

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #30C – Kalsang Yulgial
November 15, 2014

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #30C
2. Interviewee: Kalsang Yulgial
3. Age: 67
4. Date of Birth: 1947
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Phari
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: November 15, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Sakya Monastery, Seattle, Washington, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 00 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter:
14. Videographer: Tony Sondag
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Kalsang Yulgial was born in Phari bordering Sikkim in India. He describes Phari as a trading town where many different types of goods were transferred in and out of India. He was lucky to have the opportunity to attend a private school and he describes the curriculum and methods used for teaching. After the Chinese invasion, the Chinese closed all the Tibetan schools and sent the children to a large Chinese-run school in Phari. Some of the students, including Kalsang Yulgial, were later sent to a Chinese school in Lhasa, but they began to suspect the Chinese education was separating them from Tibetan language and culture.

Kalsang Yulgial was selected by the Chinese to go to a school in China. He explains how the family evaded this by sending him on a trade mission with his stepfather. By the time they returned many Tibetans had started fleeing from the Chinese through Phari. He recounts the circumstances under which his family made their escape journey through Bhutan and into India.

Kalsang Yulgial describes his education in India, then in Denmark and Iran where he received vocational training. He recounts the various positions that he held under the Tibetan government-in-exile after his return to India, starting as a mechanic and finally as a representative of a large refugee settlement.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, education, trade, life under Chinese rule, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India, Tibetan Government-in-exile.

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Interview #30C

Interviewee: Kalsang Yulgial

Age: 67, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: November 15, 2014

[Interviewee speaks in English. No interpreter required.]

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:07

Interviewee #30C: My name is Kalsang Yulgial.

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?

#30C: Sure...

Q: Thank you.

#30C: ...with great pleasure. [Laughs]

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

#30C: Yeah.

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

#30C: [Nods] All right.

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

#30C: All right.

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

00:01:02

#30C: No, not at all.

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

#30C: Thank you.

Q: Let us begin by once more asking your name and where you were born.

#30C: My name is Kalsang Yulgial. I was born in a place called Phari, which is close border towards India through Sikkim. Sikkim is by horse ride is about two days' journey.

Q: What year were you born?

#30C: I really...it's...my Tibetan calendar...it's my year is *khyi*. *Khyi* means dog.

Q: Dog.

#30C: Year of the dog. So I guess it's somewhere 1946-47, around.

Q: Around there?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: So that makes you how old today?

#30C: Now I'm 67 almost, yeah.

Q: Okay and you know, what was the nearest temple or monastery to where you were born in Phari?

00:02:16

#30C: Well, the biggest monastery would be Tashi Lhunpo, which is for us to go closer but for a native place, there is one small monastery called Dromo Gonpa.

Q: Dromo Gonpa.

#30C: Dromo Gonpa, yeah.

Q: Okay. Good and how many...maybe...may I ask what is your father's name and your mother's name?

#30C: My father's name is Sonam Tsering and my mother's name is Tsering Thakchoe.

Q: Tsering Thakchoe.

#30C: My father died when I was somewhere about 5-6 around, yeah.

Q: Oh, you were a boy, a child. And how about your mother? Did she...still alive?

#30C: She and we all came along together, escaped from Tibet and came through Bhutan to India.

Q: Oh, I see.

#30C: That was just...almost I guess end of 1959 after His Holiness the Dalai Lama went over to India.

Q: I see. Okay. So you were born and...you were born in Phari, did you spend your first five years there, 10 years there?

#30C: I was there when I was a kid. I was going to a Tibetan private school.

Q: Really?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: How did a child get to go to a private Tibetan school?

00:03:53

#30C: That's according to family's wish, you know. When they are old enough they try to seek admission in private school and then there if they find that the age is mature enough to admit, then they admit.

Q: And then they admit them. What year did you start?

#30C: I don't remember exact the year but maybe when I was somewhere about 7, 8.

Q: Seven or 8, that's pretty average.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Was this...like who taught at the private school?

#30C: My first school where I went was a place called Gangkyil Lapta. Gangkyil Lapta and you know, that is the school where they have the Tibetan postal service also.

Q: Oh!

#30C: Yeah. So at that time I remember when I was a kid they receive postal service, incoming mails and outgoing mails. They sent it over; when I was a kid I could see that.

Q: It was an exciting place!

#30C: Yeah.

Q: You can see how the postal service worked.

#30C: Yeah, but not really taking much interest on that because we were kids. You know, we never know what's happening.

Q: You didn't understand it.

#30C: So didn't really understand how important it was.

Q: Where was mail coming from?

#30C: From...mostly from India.

Q: Really?

#30C: Yeah, mails coming from India, mails coming around nearby villages. Then they sent over to Lhasa, wherever they need to go...

Q: I see.

00:05:28

#30C: ...through Gyangtse.

Q: Did...why was mail coming from India? Was it from Tibetans living...?

#30C: Because you know what actually happens is Tibet...Phari is a trade center.

Q: Yes.

#30C: So we have almost all the export goods coming from Tibet are pouring into Phari. They sent over to India. But of course, there was no motorable road but they sent by mules, by yaks and by donkeys—carry over and they sent over. Mainly, you know, I remember they export lots of yaks' hair to India.

Q: Did they?

#30C: And wool, a lot of wool.

Q: What did they do with yaks' hair in India?

#30C: Yaks' hair in India, I guess they...I don't know what they produce, but they take it to India.

Q: They took it to India.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: What did they do with yaks' hair in Tibet?

#30C: Tibet, you know, yaks' hair they make big tents, nomad tents.

Q: Right, they wove it.

#30C: Yeah. And then they make kind of you know—hat you call—ropes...

Q: Ropes.

#30C: Different ropes, you know.

Q: They would weave ropes.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: It's very strong.

#30C: Very strong.

Q: Very strong, very natural product.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: So can you tell us some of...first of all how many children were in your family?

00:06:48

#30C: My family, we were...actually my mother had seven kids out of which, out of which...yeah, we were just three left over.

Q: Three survived?

#30C: Three survived and others died, yeah.

Q: Did they die of childhood illnesses?

#30C: Yeah, yeah. I don't know what caused the death but I know four didn't survive. My...I have an elder sister and a younger brother.

Q: You were the middle.

#30C: Yeah, I'm the middle one.

Q: Middle child.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Younger brother. Okay, and then before you went to private school at 7 or 8, do you have any memories as a child before 7 or 8?

#30C: Oh, that's really difficult to remember. I cannot remember anything.

Q: Did you play games as a kid?

#30C: Yeah, we...because in Tibet you don't have any kind of games, you know. Just play around together with the kids.

Q: Just play around with the kids?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: And make your own games.

#30C: [Laughs] That's right.

Q: Make your own games.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: So then you go to school. Is the school in Phari?

00:08:05

#30C: Yeah, Gangkyil School is in Phari.

Q: It's right there in Phari, you said.

#30C: But they just teach Tibetan only.

Q: Was that it?

#30C: No, no other languages. Just Tibetan language, writing and reading, and then we have...every morning we have prayer session.

Q: Okay. About how many children were in the school?

#30C: I guess somewhere around 20.

Q: Were you all in the same class or were they broken up?

#30C: There were no classes differentiated.

Q: No classes.

#30C: But it goes into a section like alphabetical. The first ones who do not know how to write they're being helped by the older ones. They teach them how to write. Then we started learning ourselves, first the alphabets.

Q: What kind of a student were you?

#30C: [Laughs] Well, I was somewhat a medium, yeah.

Q: Medium student.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Medium, medium. Yeah, it's hard to get used to...

#30C: Yeah, we don't have any...I mean like the modern schooling system. You know, we don't have any classified into sections or class and all that. All put together but have kind of different standards of teaching. And the older ones used to help the younger ones, you know.

Q: Did you have desk that you worked at or just...?

00:09:31

#30C: That time we sit on the floor cross-legged. [Laughs] Yeah, and the first thing what we do is, we learn on the wooden plank, you know. Wooden plank where they have the scripts written by the older ones and then we have to keep on writing on that to...to really you get into a shape.

Q: Did you write on top of what was there?

#30C: Yeah, that's right. That's what we do.

Q: You would trace it.

#30C: Yeah, trace it.

Q: Trace it.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: At some point did you learn how to read what you were writing?

#30C: Yeah. While writing we have to say what we are tracing. You know a, b, c, d, ka, kha, ga, nga [Tibetan alphabet]. We have to repeat that. You know, so by that way we learn Tibetan alphabets.

Q: I see. So it was actually the alphabets you were tracing.

#30C: Yeah. That's right.

Q: It wasn't prayers?

00:10:25

#30C: No, no, no. Prayer is separate. The prayer—what they do, every morning they have prayers. First the kids won't know how to pray but then they just sit together and try to

hear. By learning from hearing you can know some of the things, some of the prayers. Then gradually you learn the...there are in Tibetan—we have *uchen* and *umay*, two scripts, the religious script and the other ordinary script, you know. The *uchen* script is mainly used in Tibetan religion, these all books [looks around room] Tibetan religious and religious script, you know. So when we learn that then they will give you the book how to...gradually you learn how to read *uchen*. So then you know how to read and by that way we learn by heart, you learn the prayer.

Q: You learn the prayer then.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Interesting. Can you tell us how long did you go to that school? From age 7 to what?

#30C: I think in that school I might have been about 3-4 years, 3-4 years, yeah. After that, you know the Chinese invasion started. Chinese came in Phari. They started, you know collecting, you know, collecting all the students from private schools. They had build up their own special school and we were put in Tibetan [Chinese] school there.

Q: Did they get permission from the parents?

00:12:07

#30C: [Shakes head] They don't seek permission.

Q: They didn't seek permission?

#30C: They don't seek permission. You know, when they close all the private schools there's no other option than go into the Chinese school, right?

Q: So you're saying...so say you started school maybe around 7 and you went until maybe around 10. So if you were born like say in 1947, you're saying around 1957 in Phari the Chinese were taking children out of the Tibetan school and putting them in Chinese schools.

#30C: They were quite many private small, small schools.

Q: Run by the Chinese?

#30C: No, by the Tibetans.

Q: By the Tibetans?

#30C: By the Tibetans. All those schools were closed and they had a big school, you know, created there and they put all the students in the Chinese school.

Q: Was there any protests by the mothers or the...?

#30C: I guess there was not.

Q: You don't remember that.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember then going to the Chinese school?

#30C: Yeah, I was there in that school for about...really hardly a year or so. Then we were a group of Tibetans were sent by [to] the Chinese school in Lhasa. That's how I reached Lhasa in Tibetan...Chinese school.

Q: So you were sent from the Chinese school in Phari to the Chinese school in Lhasa?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Do you have any idea why? Was everybody picked or just a few students?

#30C: They picked quite some of the... I guess it was somewhere around 20-15 students picked and they sent over.

Q: Do you have any idea why you were picked?

00:13:43

#30C: I have no idea. [Laughs]

Q: Were you considered very smart at that point?

#30C: Well, we really...you know...

Q: You don't know.

#30C: You don't know what's... All we were hoping is, you know, there you get a good education there. So that was our hope and the parents' hope was also that.

Q: Right.

#30C: So...

Q: How far away by walking or...?

#30C: No, not walking. They arranged a truck...

Q: They arranged a truck...

#30C: ...to send over to Lhasa.

Q: How long did it take by truck from Phari to Lhasa?

#30C: I think it took about one day...maybe two days, yeah. We had an overnight stop in Shigatse and the Chinese there had organized food for us.

Q: How did you feel about leaving your mother and your...?

#30C: Well, that time we were just kids, you know. We were so happy. We think that life is going to be very...you know...

Q: ...good adventure.

#30C: [Laughs] ...new life sort of thing, you know, to go to a new school under the Chinese.

Q: What was that school like?

00:14:53

#30C: Where, in Lhasa?

Q: Yeah.

#30C: Lhasa it was...there we were in middle school; yeah, middle school.

Q: You went to a middle school in Lhasa.

#30C: Yeah. Lhasa, yeah, that's right. There were lots of Tibetan students. I guess maybe over a thousand. They'd been collect...you know, they'd been divided into different classes and we were in the sort of beginning...beginners, you know. So there were students all over from Tibet.

Q: And what did they teach?

#30C: They teach Chinese. They teach math. They teach geography and then Tibetan as well. I guess they started teaching Russian alphabet also. Yeah, but we were soon...we found out that the...this was not a really good trick to be in Chinese school. So we sort of by kind of sensing that we are being separated from Tibetan...from families then we try to escape from the Chinese class, you know. [Laughs] At that time we were few, quite few naughty kids. Whenever Chinese class starts, we start escaping, you know avoiding it.

Q: Did they come and get you?

#30C: Yeah, this is school discipline there. They catch you; they'll punish you.

Q: Where can you escape? You're living in...

#30C: I mean just...

Q: ...anywhere outside.

#30C: Yeah, just avoid it and for a Chinese class period and then go somewhere else and you know, group together and play around, you know.

Q: I wonder why you were kind of figuring it out, it wasn't good?

00:16:50

#30C: Yeah. Mainly we felt that the Chinese are trying to, you know, change the attitude of Tibetans.

Q: Ah...

#30C: So that's what we felt. Because we were separated from Chinese, separated from the parents and brought all the way to [Lhasa]. That's why...I guess at the time when His Holiness was...at the time when he was going in India for pilgrimage, that time I was in Lhasa. And I was with the students standing on the line on the streets saying "bye, bye" to His Holiness, you know.

Q: Really?

#30C: Yeah, I remember that. At the time when we were...when I was in Lhasa it was the time when His Holiness went to...

Q: India.

#30C: India. That time I was in Chinese school.

Q: Did your mother...was she able to come and visit you?

#30C: No, no, not at all. You can't. They can't because we were taken over by truck and if they have to come, they have to make their own arrangements. Transportation will be very difficult.

Q: Very difficult. Yeah, she had a younger child.

#30C: Yeah, and plus we have other kids to take care of.

Q: Well, did you ever see your mother again?

00:18:18

#30C: Yeah, then what happened when we were in that school, we were four, four...two of my friends and two girls. We collected together and they [the Chinese] said we will be...very shortly we will be sending to China for higher studies. So what we did was we colluded together and said before we leave we must go and see parents. So we wrote application to the school authority asking, "Before we leave for further studies in China we want to go to see our parents," you see. So luckily they allowed it. So we, all of us, were permitted to go to see parents. That's how the Chinese authorities, they have arranged the

transportation also and they gave coupons for having food on the way, you know. So by that way we came back in Tibet, just say maybe somewhere around 1957-8 around, yeah.

Q: You mean by that way you came back to Phari?

#30C: Yeah, back to Phari.

Q: From Lhasa.

#30C: Yeah. So what I did, my parents did, if I start living in Phari the Chinese may call us again and send back to where they were planning to send us to China for further studies. So what my parents did was that they made me to go out of Phari area. So at the time my parents...at that time my father already, as I told you my father was expired and I have a stepfather and he was doing trade, trading in rural areas. So my mother has sent me with my stepfather to take outside and I stayed away from Phari for about almost nine months.

Q: Did the Chinese ever come to your home and...

#30C: They told me that the Chinese...

Q: ...kept coming?

#30C: The Chinese authorities, they asked where my whereabouts, you know. They said, "Where is he?" So they told lies saying that he went to visit his relatives outside and never sort of revealed that I was with my stepfather.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

00:20:59

#30C: So that way for about nearly nine months I was away. In the meantime the trouble started in Tibet. They started catching monastery abbots; all the trouble started there in Tibet, you know. So...

Q: So if we get a year just to get your story in sync with history here. So if that would have been, let's see, you would have been about 10 something. That would have been like 1957, 58.

#30C: '57, '58 yeah.

Q: This is before the Dalai Lama left?

#30C: Yeah, that's right.

Q: So roughly around '57-'58

#30C: Yeah.

Q: You are kind of on a trip to see relatives with your stepfather.

#30C: Under the pretext of...

Q: Where did he take you? What kind of...?

#30C: I took...I was...he normally goes trading in other areas like towards the Sakya side, Sakya Monastery side...

Q: Did he take you over there?

#30C: ...different villages. Yeah, I've been to Sakya Monastery too. Luckily [I got the] opportunity to visit Sakya Monastery.

Q: How far away is Sakya from Phari?

00:22:09

#30C: Oh, it's very far away. I mean far away in a sense there were no...we have to go on a yak, you know, yak or mule.

Q: Couple of days travel?

#30C: Maybe, it may be about six, seven days. Yeah, by...

Q: ...by yak.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: So he took you there. He wasn't really trading? Was he trying to hide you out?

#30C: No, no. He was trading.

Q: He was trading.

#30C: He was trading. You know what my stepfather was doing? He was getting different clothes from India, Indian tea, Indian sugar, all this stuff and then barter it, exchange with local wool, you know.

Q: Oh, yeah.

#30C: So it's a barter system they have there.

Q: He bartered for wool.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: And then did...had your father been a trader too, your father who died?

#30C: Yeah, my father had been also...

Q: ...a trader.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: So he took you with him to not only Sakya Monastery but other places?

#30C: Other places, yeah. All wherever he went for trading I was with him.

Q: What an...!

#30C: Just to pass my time, you know.

Q: Yeah, I know.

00:23:29

#30C: Otherwise, had I been in Phari I would have been sent to...

Q: Right away back to...

#30C: Back to...

Q: You would have been sent to Beijing.

#30C: By this time I would have been in China somewhere. [Laughs]

Q: But you know, it must have been a kind of...quite an education to travel with, you know, with a good trader like your father, stepfather.

#30C: It's a...I mean actually Tibetan traders, they don't have to be very educated...

Q: No, but I meant you were seeing the world of Tibet.

#30C: I was seeing the areas where my stepfather was going around and doing the trading work and I'm helping him to do the packing and unpacking. Sometimes, you know, I was that time able to read and write so I helped him to, you know, take notes for whatever he wants to do.

Q: You were a big help...

#30C: Yeah.

Q: ...to him. So you were probably about, you think you're about 11.

#30C: 11, yeah.

Q: Eleven, 12 something like that.

#30C: That's right.

Q: Was your mother, did she get in trouble for letting you go to see relatives?

#30C: No.

Q: No, she didn't?

#30C: No.

Q: She didn't, and then when you came back, did the Chinese come again to look for you or did they give up?

#30C: No, at that time then everything has been, you know, changed.

Q: Everything's been changed.

#30C: Changed, yeah. Just after my coming back to Phari I again joined another...by that time all the Chinese...some of the private schools already opened, reopened, you know. So I was again in one of the private schools. Just before my escape, you know, I was in a Tibetan school.

Q: They opened again, the private schools.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Had the Chinese schools closed or something?

00:25:12

#30C: Chinese schools were not running successfully.

Q: My goodness! You know, we didn't talk a lot about this before but by this time you've been a little bit of a young trader, you're seeing things. Tell me about Phari. What was it like?

#30C: Phari is a, you know, as I told you it's a trade center where we get all the goods from other parts of Tibet bringing in Lhasa...from Phari and then from Phari they take it out to India. So whatever Indian goods consumable in Tibet are brought in. That's the center where they bring over and then take to different Tibetan parts, you know. So it's a trade center.

Q: Was it a very scary town or dangerous or was it just more exciting and fun? What was it like?

#30C: It was really for us as kids, you know, it was really fun, you know.

Q: It was a fun place.

#30C: Yeah. I remember because that time they bring all the Indian trucks and jeeps into parts, bringing on the backs or on the mules. Then bring it Phari and they assemble it there, in Phari.

Q: Yes, the actual trucks were brought from India broken up in parts...

#30C: ...split into parts and bring over.

Q: ...and carried on what? Yaks?

#30C: Carried on...no.

Q: People?

#30C: Like chassis, you know the truck chassis, 4-5 people they carry together. I saw it, yeah. They're bringing over and the split parts they bring either on mule or yak or whatever transportation. And then actually they assemble in Tibet.

Q: Did you say the chassis, the bottom part was carried by four or five people?

#30C: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Over the mountains?

00:27:10

#30C: Yeah, they carry like that.

Q: Were there many roads where they could use a truck near Phari? I thought it was very...

#30C: From Phari there is a motorable road right up to Lhasa.

Q: Okay. So they wanted trucks.

#30C: Yeah, trucks and jeeps. I remember some Indian jeeps also brought in and they started assembling there.

Q: That must have been interesting as a young boy to see trucks being put together.

#30C: Yeah, very curious to know how they...I was really interested in how they do that, you know.

Q: Yeah.

#30C: By that time the Chinese have also bringing their military trucks in Phari. They started using it, their jeeps, military jeeps.

Q: So tell me some of the...if we were like a new traveler we could go back in time, what kind of things would we see them selling in Phari? Can you name of the kind of shops and goods that you would see?

#30C: You can see Indian tea, Indian sugar and you know, different fruits, banana, apple all these you can see. They're bringing all the way from India.

Q: Things...

#30C: Because Sikkim is very close, you know. I don't know from where they are bringing but they bring all that.

Q: And material I'm sure, cotton...

#30C: Material...

Q: Clothing?

#30C: Clothing...I really don't remember much.

Q: You don't remember that.

#30C: I don't remember much because that time we were kids, you know. So we...

Q: Yeah, you weren't looking for that.

#30C: ...care to know what's all...[Laughs]

Q: Sugar you could find.

#30C: That's why I was particularly very, well amazed, you know about seeing that truck, you know chassis by 4-5 people standing from all other four ends and then started bringing it, you know.

Q: Could you ever watch them put a truck together or put a car together?

00:29:15

#30C: I saw them bringing in and finally when they started, assembled and they started using, I've seen that.

Q: You did see it. My goodness!

#30C: And I remember, you know Phari is a very cold place.

Q: Cold?

#30C: I remember it was...I guess it was diesel engine, you know. They started putting fire underneath the engine, warming it up. Yeah, I saw that.

Q: Because it would be so cold in winter.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: If it was so cold in wintertime, did traders still come in the winter or only in the summer?

#30C: Winter is actually less. During winter is less.

Q: Less what?

#30C: Less trading.

Q: Less trading.

#30C: Yeah, because the most of the roads are blocked, you know. So it only starts in spring and summer more.

Q: Okay. And so...

#30C: There'll be more flow of, you know, movements of traders.

Q: So what happens to your story? You are saying that you escaped being taken to Beijing. You come back but things are changing you're back at school in Lhasa.

00:30:32

#30C: Yeah, now...

Q: Private school in Lhasa.

#30C: In Lhasa?

Q: Yeah.

#30C: Lhasa, it was a Chinese school.

Q: But when you went...?

#30C: When I came back it was private school.

Q: In?

#30C: In Phari.

Q: In Phari, that's right. Phari school. Then what happened?

#30C: So I was...well, just to pass my time I went to Phari school until we escaped, you know.

Q: How did your mother decide to escape? Was she also with your father, her new husband?

#30C: Yeah, now what actually happens is the time started [when] people started escaping from in our area, from Phari.

Q: Really?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Were there any arrest before you started escaping? Were they arresting?

#30C: I didn't notice anything.

Q: You didn't notice any arrest or anything like that.

#30C: No. But what we did was my stepfather, he took a different route, you know. He went back to the place where we went for trading and went other way, and we came through Bhutan. We escaped through Bhutan.

Q: Why did he go a different way?

00:31:31

#30C: Because he has got a lot of trade goods, you know. So he has to try to finish that up and then also all our valuable things he took it along because we can't bring it, you know. So he took it with him.

Q: He had the transportation.

#30C: Yeah, he had the arrangement to transport.

Q: Yaks and animals.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: What kind of valuable things would a family try to escape with or take with them?

#30C: You know, the...whatever you have, the ornaments and all different types and then best clothes, whatever you have. You know, those are things.

Q: Do you remember...did your mother tell you ahead of time that you were going to escape? Did she tell you that...?

#30C: Yeah, we...you know, we saw...just before we escaped the things are getting very bad there in Phari because people started getting arrested. My...the private school where I've been, my teacher was arrested and taken somewhere; we don't know. And then one of the abbots in the monastery was taken away. So gradually you know, things are getting very unstable there.

So by that way we knew some of the families started leaving, you know but we don't know which route they're taking. We went through Bhutan. Why—because when we were in Phari my family's having...the Bhutanese small traders, they bring, you know grains and goods from Bhutan. They sell in Phari. So our...we used to be...our family used to be one of the, you know, hosts for the Bhutanese traders. So we know some of the traders also. So through them we thought that it'd be easier for us to get through. So that's how...

Q: That's a great idea.

00:33:37

#30C: That's how my mother chose to come to...it's actually, you know, very close.

Q: How close?

#30C: Just crossing, just crossing over a hill we reach the Indian border; I mean the Bhutanese border.

Q: A hill or a mountain?

#30C: Mountain. Mountain, I'm sorry.

Q: Not a hill, you just had one mountain to cross.

#30C: [Laughs]

Q: How many were with you in your escape?

#30C: Me, my brother, my sister and my mother; just four of us.

Q: That was a small party.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Did you bring any yaks or animals?

#30C: No, nothing. We had little bit of, you know, edible goods in our bags. We packed and we went. We left in the middle of night from Phari.

Q: Did you make your house look like you were still living there?

#30C: Yeah, yeah. We have to show as if we are not going anywhere.

Q: How did you do that?

#30C: We just left whatever is there. We left it as it is.

Q: You just left it like we'll be back. We're just round the corner.

#30C: Yeah. [Laughs]

Q: Shopping.

#30C: We never told any neighbors or anybody. It was, you know escaping, it's a kind of secret, you know.

Q: Yes.

#30C: You have to be careful. If the Chinese knew they would have, you know, caught us.

Q: Do you remember what time of year or date it was?

00:35:03

#30C: I don't remember the date and time.

Q: Month?

#30C: Time I remember. In the middle of the night we left.

Q: Was it wintertime or springtime?

#30C: It was just...

Q: Had the Dalai Lama escaped?

#30C: At the time we escaped Dalai Lama was already in India.

Q: Okay, so it was after and he escaped in March.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: So maybe it was in the spring.

#30C: Yeah, maybe in the spring.

Q: Spring or summer.

#30C: The weather wasn't that cold and also it was not snowing. So I guess it maybe somewhere springtime.

Q: Sounds like in the spring of 1958.

#30C: Yeah, maybe.

Q: '59 I mean.

#30C: '59.

Q: '59 because that's when he [Dalai Lama] left.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: How long did it take you to walk there?

#30C: Until we...actually after the...until the border it hardly took about seven, eight hours. But then from border we went all the way down in the Bhutan capital and a place called Paro...

Q: Paro.

#30C: ...Paro, where luckily we met some of my parents' friends who used to come for trade, you know.

Q: How interesting!

#30C: Yeah.

Q: What did they say to you or how did they...?

#30C: They told us that it's better not to go to India. "You better stay in Bhutan." They said they'll help us to arrange to stay.

Q: Ah!

#30C: Yeah, they advised us not to go to India.

Q: Could they tell you why?

#30C: They said India is a very hot place and very hard to live. So it's better to be [in Bhutan] because Bhutan is most, situation, climate, from climatic point of view, from living situation point of view, it's similar to our area, you know. They said it's much easier, much better to be in Bhutan than [India] but as I told you, my, our stepfather went other way round. He had all the goods and valuable things with him. So we made a point to meet somewhere in India.

Q: Did you know where?

00:37:15

#30C: We finally, yeah...we knew. We were [to meet] in Kalimpong.

Q: Did you meet him there?

#30C: Yeah. We came through Bhutan and we reached India and Bhutan border, you know. There's a transit camp. A lot of Tibetan refugees are arriving there, a small place called Buxar.

Q: Oh, yes.

#30C: Buxar, you know?

Q: Umm.

#30C: We were there in transit camp in Buxar. Then from Buxar you know what happened? The exile government is sending all the refugees to Missamari, the hot place where the first Tibetan refugees...and we were supposed to go there. Then we pleaded the Tibetan authority saying that we have a relative coming through other way and we have a point to meet there and kindly allow us to leave. [Laughs]

Q: To leave.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: To stay where?

#30C: To stay where we...my stepfather...

Q: In Buxar?

#30C: No, not stay in Buxar but they were trying to you know...Buxar is a transit camp.

Q: I know.

00:38:25

#30C: I think you might have interviewed many. So that's the place where they sent... Tibetan authority sent them to Missamari, you know, for the Tibetan refugees. So we were told to go to Missamari but we said we can't because we have our stepfather who is coming other way and we have to meet him and kindly allow us to leave. Then luckily they permitted us.

Q: Where did you go to meet him?

#30C: The first thing we...that was the first time we started riding train and then we went to, we went to Kalimpong, you know.

Q: That's where you met him or...

#30C: Yeah.

Q: That was the destination.

#30C: Yeah, that's the place where our stepfather was to come. So we went there and we met them.

Q: Really?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: What was the reunion like?

#30C: [Laughs] It was really kind of, you know, joy as well as sad also because we're not sure how we'll be able to pull on our livelihood. Because when government said...if exile government say we should go, the government will take care of us, but since we're doing our self-supporting and we said we want to go our own [way], lead our own livelihood, do our self-support, you know. So it was kind of, you know...

Q: Challenging.

#30C: Challenging, yeah, heavy responsibility.

Q: Yes, so you didn't want to join any of the refugee or any of the settlements or camps.

#30C: Yeah, the first time.

Q: In the beginning, yeah.

#30C: Then...

Q: Then what?

00:40:10

#30C: Then we came to Kalimpong. We met our stepfather and we lived there for a while. That was in 1959-60, just beginning of '60. So my parents were in...my stepfather and my mother, all...my sister, all are in Kalimpong and I was sent to Dharamsala [laughs] for school, me and my brother.

Q: So you got separated.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: You are always being sent to school, aren't you? By the Chinese, by your mother...

#30C: Yeah. Though my mother is not educated but she's so, you know...

Q: ...in her heart she knows.

#30C: She's very eager to send kids to school.

Q: Interesting. So where did...what school did you go to in Dharamsala?

#30C: I was in TCV [Tibetan Children's Village]. [Laughs]

Q: You went to TCV?

#30C: Me and my brother. Then you know what happened? When we reached Dharamsala, TCV Dharamsala school, I was...my age is...I'm overage. I can't be in school, but my brother was sent to Mussoorie school. There we got separated, my brother and myself. And what happened was that since I learned Tibetan writing and reading in Tibet, I know quite good Tibetan. So I was helping in Tibetan Children's Village to teach the other kids Tibetan.

Q: You became a teacher!

#30C: [Laughs] Somehow, yeah, very bad teacher.

Q: Very bad teacher.

#30C: Not really good.

Q: But you knew more than many children about how to read and write Tibetan.

#30C: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

Q: And they didn't have many teachers.

00:42:04

#30C: That's right, yeah. That time we were short of teachers. So I was teaching the kids there. And the story is very interesting to you because from Mussoorie 20 students were sent to...were supposed to be sent to Denmark for studies.

Q: Yes, okay.

#30C: And unfortunately, one of the students got TB case, you know, tuberculosis when they had a health examination in Delhi. And in his place I was chosen [laughs]...

Q: Oh, my goodness, to go to Denmark!

#30C: ...to go to Denmark. We were...we were two...three students went to have...at that time His Holiness living in the old palace, old palace and the Education Department head took us there to get His Holiness' audience. The Education Officer, he told, "Only one will need to be sent out of three." So His Holiness told me, "You go."

Q: To Denmark?

#30C: Yeah. So out of 20 students from Mussoorie, in place of one student was chosen as one of us. Luckily, I had the opportunity to go. I was chosen and I was sent to Denmark. So among the 20 students I was there.

Q: Where did you go in Denmark?

00:43:41

#30C: Denmark...in Copenhagen.

Q: Copenhagen?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Cold weather!

#30C: That's right.

Q: Lucky boy!

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Nice weather for a Tibetan, yes?

#30C: That's true, yeah.

Q: How long did you study in Copenhagen?

#30C: In Denmark we were for four years.

Q: Four years?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: What were you studying?

#30C: We had basic education. We had our own school, I mean, private tuition. We were learning all subjects like math, English, Tibetan and all that. Yeah, then at the same time they started choosing us for...depending on our interest for vocational training, but somehow for those four years we had our own private school there. Then out of 20, 15 of us

were chosen as vocational trainees, 15 students from Denmark. So we 15 students were sent from Denmark to Iran [laughs] in a Jewish Vocation Training Center.

Q: Jewish!

00:44:55

#30C: Yeah, Jewish Vocational Training Center and there we had vocational training there for almost two years.

Q: My goodness, in Iran! Who would have guessed that you'd wind up in a Jewish Vocational Center in Iran? What kind of trade were you taught?

#30C: I was in feeder's mechanic.

Q: Mechanic.

#30C: Yeah, this thing...

Q: I knew you were going to put cars together someday.

#30C: [Laughs] Yeah, that's right. I don't...

Q: You became a mechanic!

#30C: Yeah, lathe operation and all that feeding, feeders, yeah.

Q: Really?

#30C: We were 15 students. We were in the same trade, same stream, you know, vocational training.

Q: Wow!

#30C: For two years, then last...after completion of that two years vocation, we came back to India, 1966 I guess...'67, yeah '67.

Q: Where did you go in India?

#30C: The first thing we had was an audience of His Holiness. Then we 15 were split for different directions and I was one of them to sent to get a training for a kind of, you know, machine which make threads, you know. They have the first woolen machine in Bir Settlement. So those machines were being manufactured in India, in a place called Panipat. So me and one of my friends, we were together to see those machines, how they assemble, how they work. We were there for the first time to oversee all that. After finishing the machines, they brought it up to Bir Settlement and they have that woolen machine.

Q: Woolen machine?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: How to actually...so it's spinning? Spinning, it was with the machine?

00:46:57

#30C: Yeah, yeah, spinning machine.

Q: A spinning machine, not a hand machine?

#30C: No, not hand machine. Spinning machine.

Q: I know, a spinning machine.

#30C: They have all figured out, the wool split and then they bring in...that's spin and finally they make...and the first part, the first thing in Bir Settlement when they had the woolen center, they started producing blankets, you know.

Q: You needed blankets too.

#30C: Yeah. So I was...me and my friend, we were two who went there.

Q: In Bir?

#30C: In Bir. Bir Settlement.

Q: Oh, my goodness! Did you bring the machines with you?

#30C: Machines, they already sent it over.

Q: They were already sent over. How big are the machines?

#30C: Very big ones.

Q: Are they big?

#30C: Yeah, very big.

Q: Like the size of what?

#30C: Oh, I think very tall and very big.

Q: Really?

#30C: There are different machines, shearing machine that shears the wool. Then they have the wool that kind of, you know, make it soft. Then finally they put into a, fit it into a spinning machine and then they make thread.

Q: And then they make the thread.

00:48:05

#30C: So I mean that's a very big center. We had a Tibetan woolen machine in Bir Settlement.

Q: Yes, yes, I saw the carpet making but that...

#30C: Carpet is something...

Q: ...different but they needed the wool. They have to still spin the wool.

#30C: They need the wool but that's a different process.

Q: I know. It's a different job.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: How did you like this work, fixing...?

#30C: Well, it was very experiencing, I mean, kind of work because to see all that. Because we learned some vocational work training we had in Iran. So that could be used there to see how to maintain the machine, how to fit the things in and we had those machines installed in Bir Settlement. But somehow, you know it didn't work out and they closed it.

Q: Oh, didn't work. Did they do spinning machines anywhere else in the Tibetan settlement?

#30C: No, no, that was the first place where they had that.

Q: ...where they tried it and it didn't work.

#30C: I don't know. Somehow...because I didn't stay long also. After about a year or so I was transferred to another Tibetan settlement.

Q: To do what?

#30C: To again...to oversee mechanical garage work.

Q: A garage?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Which settlement?

#30C: That was...in Himachal...

Q: Yeah, Pradesh? Himachal?

00:49:29

#30C: Himachal Pradesh but it's a place called...what's that place called? You know, they have a...the settlement is called Taopon Settlement.

Q: No, I don't know it.

#30C: It's on a hill. They cut rocks and bring down. They had about 10-12 trucks. So there was a garage where they maintain the trucks. So I was put there, in charge of that.

Q: You must have had a very natural talent for machinery, did you?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Did you? I mean, were you...

#30C: Yeah, yeah.

Q: You were pretty good at it, I think.

#30C: Yeah, at that time I was very, quite good.

Q: Put in charge of it. You know, I wanted to just because it's so unusual for a Tibetan—what was it like to go to Iran, to be in Iran? That's a whole Muslim country. Did you...?

#30C: Iran, it was chosen because that was the, that was the only...I mean we were sponsored by a Norwegian Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Organization. They sponsored us and they found that's the only...

Q: A Norwegian Refugee...is that what you're saying?

#30C: Yeah, Norwegian Refugee Council.

Q: A Norwegian Refugee Council...

#30C: Yeah.

Q: ...sponsored you.

#30C: They sponsored us, the 15 of us.

Q: To go to Iran.

#30C: To Iran, that Vocational Training Center.

Q: How did you handle the weather in Iran? That's very...

00:51:01

#30C: I mean, yeah, it was really very different over there.

Q: Very different. Doesn't it get very hot in the summer?

#30C: That's true, yeah.

Q: Did you learn...?

#30C: Very hot.

Q: Very hot.

#30C: You get the sandstorm also.

Q: Can you get the sandstorm?

#30C: I saw that.

Q: What an adventuresome life! Sandstorm! Did you learn anything about the Muslim religion while you were there?

#30C: No.

Q: You didn't.

#30C: We were completely separate.

Q: Separate in your...

#30C: Fifteen of us were in a hostel, you know.

Q: In a hostel.

#30C: We lived together; we had our own accommodation together and we were having a separate kind of vocational training.

Q: I see. So just because the story could take us somewhere else, where did you go after you were fixing trucks for the rock splitting people? What happened next?

#30C: Then from there subsequently I was again transferred back to Dharamsala.

Q: And to do what?

#30C: From Dharamsala they have sent me to south in Bylakuppe. Bylakuppe you saw that big workshop? Have you seen that? Where the tractors are being repaired, Tractor Section?

Q: In Bylakuppe?

#30C: In Bylakuppe there's a big workshop.

Q: Oh, workshop in Bylakuppe. So you went to Dharamsala. Did you work in Dharamsala or just...?

#30C: I worked for about six, seven months in the Department of Home.

Q: Home Department.

#30C: Home Department.

Q: Home Department and then to Bylakuppe...

#30C: Yeah, I've been transferred...

Q: ...for the truck?

#30C: The workshop.

Q: Truck workshop.

#30C: Yeah, Cooperative Society Workshop is there.

Q: Oh, the Cooperative Society. We know that.

#30C: You know that, right?

Q: Oh, yeah.

#30C: In Cooperative Society they have a section of truck...I mean workshop.

Q: Do you know Pema Delek?

#30C: Yeah, I know him. He's my friend.

Q: He's your friend. He will be happy to know that we interviewed you.

#30C: Yeah, you can tell him.

Q: Because he is supporting this project very much.

#30C: I see. Okay.

Q: Very much. We will take your picture and send it to him.

#30C: Pema Delek, he is the...right now he is the President of Federal Cooperation, yeah.

Q: Yes, he is. He is. So there you worked how long...so you are here, how did you get here from Bylakuppe?

00:53:15

#30C: Here? [Laughs] From Bylakuppe as I told you, after that four years...almost four years in Bylakuppe workshop, again I was sent to Orissa Tibetan Settlement, Orissa Tibetan Settlement.

Q: Orissa, yeah.

#30C: Orissa Tibetan Settlement.

Q: To do...?

#30C: Where they had again the same workshop, and I was there as the in-charge.

Q: So you went to Orissa?

#30C: Yeah, from Orissa...I worked there for about three years in the workshop. Then again I got transferred to Mundgod workshop, Mundgod Tibetan Workshop.

Q: We know Mundgod. We did many interviews there.

#30C: While you're passing through you must have seen that big workshop there.

Q: Sure, I did, and then what happened?

#30C: From there again I've been transferred to...I mean it's a Tibetan Government...I was working under Tibetan Government, you know...

Q: ...for many...

#30C: So they transferred me to Hunsur Tibetan Settlement.

Q: Hunsur?

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Oh!

#30C: Hunsur.

Q: Hunsur? Isn't that...?

#30C: Hunsur, that's...from Bylakuppe it's about two hours drive.

Q: Yes, yes. We were there. Hunsur, we went there. I think we did some interviews there. Hunsur, yes. How interesting! And then?

00:54:35

#30C: From Hunsur again to Bhandara Tibetan Settlement; from Bhandara again back to Bylakuppe as a Representative.

Q: Oh, you were the head. You were the Representative in Bylakuppe?

#30C: Yeah. I was first there for a year [as the] Representative in the New Settlement.

Q: I see, yes.

#30C: We have two Settlements at Bylakuppe, Old and New, right?

Q: I know.

#30C: New Settlement, I was there for about a year. At the time when 1,000 Tibetans were settling in America, I was the Representative in New Settlement.

Q: Wow!

#30C: While processing the admitted Tibetans to go to...

Q: Processing them, the thousand, to go.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: What year was that?

#30C: That was nineteen...let me see...nineteen...

Q: 1990s?

#30C: No, no, not '90s. 1996...[tries to recall]. It maybe '94. '94 or '93 I guess. Right? I think so.

Q: Okay.

#30C: From there again I've been transferred back to Dharamsala and worked for the new arrivals [from Tibet], Tibetan Reception Center.

Q: Oh, the new one in Dharamsala.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: The new Reception Center.

#30C: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

00:56:04

#30C: Because that Reception Center has now been shifted down to Transit School.

Q: Yes.

#30C: Before that it was there at the top, McLeod Ganj.

Q: I see. Yes, right. It was moved down.

#30C: Yeah, moved down. Before moving I was there on the top where the Tibetan Reception Center was there. [Laughs] So [I've] been moving around.

Q: You have done great service in many different areas, haven't you?

#30C: From Reception Center again I went back to publishing the Tibetan textbooks Publishing Center, Cultural and Printing Center for about a year. Thereafter, in 1998, end of '98, yeah, '98 I was transferred to Bylakuppe Old Settlement as Representative. [Laughs] '98.

Q: That's quite a journey.

#30C: Yeah, from '98 until end of '99 I was there as a Representative.

Q: Representative, you're going to have to write all these dates out for your own history.

#30C: True.

Q: That's really true. Wow! Obviously there's another 15 years to account for but since we have to stop soon, why don't we get some idea of...you know, what you...what do you think is important that the Tibetans are bringing to the world? You've been, you've travelled to many, many settlements, many countries in the world, what do you think is the contribution of the Tibetan people?

00:57:40

#30C: I guess you know, it's a kind of, you know, one way it's sad that the Chinese invaded Tibet. The other way, it's a kind of help for us to open up to the world. So I think this

losing our country is one way it's very sad, in another way the whole Tibet was opened for the world and I think this has given an opportunity to the youngsters to go into a modern education, to gain modern education and then keep our own culture and religion. So this has helped a lot. Yeah, I feel that it's called, you know...in Tibetan we call it *kye-ngen dokshar*. *Kye-ngen* means crisis, *dokshar* means it's turned into an auspicious way.

Q: Auspicious way.

#30C: Yeah, which means it has helped us to open up to the world. We are now...before 1959 Tibet was a closed country. No one knows about Tibet. So by the grace of Chinese invasion we are opened up and then we are...the Tibetans can do what we want to and we are capable of doing anything.

Q: Yes.

#30C: So this has given, I mean through kind of the lead and guidance given by His Holiness, people have gained education, had modern education, and be able to survive, our own culture and nationality. So I think it's a tremendous gate opening, rather. Yeah, I feel so.

Q: Right. Well, I think you have given us by giving us your story an understanding of all the gates that opened for you in your life, all the countries you visited, all the work you did and we thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

#30C: Yeah, it's a pleasure for me to talk to you, also to interview me.

Q: We'll be happy to share your story with the world. Thank you so much.

#30C: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW