

Norzin Lhamo
Tsuglakhang Temple Complex
Dharamsala, India
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Interviewer: Alexandra Jewell

When were you born?

She doesn't exactly know what year she was born. She was in Tibet at that time.

But, it was before the occupation in 1959?

Yes. She's 60 now.

Where were you born?

Litang.

What do you remember most about your hometown?

What she remembers most is about the lots of work that came into her home. Since her family were mainly farmers there used to be lots of work. She remembers working with her parents. And she remembers her parents working a lot.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

She has one. She has one brother but he is no more now. Her parents, her uncle, and her brother all have died. They are no more.

Do you have any family in Tibet?

She has one daughter.

Do you ever talk to her?

Sometimes she talks to her daughter on the phone. Sometimes she doesn't get through.

Is she doing okay? What are conditions in Tibet?

She actually works with bugs to earn a living. She goes to pick caterpillar fungus and then they sell it and then that's how they make a living. And, she has to take care of her children too. She does the

housework and for a living she goes and picks fungus, caterpillar fungus.

How old were you when the Chinese invaded?

She doesn't really remember exactly. She says that she was very small at that time. So she must have been around eight or nine.

Did your parents or grandparents ever tell you stories about old Tibet?

She doesn't remember her parents telling her much about old Tibet. They had to earn a living. So, she doesn't really remember her parents telling her about life before in Tibet.

Did anyone in your family have direct contact with the Chinese?

In Tibet?

Yes, in Tibet.

No, no direct contact at all. They had to earn a living and they were so engrossed in their own world that they didn't have any direct relations with the Chinese.

Were you affected by the Chinese at all? Did your lives change after the Chinese invaded?

She says that after the Chinese came, they didn't have any freedom. They had to do whatever the Chinese told them to do. They didn't have any say in anything. They could not do whatever they liked. They didn't have any freedom. So, that's the main difference.

Do you remember what your parents had to say about the invasion? She remembers her parents telling her about the hardships they had to face because of the Chinese invasion. And she remembers her parents saying that they used to live in lots of fear and they had to run away in the mountains and they did not have anything to eat. That's what she remembers her parents telling her.

So, when did you leave Tibet?

It's been four years. It's been four years since she arrived here.

Why did you leave?

She has two children that were studying here. So since her children were here and her parents had died she thought it was a very good opportunity to come to India. She especially wanted to seek blessings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. So for pilgrimage purposes and because two of her children were here, she came here.

After the Chinese invaded when you were eight, can you explain your life from that time up until you came here four years ago?

She says that her family were basically farmers. So, her memories until the time that she left Tibet were of being involved in household work and in earning her livelihood. She says that she doesn't have any experience or talent in any other fields all she knows for earning a living is just doing household work.

You said that your parents were often fearful? What were they afraid of?

After the Chinese came there was lots of repression over there. So, the main fear was what would become of them. What would happen to their future. What would become of them. That's the main fear that was always in their minds.

When you left Tibet, where did you leave from?

She left from Bhutan.

How did you feel leaving Tibet?

She says that she actually feels very happy that she has left Tibet and is here. And, she feels that her wishes have been fulfilled after seeing his Holiness the Dalai Lama. And, she sees that His Holiness always preaches about the wellbeing of all sentient beings. And she keeps that in her mind and she feels that her wishes have been fulfilled and she is happy with her decision and she feels blessed.

How long did the journey take?

She says that it took about three to four months to reach India. And she says that she felt a lot of hardship during that journey and in her mind there was a lot of fear. She also thought about whether she

would be able to get to her children or not. And, she says she felt and faced a lot of hardship but she's happy that she made it here. And now she's living a good life. She's very satisfied with what she has right now. She passes her days now praying. And, she says she is very happy.

How many people came with you from Tibet?

She had a lot of company at that time. There were many people in her group. But she says that she was the oldest in her group. There were many young people. And, she says she faced lots of problems. And she thinks that it was not only her who faced problems. It was the same with everyone. And the main problem was, of course that there was lots of fear in their hearts. And they feared that since they were travelling for so many days they might get struck with all sorts of illnesses. And there was not enough food. So, during that journey there was not even a single day when they were truly happy. They worried about what would happen if they died on the way. And what would happen if they caught a disease. And what would happen if they didn't make it to India. But, they made the decision to leave Tibet anyway. Even though they were not sure about their future. So, the whole journey was very difficult for her.

Did you have a guide? And, if so, how much did you pay?

Yes, she had to pay twenty thousand Chinese Yuan. It all depends. Sometimes people can just pay one thousand five hundred and they can make it. But, she had to pay twenty thousand Yuan.

Why did she have to pay so much?

She paid that amount of money because she felt that if she paid that much, then the guide would guide her all throughout. Otherwise if she didn't pay much then, who knows, they could just leave her along the way. They'd made a decision and they'd already left Tibet. So what if the guide left her right in the middle of nowhere? So, that's why she paid a little bit higher. Because she felt that she could. Because it was just a little bit of difference in money.

What was your biggest fear on the journey?

Her biggest fear was that they might get caught on the way. And, if they got caught then it would be a problem for her family back in Tibet. For her daughter back in Tibet. So, that was the main fear.

Do you know what happened to those caught by the Chinese?

What happened to them?

What happened to those people caught?

She doesn't have much knowledge on what happened if they got caught but she has heard a lot about people being caught. But, that's people from other places, not from her place. So she doesn't have any knowledge about what happened if they got caught.

Other than that, how was the weather when you were travelling?

Were there any other hardships?

The most hardship that she faced during the journey, other than fear, was mainly to do with food. They didn't have enough to eat. Since they were escaping, they couldn't eat regularly during the journey. And, whenever they got to eat, sometimes they were not used to the food that they got. And, then that caused some illness and they felt weak.

Where did you arrive when you came into India?

She doesn't remember exactly what place she reached because at that time she was so tired and sick. She went wherever the guide took her. So that's why she doesn't remember which place exactly.

Did you enter a refugee camp?

She didn't go to a refugee camp. They were sent in, in groups of four and five.

Could you describe to me your life in exile? Was it hard to find work?

She says that of course she faced lots of problems when she got here, regarding work. She says that at that time, physically, she was not so fit. So, she says that if she was fit physically she could go to a Tibetan and ask for a job and she might get one. But since she was feeling not so well and weak, that's why she didn't get to do any job.

But even then, in India, because of the language she would probably not get a job. So, she faced a lot of problems when it came to work. But, now she spends her day doing prostrations all the time.

You said you came here mainly because the Dalai Lama's here. Have you had an opportunity to visit him?

She says that once she got here, just a day after that she had a chance to seek an audience from His Holiness. So she says she was very lucky because she got to see His Holiness just after a day.

How do you think you maintain strength to rebuild your life, and community, and culture in a foreign land?

She says that after she arrived here there was no fear in her mind or heart anymore. The day after she got to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama, she felt very happy in her heart. And she feels that she no longer minds whatever happens to her, as long as she gets enough to eat. And she says that human beings, rather rich or poor, all have to leave this world anyway. So it doesn't really make any difference whether you are rich or poor. Her husband right now works as a caretaker of the temple here. So, her husband told her that she faced lots of problems by travelling from Tibet to come all the way here. So he told her not to worry--that his salary is enough. He is earning a living taking care of the temple. So, he told her to take care of herself. She should spend her days praying; spend the rest of her life praying. So that's why she now does prostrations every day. And, she prays; she prays for all the sentient beings. The money that her husband makes out of his job is what her family depends on.

Can you explain your mindset when it comes to this event-- the Chinese invasion, and also exile? And, how do you view the Chinese now?

She says that she can't say much on this thing about the Chinese. Everybody is suffering and upset. Everybody suffers. It all depends on you. If you want to be happy, it all depends on you. She's happy to be in this country.

You said that you feel satisfied being here in India? Do you ever wish to return to Tibet?

She says she doesn't need to go back to Tibet. She's here now. She has no plans to go back to Tibet. She's now here and she wants to stay. She can make a living here.

You also said you have a daughter in Tibet still. Do you think she will ever come to India?

She says that her daughter wants to come to India. But she has children of her own and so she can't come. She is worried about what would happen if they all came together and got caught. So, because of that even though her daughter wants to come she can't come.

What are your thoughts about the future of Tibet? Do you believe in autonomy or independence?

She's says that she can't add much. But she feels that if we get the autonomy that His Holiness is seeking; then we can all go back to Tibet.