

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

**Interview #26C – Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang  
November 14, 2014**

The Tibet Oral History Project serves as a repository for the memories, testimonies and opinions of elderly Tibetan refugees. The oral history process records the words spoken by interviewees in response to questions from an interviewer. The interviewees' statements should not be considered verified or complete accounts of events and the Tibet Oral History Project expressly disclaims any liability for the inaccuracy of any information provided by the interviewees. The interviewees' statements do not necessarily represent the views of the Tibet Oral History Project or any of its officers, contractors or volunteers.

This translation and transcript is provided for individual research purposes only. For all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: Tibet Oral History Project, P.O. Box 6464, Moraga, CA 94570-6464, United States.

Copyright © 2015 Tibet Oral History Project.



# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #26C
2. Interviewee: Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1941
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Karze
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: November 14, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Sakya Monastery, Seattle, Washington, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 02 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter:
14. Videographer: Tony Sondag
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang was born in Karze District of Kham Province. His parents had seven children of which he is the second oldest. His father was a successful businessman trading all kinds of goods between Tibet, China and India. The family owned a retail store in Lhasa selling mainly tea brought from China. He fondly remembers how as children, they waited for various gifts that their father brought from the places he travelled to.

Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang was enrolled in Nyarongsha School in Lhasa at the age of 7 and describes the repetitive handwriting exercises that the students were subjected to daily. Since he was doing poorly in school, his mother sent him to study with his uncle at Sera Monastery. Then at the age of 16 he, along with two of his younger brothers, was sent to join Gaden Monastery as monks.

As a child Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang witnessed Chinese people leaving Lhasa by order of the Tibetan Government. Later the Communist Chinese appeared and set up military camps around Lhasa and gunshots could be heard at Gaden Monastery. Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang recounts his escape journey taking along his two little brothers. He was fortunate to reunite with the rest of his family in India. He received further education in exile and became a teacher himself.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Utsang, childhood memories, education, first appearance of Chinese, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

## Interview #26C

**Interviewee: Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang**

**Age: 73, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: November 14, 2014**

[Interviewee speaks in English. No interpreter required.]

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:07

**Interviewee #26C: Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang. Chagzoetsang is the...**

Q: Okay. Chagzoetsang.

**#26C: [Nods] Chagzoetsang. It means residence, you know, residence of Chagzoetsang.**

Q: It means from that place.

**#26C: Right, my family name.**

Q: Ngawang Gyurmey from...

**#26C: Chagzoetsang.**

Q: Chagzoetsang. Where is Chagzoetsang? In which part of Tibet?

**#26C: Karze, Kham.**

Q: In Kham?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Khampa man.

**#26C: Yes, Kham.**

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?

**#26C: Yes, sure.**

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

**#26C: Hmm...**

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

**#26C: [Nods]**

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

**#26C: [Nods]**

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

00:01:31

**#26C: I don't think so.**

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

**#26C: Sure.**

Q: Thank you. So I begin again by asking your name. Your name is...

**#26C: Ngawang Gyurmey Chagzoetsang.**

Q: What year were you born?

**#26C: Actually 1941.**

Q: And your age now?

**#26C: Seventy-three.**

Q: Seventy-three and that was the Tibetan calendar year of what?

**#26C: Calendar year of horse, I think.**

Q: So where are you from in Tibet? Like where was the village that you were born in?

**#26C: Karze.**

Q: Karze.

**#26C: Yes. Karze District. That's where my parents are from.**

Q: That's where you were born?

**#26C: Yes. No, I think I was born in...I'm not sure either in Karze or Lhasa.**

Q: You're not sure which place.

00:02:46

**#26C: And my parents moved to Lhasa long, long time ago.**

Q: Okay. I see. But where they were born in Karze, Kham what was the nearest monastery or temple?

**#26C: Karze Gonpa.**

Q: Was it Karze...?

**#26C: Yes, Karze Monastery.**

Q: Karze Monastery.

**#26C: And also there's Dhargay, Dhargay Monastery.**

Q: Oh yeah, Dhargay.

**#26C: [Nods]**

Q: What was your father's name?

**#26C: Lobsang Samten.**

Q: And your mother?

**#26C: Yangchen Khando.**

Q: Okay, and so when you were born how many people were in your family?

**#26C: When I was born about...let's see. A brother, the first son I think didn't survive, the first one. We are actually seven of us.**

Q: Seven children?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: And where are you in that order?

**#26C: Second.**

Q: You're the second from the oldest.

**#26C: [Nods]**

Q: And did the older one survive above you?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: He did.

**#26C: He's living.**

Q: And you're the second. Were they boys or girls?

00:04:03

**#31C: Five boys and two girls.**

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

**#26C: My father's a businessman. He started business in Lhasa and also he has a retail shop and also export and import between Tibet and India, and between Tibet and Kham area.**

Q: What kind of goods? Do you have...can you remember what kind of things that he'd import or trade?

**#26C: Import from India, all the [moves right hand over shirt] you know...**

Q: Material?

**#26C: Materials. Yeah, all kinds of materials and different stuff, and also he import from China—it's part of China now—tea, you know; Tibetan tea and imported to Lhasa. And also northern part of Tibet he brought all the wool, wool and he shipped it to India.  
[Laughs]**

Q: He was a very widely traveled...

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: He went from northern Tibet to India and then...

**#26C: Also he has some people working for him.**

Q: He had people working for him. Do you have any idea how many people like five or 25?

00:05:45

**#26C: I can't...**

Q: You can't say.

**#26C: I can't tell.**

Q: Was he a successful businessman?

**#26C: Yeah, I think so.**

Q: You think so?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Pretty successful and so in Lhasa did he actually have a shop, in Lhasa?

**#26C: We have a shop.**

Q: What did they sell?

**#26C: Mostly tea from Kham, you know.**

Q: From Kham?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: You say Tibetan tea but it was tea brought from China.

**#26C: It's...you know...[not discernible] Dhartsedo. Dhartsedo, that's where they get the tea from.**

Q: That's where they get it from, Dhartsedo.

**#26C: I think right between China and Tibet.**

Q: And Tibet on the border?

**#26C: Yes, border kind of town-type.**

Q: And so what are...can you tell us any of your earliest memories as a child growing up? Did you play with your brothers and sister? What did you do?

00:06:47

**#26C: Yes, of course, we play. We play all kinds of stuff.**

Q: All kinds of games?

**#26C: All kinds of games and we also play cards and stuff.**



Q: Did you? But your family were traders, so did you still have animals? Did you have any animals in the family?

**#26C: Oh, yes.**

Q: You did? Oh, your father needed animals.

**#26C: That time all the...most transportation are mules and...it's not really yaks from Kham. They are like, you know 60, 70 with the tea and stuff, you know.**

Q: They would...

**#26C: ...come and they sell those animals.**

Q: Oh, they would sell them off?

**#26C: ...and also...yeah.**

Q: Did he, when your father would come back from his trading missions, did he ever bring any toys or stuff for you to play with?

**#26C: Oh yes, of course.**

Q: What did he bring?

00:07:55

**#26C: From India he bring things, rubber balls and also plastic [laughs] kind of made, you know toys.**

Q: Plastic toys?

**#26C: Yeah, different type of toys.**

Q: Like what? Like trucks or airplanes?

**#26C: Yes, airplanes.**

Q: Plastic toys.

**#26C: Bikes.**

Q: Bicycles?

**#26C: Not...yeah, he brought later on. He brought bicycles.**

Q: They were unusual in Tibet.

**#26C: Yes, that's much later. Earlier days we don't have bicycles.**

Q: Yeah, you didn't. What about any food that you liked? Did he bring you special food?

**#26C: Well, he brings all kinds of sweets and stuff from India, and biscuits and all that.**

Q: I bet you were happy when he would come back?

**#26C: Yes, of course.**

Q: You were happy.

**#26C: He goes away for quite sometime, you know in India sometimes and then he comes back.**

Q: How did the family...? When a father goes away for such a long time like two months, three months, how long?

00:09:12

**#26C: Yes, maybe at least a month or so.**

Q: A month or so?

**#26C: [Nods]**

Q: How did the family manage by themselves? Did you...?

**#26C: Well, my mom and she has help, you know.**

Q: She had help?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Like different servants or people?

**#26C: Also we have a store downstairs in Lhasa.**

Q: A store?

**#26C: Yes, one or two people working there.**

Q: Did you have any uncles that stayed with the family?

**#26C: Oh yes. My uncle...my mom is from Sandhutsang. It's a Kham...**

Q: Kham area?

**#26C: Dhargay, Kham area. Sandhutsang. Sandhutsang is a very big business people. Sandhutsang and Pondhatsang, there are two families. Those two are biggest business people in Lhasa area also, all over Kham.**

Q: You know what? Could we say it a little louder so we can hear the name of where your mother's...Sandokhang?

**#26C: Sandhutsang.**

Q: Sandutang.

**#26C: Sandhutsang.**

Q: Okay.

**#26C: Sandhu...**

Q: Sandhu-tsang.

**#26C: Tsang.**

Q: Okay.

**#26C: Sandhutsang.**

Q: What's life like in your house growing up? Is it fun? Is it hard work or what's it like?

00:10:43

**#26C: It's fun.**

Q: It's fun?

**#26C: For us it's fun. We are still kids and just all we think of is playing and stuff, but the most difficult is going to school.**

Q: Why?

**#26C: School in Lhasa, Tibetan school in Lhasa. Now I think of it...I going to school...[I] hate because all day you have to write, okay? Writing is one thing. That's also you kind of write the same thing all day long. From morning, it's about from 6 o'clock to maybe 7 o'clock, we have some prayer to say and also reading little bit, and after that we go to breakfast and come back and maybe it's around 8:30-9 o'clock. From then on we start writing until middle of the day, about 12 o'clock. Then they let you out for lunch break and maybe 1 o'clock we come back and we start writing again until 4...5 o'clock at least, I think.**

Q: My God, everyday?

**#26C: That's everyday same thing we re-write, re-write, re-write, re-write.**

Q: What were the words that you were writing?

00:12:27

**#26C: They have one...**

Q: Scripture?

**#26C: They got one scripture to look at and you have to write that.**

Q: Did you copy it?

**#26C: Same thing, yeah, same thing.**

Q: Copy it.

**#26C: Right. We have those planks, you know.**

Q: They're made of wood?

**#26C: Yes, made of wood.**

Q: And covered with what?

**#26C: Covered with white...**

Q: White chalk?

**#26C: White chalk. You know, powdered chalk.**

Q: Powdered chalk.

**#26C: Then you just make lines and then write. After you write, you have to show to somebody and then wipe it again and then write again. That reciting is all day, you know.**

Q: Was it the same? The scripture in front of you, was it the same amount of words every day, the same piece of scripture?

**#26C: Yes, same piece of scripture.**

Q: Every day? Do you remember what it says? What did it say?

**#26C: I really don't remember clearly right now because that time when I was going to school about...I was 7 years old. I was doing that time maybe two years, three years, something like that. Nothing but, you know...**

Q: Nothing but that.

**#26C: And I was really hate to going to school.**

Q: Yeah, I could see.

00:14:05

**#26C: And then my mum get mad [laughs], “You’re not doing good because...” We get also beating from the school, you know.**

Q: Who was teaching you?

**#26C: Okay, in Lhasa we have about—let’s see—five, six schools, different schools and they are not really funded by government or anything like that but teachers are volunteers. And they start their school and I think they get, maybe from parents...they offer them, you know gifts and stuff. And also when you join first the school, you give all the students tea and rice and then some money also. That’s how we first join school.**

Q: Were they...they were Tibetan teachers?

**#26C: Yes, Tibetan teachers. And one particular school is called Nyarongsha, Nyarongsha. That’s where I went to school.**

Q: The children, what age did they start?

00:15:26

**#26C: All different. No such age limit or anything like that, you know. I was started around 7, I think.**

Q: Around 7. And were you learning when you were copying the letters, right?

**#26C: Yes, copying the letters. That you write, you know.**

Q: You’re writing it but could you read the letters? Could you read what they meant?

**#26C: They don’t really explain it to you.**

Q: They didn’t tell you what they meant. So they look like drawings?

**#26C: Yes, like...you know, and they take it very important to writing nicely, write, you know. I mean...**

Q: To copy this script, very important. Did you learn how to read?

**#26C: Yes, later on.**

Q: Later on.

**#26C: But nothing [in] that school. Maybe I learned some but not much in that school. One day my mum is so upset with me, “You’re not doing good. Okay, from now on you’re going to go to Sera Monastery.” There’s my uncle, you know, he’s a *geshe* ‘monk with degree in Buddhist philosophy’ there, you know. “You got to go to Uncle Geshe’s. You’re not doing good at school.” So I was so happy, “Yes, I’m going, you know. [Raises hands] I’m going to go.”**

Q: Did you become a monk?

00:17:00

**#26C: Not really that time. I mean, you know I was just staying with my uncle and he taught me a lot of memorize prayers and reading scriptures and how to write, you know, really explained writing.**

Q: Was it better than your other school?

**#26C: Yes, much better.**

Q: Really?

**#26C: Yeah, and so I was staying with my uncle.**

Q: At the monastery?

**#26C: Sera Monastery, that’s quite close to Lhasa.**

Q: Was that kind of typical that sometime an uncle would bring in a nephew and teach him? Was that typical?

**#26C: Not everybody but you know, some might do.**

Q: Some might do that.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Did your family kind of help support him a little bit by tea and *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’?

**#26C: Oh yeah, sometimes they bring us supplies since I was living there, you know. They bring some supplies and stuff also.**

Q: Some supplies and stuff? How old was your uncle...?

**#26C: My uncle is from Sandhutsang family also, the one I told you earlier.**

Q: From the Sandhutsang family?

**#26C: They call him Sandhu Geshe.**

Q: Sandhu Geshe?

**#26C: [Nods]**

Q: Was he a young uncle or a very old one?

00:18:28

**#26C: He was old.**

Q: He was old?

**#26C: He was old.**

Q: About how old do you think?

**#26C: I think when I was there he must be around 61.**

Q: Really?

**#26C: Yeah. He's in his 60s.**

Q: What was his personality like?

**#26C: He was very gentle, very, very gentle.**

Q: Did you like him?

**#26C: Yes, of course.**

Q: He's very gentle.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: So you actually had a private teacher?

**#26C: Right, private teacher. Also my uncle sometimes sent me to different teachers. They sometimes give tuition, you know to a few kids. Sometimes I go there, too.**

Q: To do what?

**#26C: Reading and writing.**

Q: For more reading and writing with more kids.

**#26C: Yeah, yeah.**

Q: With several kids. Was that better than the other school?

**#26C: Oh yeah, much better.**

Q: Much better like smaller classes...?

**#26C: Smaller classes and...**

Q: What do you...did you learn how to read and write?

**#26C: Pardon me?**

Q: Did you learn how to read and write under your uncle?

00:19:42

**#26C: Yes, I did much better than the school where I was going in Lhasa.**

Q: How did your mother feel?

**#26C: She's very glad, you know.**

Q: It was a good idea?

**#26C: Yes, I think that's a good idea.**

Q: What happened next?

**#26C: Next then when I was about 16 years old, my parents, they decided to send me to Gaden Monastery with my two siblings, two small ones. Mainly, I have to look after those two. Three of us went to the Gaden Monastery.**

Q: You know your father was a trader. Why would he want... did he want you to be a monk and his two sons to be monks?

**#26C: Yes, and he chose my oldest brother...sent to India.**

Q: To?

**#26C: To study in a Catholic private school, yes.**

Q: Which city in India?

**#26C: Darjeeling.**



Q: To Darjeeling?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Catholic school?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Jesuit?

**#26C: No, St. Joseph's.**

Q: St. Joseph's?

**#26C: Yeah, St. Joseph's.**

Q: St. Joseph's. Catholic school?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: In Darjeeling?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: And what did he study there?

**#26C: English.**

Q: English?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Your father wanted his sons to be educated?

00:21:19

**#26C: Right. I think he's supposed to look after all of us. [Laughs]**

Q: Oh, the oldest son?

**#26C: That's my father's plan, I guess.**

Q: That the oldest son look after everybody.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Why didn't he...didn't he want his sons to become traders like himself?

**#26C: Well, whatever you do business, you know, he thought maybe you needed [to be] educated.**

Q: No matter what you do.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: So wow! How did you feel about...he sent you to Gaden when you were 16? Did you want to go?

**#26C: Yes, of course.**

Q: You did?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Why?

**#26C: With my two other brothers, you know, two small brothers.**

Q: Why did you want to be a monk?

**#26C: Well, that time it's my father's wish, my parents' wish. They think that's an easier life for you and...**

Q: Did you think that was a good idea?

00:22:29

**#26C: That time sure, of course. I didn't really want to study and, you know, I was the boss and I...two younger brothers I let them study and I was kind of you know, the boss.**

Q: You were like the boss of your younger brothers?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: You didn't want to study?

**#26C: Not much really.**

Q: Not much.

**#26C: I was really...I don't know but then I was thinking like, "Okay, I'll wait until I am 20 years old. Then I'll do some business for us." [Laughs]**

Q: Something else.

**#26C: Yes, three of us kind of one family, you know.**

Q: Yeah, like did you think maybe if at 20, maybe you would leave the monastery and do something else?

**#26C: Yeah, I can go out and do business and come back.**

Q: Some business.

**#26C: Yes, that's what I was planning.**

Q: So the monastery was like going to college or high school that you go in and you study and you learn?

**#26C: Right, and also most monks are to live there all their life.**

Q: I know.

**#26C: Not just, you know graduate...**

Q: They live there all their life.

**#26C: All their life.**

Q: Did you want to live there all your life?

00:23:59

**#26C: Yeah, I guess at that time, you know. Three of us become one family and I was thinking like, "Okay, just now whatever we need, we can get it from our parents, from Lhasa. And when they pass away or something what to do us?" Really, you know kind of sometimes worried little bit.**

Q: What...worried? How would you survive?

**#26C: Yes. And then in monasteries monks are mostly they survive but they still need extra, you know.**

Q: They do. Food?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: They do.

**#26C: So sometimes I was thinking like I have to do something, you know later on.**

Q: You would have to maybe do some kind of work or job later on?

**#26C: Yeah, do some business, you know.**

Q: Could you still be a monk?

**#26C: Oh yeah, sure.**

Q: Could you still be a monk and do something later on?

**#26C: Yes, yes.**

Q: You could.

**#26C: Of course, yeah.**

Q: You could be a monk and could you then go do some trade?

**#26C: Do your business and come back.**

Q: And come back to the monastery.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: That was okay.

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Because like in Gaden, how many monks were in the monastery?

00:25:18

**#26C: Gaden Monastery, when I was there, there are two *datsang* ‘sections in a large monastery’ you know, Shartse and Jangtse, and both maybe have close to 2,000 each, maybe at least 3-4,000 monks.**

Q: So there was one Gaden in Shigatse? That’s what you said? Two monasteries? Gaden had...?

**#26C: Shartse and Jangtse. There are two colleges, you know.**

Q: Two colleges in the same place?

**#26C: Yes, same monastery.**

Q: So one had 2,000...?

**#26C: And the other one pretty much same. I’m just guessing...**

Q: Did people go to different...did you go to the place like where you came from? If you came from this part of Lhasa you went to this college or this place?

**#26C: Okay, that's a different story. You know father's side, when they come from Kham to Lhasa, if he was or one of his sons or whatever [wants to] go to a monastery, he's supposed to go to Gaden.**

Q: I see.

**#26C: And some family they have [to go], you know maybe [to] Sera [Monastery].**

Q: They would go to different monasteries depending on where the family had to go.

**#26C: Yes, and also we have sections like, you know, all the...Tehor is the whole Kham area, okay? Karze, Dhargay, all these areas is called Tehor.**

Q: Tehor? Yes.

00:27:15

**#26C: Tehor. Each Tehor [area], they have [to go join] Sera, Gaden or Drepung. They have their own section.**

Q: In each of those areas?

**#26C: Yeah. They have their own building. They have their own...they can join there.**

Q: In each of the three major monasteries

**#26C: Right, in each of the three major monasteries.**

Q: They have their own section.

**#26C: Right.**

Q: I've heard that.

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: So I want to back up a little bit before you went to the monastery with your two brothers when you were 16, you said you had to go to school. You started school and you didn't like it. How long did you have to go to school and just practice writing? How many years?

**#26C: Well, until you become...it's okay.**

Q: But your mother made you start school at 7, aged 7.

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: And you had to go until 16?

**#26C: Eight, 9 maybe I was there about two or little more than two years.**

Q: Two years from 7, 8, 9...

**#26C: From there, from there she sent me to my uncle's.**

Q: Okay, then you went to your uncle's.

**#26C: Until I was 16.**

Q: Until you were 16. What happened at 16?

00:28:30

**#26C: Sixteen...then my parents asked me to come and go to Gaden.**

Q: Gaden with your brothers?

**#26C: Yes, with my two brothers.**

Q: Did they want to go with you?

**#26C: Of course. Yeah, they are also excited.**

Q: They were excited?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Did you have the same room or the same dormitory with them?

**#26C: We have same room, kind of a...they give you or provide you a little, you know, apartment type.**

Q: Wow! So your mother has only one child left. One goes to India...

**#26C: Yeah, the oldest one.**

Q: Three of you go here...

**#26C: And three goes to monastery.**

Q: Three girls to the monastery?

**#26C: No.**

Q: Three boys.

**#26C: Three of us go to monastery.**

Q: Yeah?

**#26C: And then one younger than me he's in Lhasa also. He's going to school there and then two youngest ones [are] two sisters.**

Q: Two sisters.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: They stay with mother?

**#26C: They're staying at home.**

Q: They stay at home?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Okay. So tell me a little bit about when you were in Lhasa before...oh, you went to live with your uncle. Do you remember Lhasa? What was Lhasa like when you were a boy, a young teenager? Was Lhasa an exciting place, nice place?

00:30:00

**#26C: Lhasa is a nice place, yes.**

Q: Why was it nice?

**#26C: Because we [can] enjoy whatever we want, you know. You can get it in Lhasa if you have some money. You can buy whatever...**

Q: What did you like to buy in Lhasa?

**#26C: Well, all kids' stuff, you know. Candies. [Laughs]**

Q: Candies?

**#26C: I mean Tibetans--they have a way of saying "If you can't get something that you want in Lhasa, then that's not good." You say, you know. You can get anything you want in Lhasa.**

Q: Because it has everything.

**#26C: Yeah, right, in Lhasa. If you have money you can get anything.**

Q: In Lhasa.

**#26C: In Lhasa. That's why...**

Q: So...

**#26C: My father always says that [when] we were younger we used to say, “Let’s go back to Kham.” You know and he will say, “Ah, no, no, no. You don’t know Kham is a very rough place.”**

Q: Really?

00:31:14

**#26C: And Lhasa is the best place you can live, you know.**

Q: Do you know what he meant? What did he mean by that?

**#26C: Well, I don’t know but he didn’t really want to go back.**

Q: He didn’t want to go back. Was it rough because it was just physically hard to live there or was it rough because it was dangerous of people or you know, were there any kind of...were the Chinese there? Were there any warlords there? What made it...?

**#26C: That time way back there are lot of fighting in between tribes and it’s kind of...**

Q: Between the nomad tribes?

**#26C: Between tribes and between the families and stuff. They used to have, I think way back.**

Q: Way back?

**#26C: [Nods]**

Q: Now when you were in...?

**#26C: And he didn’t really like it.**

Q: He didn’t like it.

**#26C: That10 way, you know.**

Q: Did you notice any Chinese in Lhasa when you were growing up?

00:32:31

**#26C: Oh yes, yeah. We used to have Chinese people do business in Lhasa. They have stores, restaurants and that’s before Communist China came.**

Q: So this was before, like before what year? Before 19...?



**#26C: Before 1950.**

Q: Before 1950?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: And what was the relationship?

**#26C: Right around that time the Chinese Communists are start you know, and so our Tibetan Government, they get all the Chinese sent back to China, from Lhasa to China, you know.**

Q: Oh, really?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: The Tibetan Government asked...

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Did they...was that an order?

**#26C: Yeah, order.**

Q: They ordered?

**#26C: They don't want any Chinese in Lhasa.**

Q: I never heard that.

**#26C: Yeah, they sent back.**

Q: The Tibetan Government, and did they go?

**#26C: Oh, yes.**

Q: Really?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Do you remember what...?

00:33:39

**#26C: We saw them when we were kids. I mean, we saw them leaving.**

Q: Is that right?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Wow! How many like...do you have any idea how many? A hundred, a thousand?

**#26C: I really don't know, maybe hundreds. I don't know.**

Q: Maybe hundreds? Why did the Tibetan Government order them to go back to China?

**#26C: Because they don't want Chinese coming in Lhasa and living, you know.**

Q: I see. They ordered them to go back to China and they went.

**#26C: They went. Of course, they have no choice, you know.**

Q: Because they were in a different country?

**#26C: Right.**

Q: They were in Tibet, which is not China.

**#26C: Which is not China, right.**

Q: Because they were not in their own country.

**#26C: No.**

Q: Okay. The Chinese say...?

**#26C: Chinese better go to China and Tibetans better live in Tibet. That's how it is...**

Q: That's how it was.

**#26C: ...that time but then the Chinese Communists marched, you know in Tibet.**

Q: Do you remember that?

00:34:54

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: What were you doing? When is the first time you saw the Chinese?

**#26C: We were still kids, you know.**

Q: You were a kid.

**#26C: I mean Chinese horse people, they marched in thousands in Lhasa and different, you know. And also they have started from the Kham area, and Kham area they did a lot of fighting with...of course, you can't...**

Q: You can't what?

**#26C: They will send hundred Chinese soldiers to a few Khampas.**

Q: They sent Chinese soldiers to fight the Khampas?

**#26C: Oh, yeah. Khampas, there are lot of Khampas, they left, you know their families and they went to mountains and fought the Communist Chinese.**

Q: Yes, they did.

**#26C: When they came, you know.**

Q: When did your life change because of the Chinese?

00:36:08

**#26C: Not much. Ever since we left in 1959, that's the big change.**

Q: What happened? What made you leave?

**#26C: Because they are taking over everything, you know Lhasa, endangering His Holiness' life, Dalai Lama's life. And everybody was kind of striking.**

Q: You were living though with your two brothers in Gaden Monastery.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: And you were now about...you said you were about 16, right, when you went with your brothers?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Right?

**#26C: [Nods]**

Q: You were 16. So let's see. At 16, so that was around 1957 you were at Gaden Monastery.

**#26C: Yeah, right.**

Q: Okay? What happened at Gaden Monastery? Did the Chinese come to Gaden? Did...?

**#26C: That time, no.**

Q: They didn't come at that time?

**#26C: No, at that time, no. Maybe they might have come after we left.**

Q: Maybe after you left.

**#26C: 1959, yeah.**

Q: I see.

**#26C: After we left, most of the monks left.**

Q: Really?

00:37:34

**#26C: And then they might have come and destroyed everything.**

Q: Why did you leave though? Was it just...?

**#26C: We didn't want to stay under Chinese.**

Q: You didn't want to. Who was...?

**#26C: The Chinese taking over everything in Lhasa and we can hear the gunshots in Gaden.**

Q: So who left with you?

**#26C: With me I have three friends same area from Kham and they helped me with the two kids.**

Q: Wow!

**#26C: And we left the monastery.**

Q: Were there other people in your group or just the friends?

**#26C: Just us, you know, just us but there are lot of other people going, you know.**

Q: They were leaving.

**#26C: Yes, not in the same group but...**

Q: How did you know the Chinese were taking over things if you were living in the monastery?

**#26C: We get word from, you know, outside. [It's] not very far and what's going on, like that because we couldn't reach Lhasa. [It's] too dangerous to go. There are, you know in between, there are a lot of Chinese soldiers by then in Lhasa area.**

Q: I see.

**#26C: All around Lhasa they have military camps, you know.**

Q: Camps all around Lhasa?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Were you in any kind of contact with your parents?

00:39:15

**#26C: No. 1957...I think...yeah, it's '57...my father sent my mum and two sisters to India because my mum has a problem with the skin disease, you know on her foot. So actually he sent them to...**

Q: To India.

**#26C: ...for medical reasons, you know.**

Q: Do you know what the problem was?

**#26C: I really don't know. It's underneath the foot and every once in a while, it...**

Q: It hurts.

**#26C: Yeah, it really hurts. And she was treated in Kalimpong and treated in Calcutta in India.**

Q: Did they give her...did it heal her problem make it better?

**#26C: Not all of it, you know. I don't know what but she has to put medicine and dress it every evening. For that reason my father sent them to India with the two little girls and my older brother is already in school there in Darjeeling. Now my father and one of our younger brothers, the third one, they are in Lhasa.**

Q: Wow!

00:40:58

**#26C: Those two and...**

Q: Did he send you a message like "Please leave. Go"? Did he tell you to take your brothers and leave?

**#26C: No, no.**

Q: He didn't?

**#26C: We never contact each other, you know...**

Q: No contact.

**#26C: ...because it's too dangerous to go.**

Q: Got it. So you had to make the decision yourself.

**#26C: Yes, and by then they have a guerrilla fighters in south of Lhasa, you know, in Lhoka. In that area, guerrilla fighters in that group, one of my uncles is also there, you know. Sandhutsang.**

Q: What was his name?

**#26C: Sandhutsang.**

Q: Sandhutsang?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: So he belonged to the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]?

**#26C: Yes, *Chushi Gangdrug*. He's one of the leaders. They are there. So I was hoping maybe we meet them, you know, go there and he will tell me what to do.**

Q: Yeah.

**#26C: That's exactly what we did.**

Q: Wow!

00:42:12

**#26C: We reached to Lhoka and *Chushi Gangdrug*. There are some relatives of us kids who are in Sera Monastery. They also came there, you know. So we are five kids there and then my uncle said, "Okay. You guys go ahead." They have two wounded people with my uncle. One is shot in the arm [touches left arm], one is shot here [shows right palm] and came out of the other side. Those two guys and then two other people to help us and all the kids. We left Lhoka.**

Q: Lhoka was a very famous place.

**#26C: Yes, reach to border to India, you know.**

Q: How long did it take?

**#26C: Maybe at least a month. I don't know.**

Q: Really, from Lhoka?

**#26C: From Lhoka to, you know, Indian border, maybe not quite one [month] but I don't know.**

Q: So you are escaping with these five kids, two wounded soldiers and two people to help you?

**#26C: Yeah, right.**

Q: Can you tell me your feelings when you were doing that? How did it feel?

00:43:42

**#26C: Well, kind of mixed feelings, you know. For a long time I was really worried about my father and my brother who are in Lhasa at that time. I have no idea whether they made it or not, you know. After we reached in Lhoka, I got word from that...this one guy came from Lhasa. He said, "Oh, they are safe in..." One of my neighbor's man... He was there and we met him and he said, "Oh, they safely went."**

Q: To where?

**#26C: Reached northwest and they have horses. And also there's my neighbor, Dongsaladang. They have about 4-5 people with horses and everything. They have also grass and stuff. They all went together, left Lhasa, you know.**

Q: They did.

**#26C: And they got around from northwest to reach all the way round to India.**

Q: They went all the way?

**#26C: Ladakh, yeah. And they got in India before us. [Laughs] Before we did.**

Q: Even before you?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: So your father and your brother made it safely by going over the northwest?

00:45:28

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Where did they land in India? Where did they...?

**#26C: I think Ladakh.**

Q: Ladakh? They went that way?

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: Wow! That's what I thought. Northwest, that's Ladakh.

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: They were really escaping the Chinese.

**#26C: Right.**

Q: So tell us about the journey with you, your siblings? What happened on that journey, a month long?

**#26C: Almost a month, I think. It took us a long time because we all don't have horse riding, you know, but kids have and sometimes we walked and then at one time I was able to get a horse to ride, you know. We came like that. It felt like it's a long journey. Maybe I don't know a month or maybe shorter, I don't know.**

Q: What was the season? What weather?

**#26C: Season right around...on higher mountains it's snowing and stuff in Lhasa...I mean in Tibet area.**

Q: How did...?

00:46:50

**#26C: We got to one town called Tsona. It's just one mountain pass to India. We got there at night; kind of you know, very late night. It was snowing and very cold. And in that town nobody was there. Everybody's left already to India, you know.**

Q: It was abandoned?

**#26C: Yes, kind of abandoned.**

Q: Did you get any food or any shelter there?

**#26C: Yes. We got shelter, of course. And then we spent one night there. Then next day we crossed a mountain. The thing is other side of the mountain when we go down little bit, all of a sudden it's all green and [laughs] it's really a very happy feeling.**

Q: You felt safe?

**#26C: Yeah.**



Q: When you were traveling did you have enough food to eat, enough clothing?

00:48:07

**#26C: We have clothing but food is very limited. So elders will have to kind of limit their eating, you know.**

Q: To give to the children.

**#26C: And of course, they have to feed the kids.**

Q: Was everybody safe? Did anybody get hurt?

**#26C: No, no, not really.**

Q: You were very lucky, huh?

**#26C: Very lucky.**

Q: What happened to the man who was shot and the one with the bullet through his...?

**#26C: They, I think got healed after they got to India.**

Q: They got healed?

**#26C: Yes. One who [was] shot in the shoulder, his brother and they live in Kalimpong. After we reached there I saw him. He was doing much better and you know...**

Q: What else can you tell us about...do you remember about that journey? That was your journey...you were leaving Tibet. Did you think you were going to go back some day?

00:49:12

**#26C: Yeah, that was the feeling. Maybe for a while, go for a while and then maybe can go back, you know, and...**

Q: When you left the monastery you were all monks. You were a monk.

**#26C: Right.**

Q: Did you ask permission to take off your monk's robe or did you escape as a monk?

**#26C: No, we escaped just, you know...We have no choice...just took off our robes and we have also other clothing.**

Q: Other clothing.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: At that time, were the other monks escaping in the monastery?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: They were?

**#26C: They are.**

Q: So many other monks were leaving?

**#26C: They are leaving, yes.**

Q: Did any of the monks leave to go fight with the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Lhoka?

00:50:05

**#26C: They might have done some, you know. Before we left, in our section there are some people left to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*.**

Q: When you left were the Chinese attacking Gaden at all? Were they shooting at it or dropping bombs?

**#26C: No, no.**

Q: No, nothing at that point?

**#26C: I didn't see any Chinese...**

Q: Yeah, that happened later.

**#26C: ...at that time. That happened later. After we all left I think the Chinese came and destroyed everything, I think.**

Q: What was in your heart when you had to leave the monastery?

00:50:41

**#26C: It's a very exciting feeling, you know. We don't know what to think. I mean, trying to get out and try to be alive.**

Q: Yes.

**#26C: And especially I was very worried about my two kids, you know, two brothers.**

Q: Yes.

**#26C: If we're getting to fighting on something what is going to happen to the two, you know, and my friends, two or three friends with me, they really helped me. Sometimes we**

**have to carry them on the back, you know [while] crossing till we get to Lhoka. There are quite big passes we have to get through.**

Q: Very big.

**#26C: Mountains and...**

Q: That was very arduous.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: Very scary.

**#26C: Yes, quite scary.**

Q: Did you run into any Chinese soldiers?

00:51:39

**#26C: Not really. There's one...it's a big hill right in Lhoka and they were saying there're still Chinese soldiers are in that mountain. They are hiding and sometimes they shoot people, you know, from there, you know, but every evening those Khampas are going up there to get them out, you know. That's what they were doing when we left.**

Q: I see.

**#26C: And we kind of one or two at a time, you know...**

Q: Walking?

**#26C: ...trying to walk down and they never shot us or anything...**

Q: Was the snow very high when you were in...?

**#26C: Yeah, some mountains. Yes, we have to kind of...horse and stuff...First we take them and then hold on the tail and go, you know.**

Q: Very arduous, very hard. Were the children frightened?

00:52:47

**#26C: They're okay. They are not very...[Laughs] They have also mixed feelings, kind of excitement sometimes, you know.**

Q: When that journey was over, I'm just thinking...and many years later did they ever talk to you about their memories of that journey? Did your brothers?

**#26C: Oh, yeah. We sometimes, we talk to each other, you know.**

Q: Did they tell you their memories?

**#26C: That time we did that, we did that, you know.**

Q: They did?

**#26C: Yeah, we talk.**

Q: They must have been...

**#26C: I have two brothers live in...the oldest and youngest brother they live in Salt Lake.**

Q: Salt Lake City.

**#26C: Utah and my younger brother, third brother, he lives in Calgary in Canada. And one of my younger brothers is in Nepal and one sister, and the youngest sister is in Sikkim, Gangtok. So we are all scattered around.**

Q: Oh, you're scattered! All over.

00:54:07

**#26C: And over here it's okay. Canada, Utah, we, you know reunite once a year either here or Canada or Utah.**

Q: When you met...did you meet up with your parents again? Did you meet your father...?

**#26C: Oh yes, of course, yeah. After we arrived in India, yes.**

Q: Really?

**#26C: They are so glad.**

Q: They are so glad.

**#26C: Yes, of course.**

Q: What did your father say about how you rescued your brothers and...?

**#26C: "You did a good job." [Laughs]**

Q: "You did a good job." And your mother, what did she say?

**#26C: She was so glad that we made it out, you know.**

Q: She was so glad!

**#26C: They were so worried, you know.**

Q: Of course, they were worried and you were worried about them.

00:54:58

**#26C: Yes, of course. I was worried about my father and my younger brother who were in Lhasa, you know. Of course, they got out from going around northwest.**

Q: Was there ever a time in India or a year when the whole family came together? Like did that happen?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: In about what year was that?

**#26C: Soon after I arrived in 1959, end of 1959.**

Q: You arrived in India?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: And your father and brother?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: They were there?

**#26C: They were there. They reached India before us.**

Q: And your mother?

**#26C: Once in a while we get together.**

Q: I see. In India?

**#26C: Yes, in India.**

Q: When you did get to India, what did you do?

**#26C: In India Dalai Lama started a school in Mussoorie [with] 25 students. I'm one of them.**

Q: You were one of the students.

00:56:06

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: One of...

**#26C: And I was there about two years maybe, not quite...something like that. Then when we were there, besides us going to class, we have to teach smaller, you know, children. They keep coming, maybe 50, 60 at a time, you know. So at that time Indian Government was not supporting the refugee schools, you know. So all they [Tibetan Administration] do is use foreign aids and also lot of volunteer teachers, you know come and teach English, and also some Indians they teach Hindi. Then we are kind of little older. So we have to teach them also take some other classes, you know and Tibetan class.**

Q: So for a boy who did not like school, you got to be a teacher.

**#26C: [Laughs] Really! I didn't mind, you know. Then after that they sent us, maybe 10 of us to Lucknow Teacher Training School.**

Q: Really?

**#26C: Yes. So we went there [to] the Teacher's Training School. After we finished that then I end up in Mussoorie. There's a Tibetan Children's Foundation they started and they want me to stay there.**

Q: You became a teacher in Mussoorie?

**#26C: Yes, about three years.**

Q: Really?

**#26C: Until I came to the States.**

Q: Did you like teaching?

**#26C: It's okay, yeah, of course.**

Q: Were you nice to your students?

**#26C: I do. [Laughs]**

Q: Were you a better teacher than the one you had?

00:58:15

**#26C: Oh yeah, of course.**

Q: You were better.

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: You taught them.

**#26C: I mean...**

Q: You taught them.

**#26C: Completely different way of teaching.**

Q: Different way. Yeah, I bet you did.

**#26C: Yeah.**

Q: You knew there's another way to teach.

**#26C: That's right.**

Q: Did you feel you got good training at that school, at Lucknow Teachers...?

**#26C: That's okay, yeah.**

Q: So you had three years teaching in Mussoorie and then you came to, here?

**#26C: To the States, yes.**

Q: You came to the States?

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: What year would that have been?

**#26C: That'd be 1967.**

Q: In '67? Wow!

**#26C: Yes.**

Q: So you've been here ever since?

**#26C: Ever since, yeah.**

Q: Well, I'm so glad you survived your escape from Gaden Monastery. Did you ever go back and see it?

**#26C: Yes, we did in 2004.**

Q: Really? What did you think?

00:59:09

**#26C: 2004, it is kind of sad, very sad. Also I went to Sera [Monastery]. I went to Drepung [Monastery]. All those three monasteries I went to see. After that [in] 2005 I took my daughter to Kham; Karze and Dhargay and then to Lhasa and all that.**

Q: Wow!

**#26C: My daughter went to summer school in Beijing.**

Q: Beijing?

**#26C: Yes, and so when she finished that I meet her there and I took her to Kham area.**

Q: I bet you've seen many changes in Lhasa.

**#26C: Oh yes, Lhasa is so crowded and it's kind of sad looking around the Potala Palace, you know. We see all the Chinese big signs all over.**

Q: I know.

**#26C: The Tibetan sign letters are smaller.**

Q: Well, you certainly saw a whole change in Tibetan history from the time you were little to when you went back in 2005. Maybe we can kind of conclude by asking what would be your wishes for Tibet? What do you wish will happen?

01:00:49

**#26C: Same as the Dalai Lama's wish. I mean, you know, really and...**

Q: What is that wish?

**#26C: Go back and live peacefully between China and Tibet. We could live together but it maybe seems like impossible right now.**

Q: What do you hope that your children and your grandchildren will preserve from Tibet? What part of Tibetan culture and history and religion do you think is important for them to preserve?

**#26C: Yes, of course. Good thing is my daughter married with a Tibetan who came from Tibet, went to school in Utah for his English studies and he's quite learned in Tibetan and he was a teacher in Tibet, I think. So I'm sure she can learn from him lot of the Tibetan history and stuff.**

Q: That's good.

**#26C: So...**

Q: Well, you have helped us learn about some Tibetan history today...



**#26C: Thank you.**

Q: Ngawang-*la*, I want to thank you. I will ask you again at the conclusion, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

**#26C: I don't think so. There's nothing much to, you know...**

Q: Okay. Thank you for sharing your story with us.

**#26C: Sure, you're much welcome.**

Q: Thank you.

**#26C: And you are doing a great job as His Holiness wishes, you know, and thank you for doing all this. So you can preserve something...**

END OF INTERVIEW