

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #9N – Chheeme Gonpo Luthoktsang
April 9, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #9N
2. Interviewee: Chheeme Gonpo Luthoktsang
3. Age: 71
4. Date of Birth: 1945
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Kutse, Derge
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1961
9. Date of Interview: April 9, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 40 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Dhiraj Kafle
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Chheeme Gonpo Luthoktsang was born in 1945 in Kutse, Derge. The ruling class of Derge consisted of a king, 30 *dhunkor* ‘ministers’ and 80 *honda* ‘deputy ministers.’ His family engaged in farming and besides serving as a *honda*, his father was a merchant trading medicinal herbs in China and India. Chheeme Gonpo lived in a large house during the winter and spent time in the nomadic camp during the summers. He describes the family’s religious practices and recalls listening to songs about a legendary Tibetan warrior king at bedtime.

In 1957 the Chinese came to Derge and life changed drastically as Tibetans abandoned their homes and fled to the mountains. Chheeme Gonpo provides a vivid narration about the months they spent in hiding—how they hunted for their food and resisted the Chinese army for more than a year. His group faced many encounters with the Chinese and many people, including his sister were killed. Chheeme Gonpo tells of courageous men sacrificing their lives to secure the groups escape and the difficulties of crossing many big rivers.

Chheeme Gonpo arrived with many others at a *Chushi Gangdrug* volunteer camp. He witnessed the airdrop of 17 Tibetans trained by the CIA in guerrilla warfare. When the camp was bombed, all the resistance fighters scattered, some heading into the isolated Northern Plains. Chheeme Gonpo’s group of 110 finally reached Nepal after more than a year of travelling on foot.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, nomadic life, trade, customs/traditions, invasion by Chinese army, resistance, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, CIA training, escape experiences.

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Interviewee: Chheeme Gonpo Luthoktsang

Age: 71, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 9, 2015

[Interviewee speaks in English for the majority of the interview.]

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:13

Interviewee #9N: My name is Chheeme Gonpo Luthoktsang.

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?

#9N: Yes, I do.

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

#9N: [Silent]

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know.

#9N: Okay.

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#9N: Okay.

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

00:01:03

#9N: No, I don't think because I'm telling the truth about what took place. So there shouldn't be any problem.

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

#9N: [Nods] Okay. Thanks.

Q: Chheeme-*la*, let us begin by asking how old you are now and where were you born?

#9N: Now I'm 71. I was born in 1945 in eastern Tibet known as Kham, Derge. And my hometown is Kutse.

Q: How large was your hometown, say in number of families?

#9N: In Kutse, I think its 1,500 families.

Q: What kind of livelihood was your family engaged in?

00:02:01

#9N: It's kind of mixed farm and also we do trade.

Q: What kind of things did they trade?

#9N: Trade...we buy [speaks in Tibetan] *bu* [*yartsa gonbu*? 'summer grass, winter worm' - Caterpillar fungus *cordyceps sinensis*] and *bhemu* 'white garlic.' [Switches to English] We buy medical items, I think. I don't know the names.

Q: Medicinal plants?

#9N: Yeah, different plants and take to China or Kalimpong [India]. I think they do [such] business. That's what I know from my parents.

Q: Did you yourself ever go with them to China?

#9N: To do the trade? No, no. I was too small.

Q: Well, speaking of being a young boy, what was it...First of all, when you were a young child, how many people were in your family?

#9N: We...in our family we have five sisters and two brothers and parents.

Q: Where were you in that lineup of children?

#9N: Well...

Q: Were you the oldest or...?

00:03:19

#9N: No, no. I'm in...there are two sisters who are younger than me. The others are older than me.

Q: Third one up.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: What about telling us some memories about your home? Can you describe your home a little bit in Derge?

#9N: Yeah, actually in Kutse, as I told you there were about 1,500 families and [the place where] my home is called Kutse Desar Shosum. [Speaks in Tibetan] There were many *shokhag* ‘divisions/sections’ and [mine] was called Shosum. Earlier it wasn’t called Kutse but Gonjo. From Gonjo it became Kutse but [I] think it isn’t important to talk about this because it is an old story. What else should [I] talk about?

Q: Shosum?

#9N: Desar Shosum. There were many sections in Kutse and this is the name of one section.

Q: Was there a special meaning to that title? Did it mean anything to do with your occupation or just region?

#9N: I don’t think anything to do with occupation.

Q: What kind of... You said, you know, over a 1,500 people?

00:04:58

#9N: That’s not only [in] Desar Shosum [but] among Kutse. Kutse is a big...

Q: Town?

#9N: Town. Not only town. There are many towns but Kutse is a *shokhag*. In Derge, actually there are so many districts or something. It’s one of the districts, maybe you call district. I don’t know.

Q: Divisions?

#9N: Division, yeah, Kutse.

Q: In Derge there were many divisions...

#9N: Oh, many.

Q: ...and Kutse was one.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: And that’s the one in which you lived?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Is that the one where there were about a 1,500...?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: What kind of a...in terms of your family's livelihood, were you middle class, very wealthy, what kind of status were you?

00:05:47

#9N: There are all kinds of...

Q: Your family, were they well off?

#9N: Yeah, my family's quite well off. Actually in Derge, there used to be a Derge king and after king, there were 30 ministers, and after that there were 80 *honda* 'deputy ministers,' what we call *honda*. So I'm one of the *honda*.

Q: *Honda*?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: *Honda*, does that sort of mean leader or minister or something?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Assistant to the minister?

#9N: [Speaks in Tibetan] There were 30 *dhunkor* or ministers under the king. Below that were the...not ministers, but *honda* is a person in authority and in serial order, the third one.

Q: You said...was your father one of those leaders?

#9N: Yes, yes.

Q: What kind of responsibility did they have, these *hondas*?

00:06:58

#9N: This I don't know exactly because when I was young, I didn't remember these things very well. Actually, usually they have to take responsibility of the different villages, I think. Maybe whatever the orders or instructions coming from these ministers or king, then they have to, I think, instruct the other people. I think; that's what I thought.

Q: It's kind of governing.

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Governance, yes. And in terms of your own family, what kind of a house did you live in in Kutse?

#9N: Well, we have quite a big house.

Q: Did you?

#9N: Yeah, because after we left, in 1980 I went back to the village. There were seven families living there. Seven families, the Chinese, they gave or they occupied. Seven families have occupied our house but it was a very old one.

Q: That must have been...did you recollect that house and recognize it when you went back?

#9N: Yeah, yeah. I recognized it.

Q: Was it changed very much?

00:08:15

#9N: Nothing is changed. Actually in my hometown, nothing is changed. Only in the cities things have changed. There everything is same.

Q: Same?

#9N: Yeah, yeah, same.

Q: How interesting!

#9N: Because at that time there were no motor vehicles or nothing but now lots of things changed since 1980.

Q: Since 1980?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: You said your house was very large. Can you tell us a little bit about it? What kind of rooms and what were they used for? What would we see if we went to visit it before the Chinese occupied it? What would we see?

#9N: [Speaks in Tibetan] It's difficult to say. The house had three stories. [Switches to English] There were three stories and in front of the house we have a stupa, and we have a *mani dhungkhor* [full-size prayer wheel to walk around], [hand-held] prayer wheel, a prayer hall and a big altar, a shrine room. So the rest I think used by the family on different occasions, and also there were certain people who always do prayers.

Q: That would come there...

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: ...or live there?

#9N: They don't permanently but during these occasions they live there.

Q: They come as a part of celebration or ceremony.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: You had lots of sisters and brothers. Did you all have your own room? Did you share sleeping quarters? What was that like?

00:09:54

#9N: It's unlike that because we don't have separate rooms usually in Tibet. Many people, they sleep in one room.

Q: Yes, more economical for heating and everything?

#9N: Yeah, yeah, but system is like this, I think. The system is...system is like this.

Q: The cultural system.

#9N: Yes, the cultural system.

Q: Exactly. Give me some idea of your childhood. How would you spend your days in this beautiful house in this beautiful area?

#9N: Actually it's a mixed farm and we also have our nomads [site], where we keep animals, yaks, *dri* 'female yaks' and... During summer we go to the mountains. So when I was quite young, sometimes I go there at the nomads [site] and sometimes go back home.

Q: Would you stay for a while with the nomads?

#9N: Yeah, I do, especially during summer. Summer place is very nice and its good to stay there but winter is too cold. So you always...you have to come down to the village.

Q: What did the children do when they would go and stay with the nomads?

00:11:09

#7N: Well, they just play and they help, helping [herd] the animals usually.

Q: So when it wasn't summertime, what about education? Was there any schooling for you?

#9N: No schooling, we don't have...individuals they...you have to learn writing and reading. That's all, I think. Individually, you can learn from...

Q: Did you? Was somebody teaching you how to read and write?

#7N: No, I didn't because my brothers, elder ones they do this. Sometimes they go to monastery where they learn writing and reading.

Q: So you didn't have any help or education?

#9N: No, not in Tibet.

Q: Your family was well off and it sounded like your life overall...was it a very comfortable life?

#9N: Yeah, it's comfortable, very happy life actually. We don't have any problems because we don't see many problems around us always. So we're happy, you know.

Q: Tell us; please a little bit about your parents. What was your father like? What kind of a man was he?

00:12:30

#9N: [In Tibetan to interpreter] How to explain this? How do we in Tibetan...talk about family members...?

Q: What was Father like?

#9N: It's hard to talk about this. How do [I] say?

Q: Well, it could be about capabilities, his temperament, physical appearance or anything.

#9N: [I] cannot explain much but in general, my father was very kind hearted and good. [He] spent most of [his] time doing trade. If not [he] was engaged in practicing the dharma.

Q: Chheeme-*la*, can you tell me something about your father? What kind of a person was he?

#9N: Well, he was a very nice person and very religious. He did go for business and the rest [of the time] he used to pray and stay [home]. And he likes horses very much and he rides horses.

Q: Did he teach you how to ride horses?

#9N: Yeah, yeah because regarding riding horses I was very skillful. When I was 6, 7, I used to ride horses. Any kind of horse I can ride, and especially when they are in the pastures, you know, mountain, I go and catch them and ride them. So everybody says, "One day he will be killed by a horse." But it never happened.

Q: Did you...if they were wild, how did you catch them? How did you do that?

00:14:06

#9N: Well, you know on the steep hills, I take them there and I hold the tail. When it turns here, wherever the head turns, I pull it. Then they stay because they...maybe it's difficult for them because it's steep.

Q: It's steep.

#9N: It's steep and then they stay. Then I hold on the neck.

Q: Really, you were a daredevil!

#9N: [Laughs]

Q: You were quite a daredevil! Sounds like you didn't get hurt too much.

#9N: No, no. Never.

Q: My goodness! Was that...were the children...because they were in the mountains and they loved animals, did many of the children learn how to ride horses?

#9N: I think almost everyone did; they ride horses. Girls and boys regarding riding horses, everyone...It's only a matter of who can ride well or not. Everybody can do this.

Q: How about the girls?

#9N: Girls, they also ride horses.

Q: Really?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Was there any...were you ever in any competitions?

#9N: No, not really competition. Sometimes there's horse racing...

Q: That's what I meant.

#9N: ...only for, say, fun.

Q: And religious festivals, was there some?

#9N: Yeah, yeah, at that time sometimes there are horses.

Q: Did you ever participate where you had to pick up a scarf while racing?

00:15:32

#9N: No, I didn't.

Q: You didn't do that?

#9N: No.

Q: So that sounds like a lot of fun. What about your mother? What was she like?

#9N: Yeah, mother also was very nice mother, very kind to the children. Yeah, she loves all the children and even when I was 6, 7, I used to stay with mother. When I sleep, I sleep next to mother always.

Q: You were a favorite.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Was that kind of, you know, usual that a little boy could stay close to mother at that age? Was that possible?

#9N: Not in same...separate bed but I stayed in one room.

Q: That made you feel good...

#9N: Yeah.

Q: ...to be close to her.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: What about...how did you get along with your sisters? How were those relationships?

#9N: Relationships are nice we had.

Q: In terms of the family's schedule, it would be interesting to hear what would be daily life like? You're in a beautiful house, you know, you're well off. How...what would your daily schedule be like, say in a young boy, 10, 11, 12? What did you do?

00:16:58

#9N: Well, usually we just play around and also we go, as I told you, we go with a lot of animals.

Q: And nobody had to go to school or anything?

#9N: No. Only elders they learn reading and writing from a monk or some people who teaches.

Q: Were there times to get up and have breakfast and lunch or come home for dinner? Did people gather for the meals?

#9N: Yeah, yeah. We have to gather for the meals and in the evening we have to do prayer, everybody, all the family. Everybody, all the children they have to attend the prayer.

Q: Who led those prayers?

#9N: Usually father.

Q: Father did? Do you remember what the prayers were for or what you were praying about?

#9N: Usually prayers are mostly Tara prayers, Dolma.

Q: White Tara?

#9N: White or green one. There are 21 Taras, so...

Q: Was there some special reason why Tara was important to your family?

#9N: Well, our family always does this prayer. So I don't know exact reason but usually Tara is good for everyone, you know, if you do prayer. Still we do this.

Q: Still today?

#9N: Not every evening but separately we do Tara prayer. Also we ask monks to do this prayer.

Q: For people who don't know anything about Tibet or...maybe you could explain who Tara is.

00:18:41

#9N: Tara? Maybe Tenzin-la [interpreter] can explain better. Tara, I think...I cannot because these are religious matters. So I don't want to give wrong information. Tara, maybe you can get...

Q: What would be some of the reason why you would turn to Tara? What would you be asking her for, her help with?

#9N: Well, for the benefit of everything, all sentient beings.

Q: That covers everything.

#9N: Yeah, yeah, but that you can find the exact meaning from the books.

Q: Yes, we can, yes. And so how long would those evening prayers last?

#9N: I think you have to say [the prayers] maybe half an hour or 40 minutes.

Q: And then what would happen after the prayers?

#9N: Then go to bed. We don't have television or anything to watch. So we only do...there's called...story from Ling Gesar [emanation of Guru Padmasambhava who is a legendary Tibetan warrior king that ruled the kingdom of Ling in eastern Tibet in the 12th century]. That maybe one or two people they read or they do the song. It's kind of song, you know. So then everybody can listen this.

Q: Interesting. Maybe we can try to understand what that is a little bit. Story from...say what it is? Ling...?

00:20:07

#9N: Ling Gesar.

Q: Ling Gesar?

#9N: I think if you check Ling Gesar maybe on the Internet you'll find.

Q: Ling Gesar? Ling Gesar...

#9N: Story of Ling Gesar.

Q: An emanation of Guru Padmasambhava?

#9N: Yeah and this has different tunes, you know, different ways of singing. So those who have good voice, they can sing it and then you can listen.

Q: And it would be his story of his life?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Adventures?

#9N: Story of how he lived and how he conquered other nations or...it's a long story, you know, Ling Gesar.

Q: How he battles demons...

#9N: Oh, yeah.

Q: ...that enslaved mankind?

#9N: [Nods]

Q: They're full of magic and adventure?

#9N: That's right.

Q: It sounds wonderful. So in a way it was like a serial television show, only it was singing and...

#9N: Especially old people, they always like to listen to this, you know and all the different names of this Ling Gesar, his ministers, what they are fighting in the old days like Robin Hood or Ivan Hood, you know. So then they listen. Then can listen who fights and who kills. [Laughs] So very interesting people they think.

Q: Who would actually do the performance or the singing? Who?

00:21:28

#9N: Anyone who has a good voice or...

Q: Really?

#9N: ...who can read or just...you have books, lot of books.

Q: You would read...

#9N: Yeah, you can read this.

Q: So would they be reading the stories or singing the stories?

#9N: Actually singing the stories. I think...I have an iPad, still people they do this.

Q: That would be fascinating. Can you...if we got you a book could you sing any for us?

#9N: No, just now I don't have a book, but I can. I have no good voice but I can sing.

Q: You could?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Could you sing some? Do you have any in your mind or memory?

#9N: Not fully but some words I can sing.

Q: Okay.

#9N: [To interpreter] You might have heard the story of Ling Gesar. They say...

00:22:19 [Sings]

Lu ala ala reya 'The song ala ala reya'

Thala di luyi lenluk re 'This is how the song is sung'

Kyap lama yidham kunchok sumya 'I take refuge in the lama, tutelary deity and triple gem'

Like this so people can hear all the words.

Q: Lovely. Wait until the sound goes and maybe we'll have you do it again.

#9N: But if I have to say all, I've to read a book but this is...

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: Perhaps you could sing that for us just one more time, so we could hear it more clearly.

#9N: Yeah, but it's not fully, you know...then I'll sing maybe a different tune.

00:23:02 [Sings]

Lu ala ala reya 'The song ala ala reya'

Thala di luyi lenluk re 'This is how the song is sung'

Kyap lama yidham kunchok sumya 'I take refuge in the lama, tutelary deity and triple gem'

Ma Jetsun Dolma tseyi dagya 'Mother Tara life protector'

Dag sowa depso thukji zig 'Please I thus pray'

It's like this.

Q: Can you translate that?

#9N: [Laughs] Sadi sango mashayna... 'If you do not recognize this land...'

What did I say now?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: ...It is the land of Ling?

#9N: I've forgotten what I sang now.

Q: Okay.

#9N: Maybe a book...if you want I can...

Q: All right. Perhaps we can look that up later. Good. Thank you. It was such a sweet scene to picture the family. Somebody signing that and the old people liking to hear the next story, you know, what's going to happen, like Robin Hood?

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Like Robin Hood.

#9N: Yeah, because after finishing one story, the next starts. So everybody is excited to hear especially older ones, not children. They're not interested much.

Q: The older ones...

00:24:24

#9N: Yeah, the older ones. There are some people even who remembers. [Switches to Tibetan] There's something like the stories occurring naturally in some people. The person just comes to know the story naturally.

[Back to English] Some people naturally [acquire] these old stories, come naturally. So he can tell. He writes all these books.

Q: So the tradition is kept alive that way. Great. You know, Chheeme-*la*, when you mentioned old people I was wondering, were there many...were there any older people living with your family like relatives or...?

#9N: Yeah, yeah, relatives.

Q: How were old people taken care of in Tibet?

#9N: Well, all the older ones are taken care of by their younger ones, son or nephew or niece.

Q: What if they didn't have any nephews or nieces?

#9N: Me?

Q: No, if somebody did not have a nephew or niece or family? How did they get...?

#9N: They have other relatives who are related to them. Everybody who is related they look after those who need.

Q: Okay. So there was always some...

00:25:48

#9N: Always there's...usually there are no problems for the older ones, regarding this because every young one...It's a tradition or it's always that parents, they teach young ones to look after their relatives or older ones. So it's no problem usually.

Q: It was part of the culture...

#9N: Culture, Yeah.

Q: ...to teach you to always look after the old.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Tenzin Yangchen, if there's any question you think...okay...

So in terms of your prayer life, it sounds like the family would gather every evening, but were there visits to the local monastery by your family?

#9N: Yeah, yeah. We have monasteries and all the village people, they gather together for special religious ceremonies.

Q: Which monastery did you go to the most?

#9N: Actually in Kutse there were two monasteries. In our area there were two monasteries. One is the Serjong Gonpa and there's one Migsong Gonpa.

Q: What sect did they belong to?

00:27:09

#9N: Serjong is Sakya and the other one is Nyingma. But in the very, very old days there were Bonpos in Kutse.

Q: Oh, Bon! Bon was there?

#9N: Bon. But that was very old days. When I was there, there was no Bon but in history there was Bon.

Q: In history but...so was there an actual building or a monastery that was Bon in that area?

#9N: No, I didn't see. I have some news...what you call history...about Kutse. So in the history they say like this.

Q: I get it. When would the family typically go to the monasteries for ceremony?

#9N: Well, whenever there's a big occasion. In the monasteries every year there are 2-3 different occasions. So they go there.

Q: How were monasteries supported in your area?

#9N: I think supported by themselves.

Q: Really?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: How did they do that?

#9N: Because they do have lot of offers from public and then all the food, everything I think you have to take it. That's what I know.

Q: You mean when somebody joins the monastery they would take food?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Or the people living there would bring food?

00:28:52

#9N: No, you have to take it because you have to build a house individually and then you stay there, do the prayers. But you also have a lot of help coming from public, donations, but you have to...mainly you have to take it, I think.

Q: Is that right?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: So if somebody wanted to become a monk or a family chose a son to become a monk, they would have to build a little house for them?

#9N: Yeah, usually.

Q: At the monastery?

#9N: Because tradition is like this. Almost every family, you have to send one son to the monastery.

Q: Did somebody go in your family?

#9N: Yeah, one of my brothers. He was in the monastery but that monastery is called Polu Gonpa. It's not Kutse but near our house. It's a Sakya Monastery, Polu Monastery, Polu Gonpa.

Q: And that's where your brother went?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Did you miss him when he went?

#9N: No, I didn't. I just play around and...

Q: Still having fun racing horses. I know you had other things to do. So if your father traded with the Chinese around herbal medicine from Tibet, do you have any idea of which medicines he would take to trade?

00:30:25

#9N: I don't know the English name as I told you. It's *yartsa gonbu*. It's well known in Tibet these days. *Yartsa gonbu* means during summer it becomes grass but during winter it's a worm. That's the one thing. Still it's very famous in Tibet. Then there are in the mountain *zayung*. It's a white plant that grows among the rocks. On rocky mountains you get one white stuff; it's called *zayung*. I don't know [the English name].

And then in the plains there's another white one called *bhemu*. So these...only I know the Tibetan names. So these...my father used to go to the nomads in the summer to collect these things because they [nomads] collect and they sell it. Then [father] takes to different places. Then also horn of the rein..., not rein... but deer. In deer, you know, in one season the horn is very soft and it's full of blood. So this...

Q: Do they take the blood or the whole horn?

#9N: Horn, horn because every...actually the deer change its horn every year, you know.

Q: I get it. So when it's getting a new horn, it's full of blood?

#9N: Yeah, and after that it gets dry and then throws away and then another new horn is coming.

Q: So which horn do you take as medicine?

#9N: Horn of the deer.

Q: Of the deer. That is thrown away or the new one?

#9N: Well, mostly dry ones.

Q: Mostly the dead horns?

#9N: Dead horns.

Q: And they were used for medicine?

00:32:26

#9N: Medicine, I don't know what kind of medicine but Chinese...they sell it in China.

Q: Doesn't sound like it was Tibetan medicine, used for Tibetan medicine?

#9N: Tibetan medicine, I don't know exactly.

Q: Could you just say the names of the two white flowers, please?

#9N: [Speaks in Tibetan] *Zayung*, *za* means rock and *yung* means turnip. The other one is called *bhemu* and *bhemu* grows in the meadows.

Q: And you don't know what they were used for?

#9N: No, I don't know exactly.

Q: Are there any events that are memorable to you that happened in your childhood that were pleasant or happy, some special memories you have of these very, you know, wonderful childhood?

#9N: Yeah, especially in the summer they go for picnic. The whole village they go for picnic in the mountains, not exactly mountains but on the hills where they dance [to] different songs and horse racing. So this was...

Q: ...a special time.

#9N: Special time.

Q: It's called what? Just a picnic time?

#9N: It's like a picnic but [in Tibetan] burning incense.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It's like an incense burning ceremony.

00:33:59

#9N: Incense burning. In the mountains usually Tibetans, they believe that *shidhak* 'local guardian deity'...[I] don't know how to say.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Mountain gods, protective deities.

#9N: Yeah, mountain gods. You have to do prayers almost once or twice a month, you know.

Q: And so one way that you would do prayers would be to bring incense and burn it? Is that what you're implying?

#9N: It's not incense. Usually it's...[to interpreter] what's *shukpa* called? This smoke...a special tree.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Juniper.

#9N: Juniper, this smoke.

Q: Juniper smoke.

#9N: And then monks, they go and do prayers and then you have to throw lot of what you call *tormas* 'ritual offerings made of dough' and different...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Ritual dough as offerings.

Q: And they are made of dough, right?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: These forms, beautiful forms.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, made of dough.

#9N: And prayer flags you have to put up.

Q: It must have been beautiful.

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Lovely.

00:35:05

#9N: I do have these prayer things, lots of photos. Maybe if you have time I can show you.

Q: I'd love to see some. Yes, that would be beautiful. It sounds like a very memorable special time, summertime, prayer flags, ritual incense...

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: ...and prayers. Lovely. So does anything begin to happen or change in your life, as you get older? Did things stay the same or when did things change in your life?

#9N: In my life, there are...I mean lot of changes happened because I had quite a hard life from when I escaped, you mean?

Q: No, I think I mean like from when you were a child, now you are growing up, you are a teenager. When did things begin to change in your family life, in your home life?

#9N: Well, since we escaped from there everything is changing all the time, you know.

Q: What about before? What made you escape? Tell us what led up to that.

#9N: Well, the Chinese...what they called it...

Q: Why did you leave home?

00:36:18

#9N: What's *rignay sarjay* called? Peaceful Liberation, what they called Peaceful Liberation. It started from...actually it's from Derge but...Is Drichu called Yellow River?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Yangtze.

#9N: Yangtze River, the other side of the Yangtze River, they started.

Q: Right. What started? Tell us about it.

#9N: This [is] what you called Peaceful Liberation. Then they [Chinese] go to the monasteries and high lamas and leaders, they take them and lots of things were changed. So that's what we could not accept and that's why we had to run away or escape, you know.

Q: How old were you when you started...when's the first time you started hearing about this problem of the Chinese coming to give Peaceful Liberation? Do you remember how old?

#9N: Around I think 12.

Q: Around 12.

#9N: At 12 I heard and from the other side of the Yangtze River many people they run, they came to our place where they stayed.

Q: Were these Tibetans?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: What did they tell you?

00:37:37

#9N: They said all the lamas and leaders, they [Chinese] take away and you have to change all the culture or whatever, the monasteries are closed. Because people don't accept it then there were problems, you know. Actually not really fighting. In the beginning there was no military action or anything but like that happened.

Q: I see. Did you yourself have any experience of seeing Chinese come to Derge or to your actual town to Kutse?

#9N: Yeah, Chinese. Of course, Chinese came and I think it's in 1957. So then usually we go to mountains, stay there around maybe almost one year. We move one place to other place. We can't go home because of the Chinese presence.

Q: You were around 12 years old and your family had to flee to the mountains?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Did you leave your house and everything?

#9N: Yeah, yeah. We had to leave everything.

Q: Was anybody left behind in the house?

#9N: Not our own family. Everybody came but others, lot of relatives were there.

Q: And was your flight because you were hearing from other people about the Chinese coming and you got worried?

00:39:03

#9N: But during our escape in the mountains, the Chinese occasionally come to our house, check where we were. So we run one place to other place and stay there few months or like this.

Q: I see. Before that started and before you left home, were there any Chinese in your village, in your town?

#9N: They occasionally visit but they don't stay. They didn't stay there.

Q: So your father must have heard it could be very dangerous...

#9N: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: ...to stay?

#9N: Dangerous.

Q: And so he took the family?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: What did you take with you when you went into the mountains?

#9N: Well, not much things because the things which we had, usually we [speaks in Tibetan] we hid the things beneath the trees by digging the ground. Then we'd run away taking the horses. [Speaks in English] Because a lot of big forest, big trees. At the root of the trees, we make a hole and then hide the items there.

Q: And hid the items that were valuable?

#9N: [Nods]

Q: Did you ever get those items back?

00:40:30

#9N: No, no. I went back in 1980 and I heard all the stories. Then they [Chinese] take all the items.

Q: They did? Did they dig and find them?

#9N: It took maybe one year. Everybody they said...not only us, many people hid it. They checked everything. So they've taken away.

Q: Did they actually check in the earth around the trees?

#9N: The story...they must have known where we stayed during those days. So it's easy because nobody has [any] work, anything. Then they take all the people, let them work for many months, and even years to check these things.

Q: So tell us about that. You're 12 years old and your father says, "We have to go hide in the mountains." Who's in your party? How many people?

#9N: Twelve or 13 maybe but I'm...maybe 13...I'm not sure, you know.

Q: And your own horses?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: How far into the mountains do you go like one day's ride or two days?

#9N: Yeah, one day or two days' ride but we slowly went further away. In a group actually maybe around 1,000 or 800 altogether at the end because there was a lot of Derge ministers at that time they were together and there was a king of Derge, this young boy at that time. He was also with us that time.

Q: Was he...with your small family or with the...?

#9N: No, no, with the whole camp, whole camp. Became a big camp, you know.

Q: It was a kind of escaping in your own country?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: If you went on horseback you probably took some supplies and tents and things like that?

00:42:43

#9N: Actually weapons we didn't have much, many bullets or anything, very few.

Q: Do you remember how you felt to have that happen? What was going on in your heart?

#9N: Well, it was very scary because you have to stay one day and then they [Chinese] came closer and then you run to other place like this but at the end, then I think three or four directions, the Chinese came because they came to know all our camps, whole camp. And four directions they came and just a matter of only few days and nights, then we had to leave that place and we run away to different place, you know.

Q: So they would find you...

#9N: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: ...in a few days.

#9N: Three or four different places, they [the Chinese] came together, you know. So we...there's no way to escape. So we, at the end we run away to a mountain where there's lot of forests. Actually there was not even a footpath but we had no choice. So many were killed and many died because of the place where we ran away, you know.

Q: Were they hurt by falling or something like that?

00:44:10

#9N: Yeah, yeah lots. Actually lots of ...[not discernible] brought with us at that time but on that night, only one night everything was lost. Nothing is there. Everything.

Q: Was it lost...did it fall off the mountain or into the water? What happened?

#9N: Yeah, yeah because then you can't take them. Because of the fighting and it was...actually for us it was the first time the Chinese shoot us. Then they throw lot of lights in the sky, very scary, you know.

Q: Were they like spotlights coming down from airplanes?

#9N: Not airplanes but they...

Q: Torches? Flares?

#9N: It's big, big lights on the...because it's a sign of something the Chinese... They send different lights, green lights, red lights, yellow lights on the mountain, in the sky, you know.

Q: They are like firecrackers or flares.

#9N: It's exactly like firecrackers.

Q: That would light up, so they could see where the people were?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Were they actually shooting at the family?

#9N: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: Oh, my goodness!

#9N: Shooting, shooting. Lot of [people] killed only on that day, you know.

Q: Was there anybody close to you who was shot that day?

00:45:28

#9N: Yeah, many were shot and even they left behind. In that group maybe many people left behind, many people went different place. So all separated from there.

Q: What about your parents? Did they survive?

#9N: Yeah, my parents survived. Only one of my sisters was killed.

Q: And she was shot by the Chinese?

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: That was a very frightening end because you were getting pursued.

#9N: Oh...

Q: You must have been...What happened in the end? Did you get caught or did you escape?

#9N: Those who were caught...I mean we were not caught but others were. Some were caught, some went different place, some jumped in the river. So the next day you find a lot missing. In one camp maybe 60% of them are not there, you know.

Q: Oh! Can you remember this very clearly?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: I imagine.

00:46:47

#9N: You have to run day and night and I think when we went down, there's a river where there's a bridge. I remember very well. On the bridge there's a...Yangtze River on the other side. On the other side of the Yangtze River there were Chinese. So when they saw we're crossing the bridge, then they shoot and they killed. So you have to wait there, wait there and then you run. Sometimes you're killed; sometimes you manage to run away. Then you have to stay when it becomes dark. Then you have to run from the bridge, you know. But it's the other side of the Yangtze. We can't do anything.

Q: So if you're running, were you running...but the Chinese are on the other side. Are you're running towards them?

#9N: Actually the river is like this, one river. We've to cross this river but there's another bigger river, the Yangtze River this side. So other side of the Yangtze River, Chinese they were there. They see the bridge, you know, where we cross. So then they shoot.

Q: Then they shoot.

#9N: They can't come because of the river. We can't go there.

Q: Yangtze is big. They couldn't cross it.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: They could still shoot you...

#9N: Shoot, of course.

Q: ...crossing the smaller river.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Oh, how terrible! What happened next?

00:48:08

#9N: Then day and night we run away and I think we stayed in...maybe few hours during night because we didn't know where to go, but next morning the Chinese came and then shoot and they killed lot of people.

[Speaks in Tibetan] Yesterday a colleague of mine told you about his father being shot. It was that place. We were together. The one called Kalsang Chime [Interviewee #10N] yesterday. His father was shot there then. We were together.

So we were together that time in our camp.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: His father?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Kalsang's father was killed.

#9N: But of course, many were killed. I don't know the exact names.

Q: So you stayed one night and the next morning the Chinese came and killed people.

#9N: Then we run away the whole day and whole night and during night, many who are good for fighting, they...Three or four men killed because the Chinese came too close to our people while we are running. They stayed there to fight because in order to stop the Chinese. So at last the three or four, they were all killed there. The name of the family is Telpatsang.

Q: They were heroes.

#9N: They were very heroes because they were...from other side of the Yangtze River they used to fight [the Chinese] maybe since '56 or something like this. So there were three or four heroes that were killed on that night. Because of their—what you call—fighting we managed to run away.

Q: They covered for you?

00:50:18

#9N: Yeah, they stopped the...

Q: They provided protection and stopped the Chinese but they were killed.

#9N: At last they were killed.

Q: And that is the Telpatsang family?

#9N: Telpatsang.

Q: Telpatsang.

#9N: Telpatsang and the name of the person is Telpa Ngawang and Telpa Jamyang Tsephel from one family, I think. So then others, there were many. I don't know the names exactly.

Q: So they sacrificed their lives...

#9N: They sacrificed their lives, actually.

Q: ...to help you survive.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Then what happened to you?

#9N: Then from there...I don't know exactly name, but to many places we run away day and night and sometimes Chinese came and we fight and that going on maybe almost one year. So at the end we managed to [reach] a place called Shotalhosum or Chara Penpa, actually it's called.

Q: You're still in Kham?

#9N: Yeah, yeah, still in Kham.

Q: And how many, at that point, how many people are in your party that are still running day and night? How many survivors?

00:51:43

#9N: Maybe at that time 200 people or 300 people at the beginning, but on the way then getting less and less because some were killed and some were conquered. Then we have to cross, mainly we have to cross two big rivers. I don't [know the names in English] exactly but Dhachu 'Mekong' and Gyamo Nguchu 'Salween.' So when we came to that river there was a Chinese military who stopped on the bridge, you know. So we have to only come during night and we have no other ways. Then some of our people...they [Chinese] have a house where they built those who keep the bridge.

Q: Functioning?

#9N: They have to see who is going and they stop, you know. So we came to know there were not many Chinese but then we suddenly, we attacked the military there, those at the bridge [speaks in Tibetan] who were guarding the bridge. We went and threatened them with guns and then crossed the bridge.

Q: You threatened the guards...

#9N: Threatened the guards because they were inside and we went around them and we threatened them. They could not come out. So then in the meanwhile all the people, they crossed the bridge.

Q: Good. So you kept them under arrest...

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: ...and then the people crossed the bridge.

#9N: [Nods]

Q: And they were the only Chinese around?

#9N: Yeah, but nearby was their military. After we crossed, the next morning they came after us.

Q: It's like a never-ending story...

#9N: Oh, never-ending.

Q: ...that's so frightening.

00:53:51

#9N: That's one river and then at the other river, there was no way for us to cross the bridge because of the so many Chinese military camps. So we stayed in the jungle for three days where you cannot make fire or anything because they will know. Then we killed some animals, horses and others and we made boats, and then one night we crossed the river by boat. The whole night there were three different boats because in our group there were people who used to live near the Yangtze River. So they know how to row them.

Q: You actually made three boats?

#9N: Three boats.

Q: What did you make it out of?

#9N: I said horse skin.

Q: Horse skin.

#9N: Horse or animals we killed.

Q: Coracles.

#9N: Actually it should be dry but...

Q: Coracle. It's called a coracle like a round boat.

#9N: Yeah, yeah, round boat and put wood inside.

Q: Animal skin.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Did you kill the horses that were with you?

#9N: Yeah, we have no other way.

Q: You have no other way. They had another journey to take you on across the river.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: They sacrificed their lives and you made these three boats?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: How many people did you take across the river?

00:55:27

#9N: I think maybe 100 people. I don't know exactly 100 people or 60, maybe.

Q: My goodness!

#9N: Three boats whole night rowing, you know. The next morning again the Chinese came to know and they came after us.

Q: You were intrepid nothing would stop you. You were a very brave group of people.

#9N: Usually whole day we hide in the jungles and when it becomes dark we take the journey, you know. That's why it took so many years or months to come to India.

Q: You kept hiding in the jungles at that point. Was it jungle territory or what kind of land was it?

#9N: It's a jungle, a forest.

Q: We are now hearing about after ferrying all these people all through the night you now have to go hide in the forests. Can you tell us what happens then?

#9N: Well, then we came towards I think its Shotalhosum what is called. We just...I think I don't know exactly but we tried to come to India, I think. That's why we escaped and

another thing in Shotalthosum there was the *Chushi Gangdrug*, you know, *Chushi Gangdrug*, the volunteer army.

Q: Oh, the volunteer, *Chushi Gangdrug*?

00:57:11

#9N: Yeah, the *Chushi Gangdrug* because even when we were in our home village, the elders they say they get letters that says all the men have to come to...for the army. We heard that in Shotalthosum there is a big *Chushi Gangdrug* camp. That's why we came towards Shotalthosum. Shotalthosum is [also] called Chara Penpa.

Q: Did you actually reach the camp?

#9N: Yeah, yeah. At the end we reached the camp.

Q: But that would have taken...so I'm just wanting to understand from the time of the very arduous river crossing, you know with the boats all night, how many days about did it take or weeks did it take you to get to this camp?

#9N: I don't know exactly but not only days and weeks, months and months.

Q: It was months.

#9N: Because all the major roads and bridges were stopped by the Chinese. So we have to go through mountains or forests where there was not actually road, you know.

Q: So about how many people...I know they might be disappearing from illness and injury, but about how many people were in this group traveling through the mountains?

00:58:37

#9N: With us about 150-160 people.

Q: Was it?

#9N: All men, women, children.

Q: Were they...how were they living off the land? How were you eating?

#9N: Eating whatever we get in the mountains. Even we have to hunt.

Q: Like eating the...

#9N: And also we did meet lot of villages, you know, where we get little food.

Q: Were they helpful?

#9N: Yeah, sometimes they're helpful; sometimes we just eat there and run away. [Laughs] We had to do that, you know.

Q: Yeah. You just ate and left.

#9N: When there was no Chinese presence, they were helpful. When there were Chinese present, they can't do anything. Then we have to take that action, you know.

Q: Were your parents still able to survive through all of this? Were they both alive?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Your mother, your father?

#9N: All.

Q: This is...

00:59:49

#9N: Everybody says...in our family only one sister was killed because no injuries, nothing happened. Everybody says it's the only one family who has this. Otherwise, each family maybe 1-2 people killed and almost every family there were injured people.

Q: Your family was very blessed.

#9N: Yeah, very blessed.

Q: Very fortunate. What was the morale of the people? I mean if you said months and months, this would be like five months, six months, 10 months living in the mountains?

#9N: I said '57. It's one-year maybe. We came to Shotalhosum, it's 1958 that I know, 1958 so almost one year.

Q: What was the spirit of the people or the mentality during that? Were they feeling like they are going to make it to freedom or were they despairing? What were they feeling?

#9N: Those who...

Q: ...who were with you?

#9N: Well, everybody thinks it's better to die than go under China. That's only what they say and what they think.

Q: And that means better to die than get captured?

#9N: Yeah, captured. That's only the last thing you had to do.

Q: I was imagining this is...maybe for your family but maybe other families, this is a big contrast between living in a beautiful 3-story home with food, you know, good warm clothing. This is a complete change.

01:01:29

#9N: Oh, yeah. That's why I said all the time changing. Sometimes 2-3 days you don't get any food. You have to run continuously day and night, day and night. Sometimes you have to hide 2-3 days in the jungle. So that's why...sometimes you come maybe one week and the next time you can't go and you go back to the same place and then take another route, you know. So that's why it took so long. I think that's...

Q: Yeah, yeah. It was very arduous, very hard. Did people get ill very much along the way?

#9N: Ill...maybe too scared. I didn't see any.

Q: Maybe you were too scared to notice.

#9N: Oh, yeah. Only injury [from] fighting, injury. We have no medicine or nothing, we didn't have. Whatever happened, it's just natural.

Q: Oh, my goodness! Did...was there any prayers that people said during this time or what did they do to look for support from the Buddha? What did they do?

#9N: Prayers, they, of course...you say prayers for the gods and there were many families who said, "Karmapa *khyen*, Karmapa *khyen*" 'Karmapa, care for me' always. When the Chinese are shooting, "Karmapa *khyen*, Karmapa *khyen*," they say like this.

Q: What does that mean?

01:02:54

#9N: It's the lama Karmapa. So they say, "Karmapa *khyen*, Karmapa *khyen*."

[Speaks in Tibetan] This was shouted out a lot by our people. Some shouted, "Karmapa *khyen*."

Q: Calling out the name of a lama as a way of asking for help?

#9N: Yeah, protection.

Q: And so by then you are no longer 12. You are 13, 14.

#9N: Fourteen, 14.

Q: Fourteen, 15.

#9N: Fourteen, I'm 14. When in 1958 in Shotalthosum there was a Tibetan New Year, so I was then 15.

Q: Is that right? So then how does the story come...tell us how you reach the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp, what happens?

#9N: We reached Shotalhosum. There's a monastery called Penpa Gonpa. There were, I think in that place, three monasteries. We came there but unfortunately the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp was destroyed by China. Some were killed or maybe run away and we couldn't do anything but luckily there was a CIA help. So 17 Tibetans were air-chute using parachute.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Airdropped.

01:04:23

#9N: Airdropped. That is the only...that is the help [with] which we could manage to come to India. Otherwise, there was no way, no weapons, nothing; everything was completely finished. So we stayed 6-7 months there. There was training using the different weapons, which we got and at the same time those who ran away from different places, all gathered in that place, maybe 6-7,000 Khampas [people from Kham], all Khampas from there. They were gathered there and they thought maybe then can fight and drive away the Chinese. But it was...there was no way, you know.

Q: Say the name of the place again?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Chara Penpa.

Q: Chara Penpa, and did you...had you arrived before or after the weapons were airdropped?

#9N: We arrived there before, and after half a month then they were dropped.

Q: Did you see that happening?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: You did?

#9N: At night a plane came, you know, but we didn't know whether it was Chinese plane or whoever's. We never thought American plane, you know.

Q: Yeah, you never thought.

#9N: [Laughs]

Q: Do you remember the year, what year?

#9N: 1958.

Q: It would be '58?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: When you saw them being dropped, were you able to get close and see anything that happened?

01:06:00

#9N: Actually, there's a big monastery and then there are rivers. It's [speaks in Tibetan] a level ground with many water sources.

Yeah, it's level ground with rivers, small rivers, different. They were air-chute there.

Q: That's where they were dropped?

#9N: Dropped, 17 people.

Q: Did you meet any of them?

#9N: Of course, but not [at that time] because we were not sure whether they were Chinese or who they were.

Q: Of course.

#9N: So we all...we tried to...went around those people, not close but we were ready to fight. Even they were not sure. They were not sure whether...they thought maybe Chinese came. So maybe it took half a day to get together.

Q: Do you know how they helped identify each other?

#9N: Then later on maybe they thought some people they throw white scarves or something like this. Then they...we sent some people nearer to them to check and so then we came to know it was those who [were] dropped by air.

Q: They were Tibetans.

01:07:25

#9N: They were Tibetans. Among them there were three Derge people from our county.

Q: Do you remember their names, of those three?

#9N: It's called Chagoe Sey Dhonyoe...

Q: C-H-A-P...

#9N: [Speaks in Tibetan] Chagoe...one can say Dhonyoe. It's not necessary to say Sey 'Prince.' Everybody calls him Chagoe Sey Dhonyoe.

[Back to English] And then other one was Utsa Bhuchay. Then third one was Raru Yeshi. These three were from our county. Then others were...altogether 17; I don't know exact each from where.

Q: Do you yourself happen to ever get to talk to those three?

#9N: Of course, 4-5 months we live together. They teach how to use those weapons, which were dropped. We had training, you know.

Q: Do you know that sometimes they were given American code names? Like was Raru or Sey given a code that you know? Do you know of any code name?

#9N: Code name, I don't know.

Q: American nickname?

#9N: No, I don't know but they had I heard.

Q: Yeah, that they did have them. So when they dropped, they were parachuting themselves. The weapons came in another, from another parachute?

01:09:04

#9N: Together I think there were some weapons, but later on I think...I don't know exactly four or five times the weapons were dropped, you know.

Q: Oh, really?

#9N: After they reached they communicated by radio, you know. So...

Q: I see. Okay, so the people came first and then the weapons were dropped.

#9N: [Nods] When they came maybe some weapons together on that day for they've to use, you know, if they were in the Chinese camp.

Q: So that was happening right near this monastery and the *Chushi Gangdrug* were nearby...

#9N: *Chushi Gangdrug*, they had...all...Chinese have destroyed and they went to Lhasa or some...wherever they.... No *Chushi Gangdrug* but those were part of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. *Chushi Gangdrug* sent trainees to Colorado, those people and from Colorado they were airdropped.

Q: Are there any of those jumpers still around that you know living around here?

01:10:15

#9N: Now I don't think. Maybe 2-3 years ago one was in Dharamsala, but I heard now maybe he's also passed away. And this...Sey Dhonyoe was passed away last year.

Q: What was his name?

#9N: Dhonyoe, Chagoe Dhonyoe, Chagoetsang Dhonyoe. He was passed away only last year.

Q: So as your group arrived, how many were left in it at that point, in your personal group?

#9N: In Shotalhosum there were 6-7,000 people gathered.

Q: Already there?

#9N: Already there and...not already but they came because they heard there was the *Chushi Gangdrug*. They came [from] different places altogether. Five to six months we stayed in one place. I think that was the biggest mistake we did, later we came to know because we have no military training. We thought the more people, the better it is but it wasn't like this.

Q: You thought with numbers you would be safe.

#9N: [Smiles]

Q: What was the mistake? Why was that a mistake?

01:11:36

#9N: Well, later I thought if there were smaller groups in different places, it's more problem for the Chinese, but when we were all together [this was] what they were expecting, you know. That's why they didn't do anything for 5-6 months. Just they let us to come together there in one place. So it's easier to destroy us, you know.

Q: Sure, you were like corralled in a way, like animals in a coral that they could know where you were.

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: What did they do, the Chinese? Did they attack you at all when you were in that group?

#9N: Well, at the end there were three or four different places the Chinese came and then on the air, airplane. So destroyed only few days. It took only a few days. There was no way for us to...

Q: How did they do it?

#9N: Well, as I said from three to four different routes the Chinese military, they came and we have no protection or no routes to run away even.

Q: Right.

#9N: So then on the air there were Chinese fighters. They dropped bombs.

Q: What happened?

01:13:20

#9N: So from there we were all separated, different [directions]. In our group there were only 100, 60-70 people, that's all. All the 600-700 they went different places, some were killed some were arrested. So all from there...then the biggest separation. What you call it? Separation, is it?

[Speaks in Tibetan] Scattered everywhere.

Q: It must've been terrifying! Bombs.

#9N: But that...our group had the better chance to come to India. [The] rest all—they couldn't come. Nobody could come, you know.

Q: How did...did your group then escape to India when this attack was happening? Where did you go?

#9N: Well, we then...actually we...on the route there was no place to run. So we run to one jungle I know, one jungle where there was...because there was no route and no Chinese. So we crossed the jungle on the other side and then we run from there, and also we heard at a place called Dhamshung [speaks in Tibetan] the *Chushi Gangdrug* was there in a place called Dhamshung towards Lhasa.

We went towards Dhamshung, you know. It took 3-4 weeks, I think. Every night we go, next morning we meet Chinese. Then we fight the whole day. Then we run away the whole night. Those Chinese I believe, they were also...they were crossing to Dhamshung because there was the *Chushi Gangdrug*. And we were there all the time together, you know, every morning.

Q: Oh, my goodness, it was like a never-ending escape.

01:15:23

#9N: When we came to Dhamshung there was no tree or nothing. It's completely plain, you know. So *Chushi Gangdrug* was destroyed. Then again no *Chushi Gangdrug* was there. So we stayed there one or two days and Chinese dropped a lot of bombs and everywhere there were animals, people roaming around. That's the place where we came. Then in the night they again throw these lights. That was helpful for us because wherever they throw lights, we see it and where there was no light, we escaped from there. And we managed to cross; I mean, leave those Chinese.

Q: To leave them behind?

#9N: Yeah and then there were tanks. Whole night tanks they came after us but again we see their light, you know. So we ran where there was no light.

Q: And then?

#9N: Then there was no way to come because it was 1959. The Dalai Lama has escaped already and *Chushi Gangdrug* was no longer there because [it was] destroyed. Then we went to the far north where there was no one, you know, because in Tibet the plateau north is very far away. It's so cold no people live there. So we went there. There was no way to come to other place. It took about 2-3 months. There was no people, only animals we can hunt.

Q: What region were you in then, like you are going north into Tibet instead of going south?

01:17:32

#9N: North, far away.

Q: Far away into Amdo?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Changthang?

#9N: It's Changthang.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Northern plains.

Q: Oh, to the Northern plains.

#9N: Northern plains. Nobody can actually stay there but we managed to...

Q: ...survive.

#9N: Survive, yeah because no Chinese can come there. No Chinese, no Tibetans, no nomads, nothing is there, only the wild animals. *Kyang*, what you call wild ass, wild yaks and *tsoe* 'Tibetan antelopes.'

Q: And probably no roads?

#9N: No roads, no roads, but it's plain. You can go everywhere like a bed, you know. Even if you walk for three days you can see like this. All the...actually, [there were] not much rivers but small lakes, all are salted lakes. We had big problem because we... many people when they are starve, I mean starvation, if you drink this salt water immediately they die.

Q: Did some do that? Did some die?

01:18:46

#9N: Oh, many, many died. Then many died. So from there then we went to Amdo—I think you said Amdo Thoema. [Speaks in Tibetan] It's Amdo of the Thoe region and not [of the east]. It's close to Mt. Kailash.

So we came towards Mt. Kailash in 1960. From there we then crossed...we came to Nepal in Mukhum, what is called.

Q: Were you aware that you crossed the border and you were in Nepal or you were in another country? How did you know that?

#9N: Because there were some nomads and we came to know that it was close to Nepal. Before we did have some animals and some items but then there was a place called Kawala. It's a mountain pass. Whole night we came and the next morning the Chinese were already there. On the mountain pass there was snow and the mountain is like this. So this side the Chinese were already in the front and also coming from behind. In the morning we saw and we had whole day fighting until late, maybe around 10.

Q: What did you fight with?

01:20:36

#9N: We did have [weapons] because then again I said in Dhamshung there were 11 people who were airdropped from Colorado—Colorado, I don't know but from America. Eleven people were there. They were just with weapons; nothing is there. So we got all the weapons, bullets.

And then we had to fight around until 10. There were mountains like this [indicates left hand] Chinese this side, other side. So around 8-9—the Chinese military come this side. Then we have no way to hide, you know but it was dark already. Then we leave everything there, everything. We made a fire and put them in the fire...animals and we run this way [makes a circle around left hand]. Whole night we run this way. The Chinese were, they thought...because later we heard story they thought we were there. The next day...then everything is in their hands, they thought you know, but then we ran away the whole night, whole day, whole night. No tea, nothing. Three days and nights and we managed to cross the border, the Nepal border.

Q: It was your final, final escape under very hard conditions.

#9N: Yeah.

Q: The reason that you were able to fight them, you know they were on each side, the Chinese were on each side of the pass and the reason you are able to fight them is that you are carrying with you ammunition and weapons that were dropped to the forces from...the men from Colorado, the American trained Tibetans and you took those guns with you?

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Because the guys had left, the other...

01:22:42

#9N: Yeah, yeah, because like in Shotalthosum everyone can get, everyone can get guns and take them because there were enough weapons, you know.

Q: ...to take. I see. And so three days, it took you three days to circle around that mountain and escape the Chinese finally and land...

#9N: Finally. That was the final.

Q: That was the final day of escape?

#9N: Yeah. I think [it was] '61.

Q: How many were in the group at that point that were left?

#9N: One hundred ten.

Q: About a 110 out of 150?

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember that day? Can you describe when you knew that you were now in another country?

#9N: Yeah, we were very happy but whenever we heard something *dong* everybody gets up ready to run away. [Laughs] It happened like, even for one month it happened. Everybody was so...

Q: You were traumatized.

#9N: [Nods]

Q: So every time you hear danger you're like you're going to flee...

#9N: Yeah, yeah.

Q: ...to save your life.

#9N: That's...

Q: Wow! Were you greeted by anybody? Was there a city there or anything?

01:24:00

#9N: Well, there's a village, you know. There's Nepali police.

Q: Okay. What did they do to you?

#9N: They didn't do anything.

Q: So where did the 110 people go next?

#9N: From there then we came to India. We walked maybe it took 1-2 months. From there we walked and all the guns, which we got from airdropped...we didn't know they said we have to surrender them to Nepali police. We gave them all.

Q: Yeah, they wouldn't let you bring any in?

#9N: No, no.

Q: How did you eat along the way then? How did you get food?

#9N: We did have some weapons or some items from Tibet. Some several items we sold them in Mukhum and then we came with that.

Q: Where would you say was your final...even though you maybe moved since then...but where did the group feel like they had finally arrived in Nepal and were going to stay until they decided? What city or what place?

01:25:20

#9N: We just came to Dharamsala where the Dalai Lama was.

Q: Is that what you did?

#9N: That was our aim to come to there.

Q: So from Nepal you went to Dharamsala?

#9N: We went to UP [Uttar Pradesh]—one state called Paliya; it's in UP, I think. We stayed there maybe 1-2 months and there the Indian Government, they gave us all the food, everything after we reached there. Every week they gave food [speaks in Tibetan] what's it called?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Rations.

#9N: ...rations, they give rations.

Q: This is quite a happy ending for this group of people. You survived so much!

#9N: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember what your feelings were when you finally knew that you were free and you're in Nepal?

#9N: Oh, we were very, very, very happy. We walked a few hours a day and we stayed there to rest. So that took long time to reach India. We walked, you know.

Q: You walked enough. You said you could take your time now.

#9N: [Nods]

Q: You weren't being followed or chased.

#9N: No, no, not much then.

Q: How was it? Did you have as a group...did you have an audience with the Dalai Lama?

01:27:01

#9N: Among us there were three people...our group leader was called Gyankhar Gonam, Gyankhar Gonam. Then there was another Telpa Tulku and with them there's another guy [who] went—Dhongtse Kargay. They went to Dharamsala to—what you call—to report or I don't know what you call—to take the story to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the Dalai Lama. So at that time they've written all the stories, every story, each and every...not like I'm telling because they know the place, everything and they gave to the foreign secretary of the Tibetan exile government, and I was trying to get this information back.

I went to Dharamsala 3-4 times and the last time I managed to meet that person, that secretary who was old; I think 89 or 90. He was in the U.S. but the Dalai Lama asked him to come back. He told me that the Dalai Lama wants to know a lot of the old things, what the people ask. I know one person in Dharamsala and he told me that he came to Dharamsala and maybe I get the document. So we went and he said they were kept in Delhi. So he's going to give us. That has the whole story; it's written.

Q: That would be a great...

#9N: Everything, the story.

Q: Excellent story. I would love to get a copy of it.

#9N: That story is really...Still I haven't got it but...

Q: It's somewhere in Delhi.

#9N: I'll get it because he promised; he promised.

Q: Do you know is there a title to the story and author's name?

01:29:32

#9N: Authors' names are those three people who went from our camp and they have written this. At the spot the Dalai Lama told them I think to write all the things. So it was very clear because at that time. It's now over 50 or 54 years since.

Q: Any of these three people are alive now Gyankhar Gonam, Telpa Tulku and Dhongtse Kargay?

#9N: One is alive. Kargay.

Q: And where is Dhongtse Kargay?

#9N: He's in Nepal.

Q: Here?

#9N: [Nods] But the main [people] were those two. He went as a helper. When those two who knows and who led us to come to India...so they've written everything, every detail. So I think...I hope I will get it.

Q: Thank you. Well, I think we have to find out from you if there is anything else that you can think is important and you would like to add to your very incredible story? Anything that you want to tell us more?

#9N: I think there are lots of small stories...what happened on the way, but I told most of them.

Q: Yes, you did.

01:31:06

#9N: But on the way we had maybe 62-63 times fighting with the Chinese during those... So, so many things happened, so many were killed. So...

Q: What is...Many, many suffered during that journey. It's a very, very powerful tale of Tibetan strength and resilience, very, very powerful story. What are your hopes for Tibet these days? What do you hope will happen?

#9N: Well, the hope is very little, I think. In fact, now everything is...the Dalai Lama is trying to get...[Speaks in Tibetan] What's *Umay Lam*?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Middle Way Approach.

#9N: Middle Way Approach—that's beneficial for both Chinese and Tibetans but it seems Chinese doesn't take any actions or responsibilities. So that's the last option I think Tibetans can give. Tibetan exile government or what you call it gave up all the freedom, everything, that's the last option they gave. So still they [Chinese] are not responding. So I don't know what happens.

Q: It sounds like you had a visit back to Tibet not too long ago? When was that?

#9N: Tibet was opened end of 1979. So I went in 1980.

Q: You went in 1980?

#9N: '80.

Q: What changes did you notice?

#9N: Change...like I told you in our village nothing is changed, nothing is. I was surprised nothing is changed; only in towns and cities the roads, they were changed, you know.

Q: What was the attitude of the people, the Tibetans that you met? How were they doing? How were they feeling?

01:33:34

#9N: Actually, many of those old people were passed away and then the second ones, they were...almost all of them were imprisoned in the labor camps. So nobody dares to speak anything about those, and those [of the] next generation, they do not know anything. They do not know anything because there was no one who tells these stories. So that's the situation.

Q: May I ask then what do you think about the fact that this project is trying to gather stories? What is your opinion of this work?

#9N: I think this is good for the young Tibetan generation, especially others they will know what happened. That I told even my friends, "Now this is the time we have to tell" because I know so many who wanted to interview those who were fighting like in Mustang and everything. They say, "No, now I don't want to say anything." So no stories were there. We cannot write anything. Since we cannot write, we have to...those who can write if we tell it's true; we are not telling anything, lie or anything. So I think it's best to tell whatever you know.

Q: Do you think that the young generation of Chinese knows what actually what happened in Tibet?

#9N: Even Tibetans, they do not know. Even Tibetans, those who came here if we tell say, "Oh, nothing happened. Who told you?" Like last night I met one Tibetan and I think yesterday my friend must have told [you about] Ba Linkashipa's Chime Dorjee. He was [living] close to Ba and I said, "Do you know Gyapon Chime Dorjee who was...?" "Oh, this is a long time story. I heard this name but it's before China took Tibet." But I said, "No, it's 1956. He ran away from your village and came to our village and we were together." I told him. Before he said, "Oh, that's an old story. We heard this person's name but we know nothing." So like this nobody knows.

Q: Chheeme-la, is there a...any wish that you do have for Tibet as a man who suffered a great deal, you know under the invasion and occupation? What would be your personal wish for Tibet?

01:36:43

#9N: Actually, my personal wish was the freedom of Tibet. That's the wish.

Q: And what do you hope will be saved for the next generation of Tibetans?

#9N: I think; now according to the situation if we can save our culture and religion, I think that's the, maybe best way. Even if you don't get freedom, the best approach is this because people can survive, religion and everything can. So it's not much difference because it's...I think it's not like in the old days. So even if you are under Chinese control, but if you have a separate culture and things, I think still it will work.

Q: What do you think is important to the world about the Tibetan religion, the Tibetan Buddhist religion? Why do you think it's helpful or useful for the world to at least know about it?

#9N: Tibetan Buddhism is very, very helpful. I'm not a religion person, so I don't know the detail but what I heard, especially all the scientists when they check, when they compare Tibetan Buddhism [and science] there are so many similarities and very much useful things, common things. So I think it will be very useful for the world because usually Tibetans, they talk about lot of compassion and religion, the way, usually the way they think if people know, I think this is useful because...I can't explain but whenever you think you never, you never...

01:39:06

You never harm any people; even animals or plants. So that may...if people get those things. Otherwise, if you don't know this you can kill anything because you don't hurt anything. You never know the one you have killed is hurting. So according to Tibetan religion if you kill someone, if you were that, what will happen? You have to think this. So in this way I think maybe helpful.

Q: Well, we think your story has been helpful for people to understand the history of Tibet and even this concluding observation that a religion that teaches compassion and no harm to others is a very important teaching.

#9N: Very important, yeah.

Q: So we are very grateful for your story and thank you for spending this time.

#9N: Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to tell this because I know this and it...

Q: Yes.

#9N: I'm happy to tell this.

END OF INTERVIEW