

Timing critical in interview project

By J.M. Brown

Correspondent

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Moraga psychologist Marcella Adamski set out this time last year to spread the news far and wide about her groundbreaking interviews with 85 Tibetan elders.

She raised enough money to have 25 oral histories of the Chinese occupation of Tibet translated and archived on the Tibet Oral History Project Web site. The work interested Radio Free Asia's Tibetan Service, which is broadcasting excerpts worldwide, and Adamski wants to send the collection to libraries around the world.

But this month, Adamski is putting the brakes on promoting and distributing her work because she believes there is more of it to be done.

"We could do all kinds of things with this, but quite frankly, I think what I really need to do is keep interviewing," Adamski said. "These folks are dying. We've already lost 10 of them."

On Saturday, Adamski and her team will head back to Southern India to interview elders who have been living in refugee communities since the 1959 occupation. She interviewed 85 elders in India in 2007 after receiving encouragement from the Dalai Lama.

Two teams comprised of an interviewer, videographer and translator will visit the remote Dhoeguling Tibetan settlement in Mundgod to talk with more than 50 elders about their early life in Tibet and what their life has been like in India since being forced to flee. Adamski and her crews will stay for three weeks.

The team asks questions about family traditions, aspirations and spiritual practice before slowly delving into what Adamski said are painful memories of the Chinese incursion.

Each one of the living elders whom she interviewed in 2007 received hand-delivered DVD copies of their conversation with Adamski.

"They were thrilled," she said. "Many said they know now that their experiences would never be forgotten."

Adamski hopes to find a permanent home for her collection at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, the seat of the exiled Tibetan government. That is where Adamski met the Dalai Lama while working for the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

When Adamski asked the Tibetan spiritual leader what she could do to help his people, she said he encouraged her to meet with elders and document their stories before it was too late. Many elders are in their 80s and 90s.

Dennis Cusack, a San Francisco attorney who co-chairs the International Tibet Support Network, supports Adamski's works.

"The Tibet Oral History Project plays a crucial role in the Tibetan struggle for freedom," he said. "Hearing these interviews, younger generations of Tibetans can bind themselves even more tightly to the Tibetan identity that they and their elders are fighting to preserve."

Other financial supporters have included the Walnut Creek-based Firedoll Foundation and the Rowell Fund for Tibet, which is based in Washington, D.C. Adamski hopes to raise another \$10,000 this year to translate the interviews from the upcoming trip and put the entire collection of oral histories online.

HOW TO HELP

For more information about the Tibet Oral History Project, visit www.tibetoralhistory.org, where there is a link to donate to the effort and excerpts of interviews with Tibetan elders living in exile in Southern India. Contact founder Marcella Adamski at 415-292-3202 or info@tibetoralhistory.org.