinese took away all those that knew to write. We did not know writing. Students below Grade 4 were made to write but the handwriting did not match.

Q: We're about 1970 now, *ani*, and I think...So you stay in Tibet from 1970 to 2006, so that's a good 36 years more. Are there any experiences during those 36 years that you think it would be important for us to know that happened to you and you could tell us about because you saw with your own eyes? So between 1970 and 2006...

#73D: What happened had happened and in our family, my sibling had three children. We lived tactfully and were mediocre though it was not like earlier times. However, one was not happy.

Q: What happened later? How long did you live that way, tactfully?

01:24:46

#73D: [We] lived tactfully. [We] lived for around 20 years with the right to earn a living and without having to deliver messages and letters. [We] could earn our living before I came to India. [I] looked after my sibling's children and lived at home like a mother.

Q: *Ani-la*, during that time did you continue to wish to practice the dharma in your own way, in your private way? How did you do that?

#73D: When there was a little religious freedom, there were around 40 monks in the monastery. There were numerous Chinese watching every day of the week and the monastery did not have freedom. Here in India monasteries have freedom over whatever they own, but our monastery did not have freedom. Everything lay in Chinese hands, whether it was money or the statues or anything [the monastery] wanted to do. Everything lay in Chinese hands and the monastery did not have freedom.

Q: Did you live in the monastery?

#73D: Only monks and not nuns could live in the monastery. We never had [nunneries]. There were no nunneries, even in earlier times. Long ago in our region nuns were like servants in the family. [They] were work hands while in India [they] are practitioners of the dharma. In our region [they] were not practitioners of the dharma. The *ani* was like a son if the family did not have a son. [She] was a servant. She did a man's job like road construction. [She] went wherever required; [she] was a servant.

Q: *Ani-la*, when you were staying at home and taking care of your sister's children and you said you were like a servant in the family, was that an agreeable role for you to play? Was that something you were willing to do?

01:29:00

#73D: [I] felt it was better for me to leave than remain at home. [I] hoped to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama before [I] died and so [I] came to Lhasa. [I] enquired from people in Lhasa if there was a chance to go [to India] and [I] arrived here. [I] hoped to see His Holiness before [I] died; I had seen His Holiness once when I was a little child.

Q: Where was that that you saw His Holiness when you were young?

#73D: As a little child [I] had seen His Holiness the Dalai Lama before the escape. Before I ran away into the mountains, as a little child I had seen [His Holiness] once in Lhasa.

Q: Did you go to Lhasa when you were a little child?

#73D: Yes, I went to Lhasa but that is a long story.

Q: So you thought it was better to leave and see His Holiness. Had you cut your hair at that time and made your offering?

01:31:03

#73D: Yes, [I] had made the offering.

Q: Where did [you] make the offering?

#73D: [I] made the offering to a *geshe* ‘monk with Buddhist philosophy degree’ in my village. I was around the age of 40 when I made my hair offering. [I] made the hair offering to a *geshe* who had come out of prison.

Q: Did the *geshe* give you any special prayers or any instructions in the dharma, in the Buddha dharma?

#73D: Having been released from prison, [he] was not allowed to go anywhere and stayed indoors. [He] did not live long. Those in prison did not have much to eat. Grains were soaked in huge containers and fed to the prisoners and [I] heard that most of them died. My father and the *geshe* were very sick due to which the Chinese released [them]. It was on account of lack of food.

Q: The *geshe* did not live long and passed away?

#73D: Yes, [he] passed away. [He] was not allowed to go anywhere.

Q: *Ani-la*, how did you eventually leave Tibet and get to Dharamsala and arrive here?

01:33:13

#73D: [I] requested a person [I] knew to seek a way for [me] from Lhasa.

Q: Did [he] help you?

#73D: Yes, [I] sought help and went away.

Q: Have you been able to see His Holiness here in India?

#73D: Yes, [I] saw [His Holiness] many times.

Q: What was the experience like for you?

#73D: It is a long story, but initially [the Chinese] collected all the photographs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in our village. When the photographs were being collected, I did not give up mine. I had many photographs and did not reveal them. I feel that my being able to come to India is on account of that.

Q: *Ani*, when you came here to India, were you able to find a nunnery that you were able to stay in?

01:35:05

#73D: [I] did not seek a nunnery because I do not know [to read] the scriptures. One cannot join a nunnery if one does not know the scriptures.

Q: So what situation do you live in now, *ani-la*?

#73D: Presently [I] live with people [I] know. Kalsang Gyaltzen helped me find somewhere to live.

Q: Living with people [you] know.

#73D: Yes, presently I live with someone [I] know. As for money, the Welfare Officer gives some and during prayer assemblies at the Tsuglakhang [main temple in Dharamsala], the government makes offerings to the monks and nuns. So [I] survive on that.

Q: *Ani-la*, thank you for telling us your very important story and we hope and pray that you continue to have a good life here in Dharamsala and hope that you will pray for us. Thank you, *ani-la*.

#73D: [Cries]

END OF INTERVIEW