

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #42M – Dolma Yangzom
April 12, 2010**

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #42M
2. Interviewee: Dolma Yangzom
3. Age: 79
4. Date of Birth: 1931
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Lhasa
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 12, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Old Palace, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 52 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dolma Yangzom had a very special childhood. She spent most of her early years working in the Norbulingka, summer palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Lhasa. Her father was a tailor for His Holiness' family and she helped to stitch clothes and clean for Gyalyum Chenmo, His Holiness' mother, and for his elder sister. She narrates a vivid picture of life at the Norbulingka and her relationship with Gyalyum Chenmo and other family members.

Dolma Yangzom describes the gradual worsening situation in Lhasa and the tumultuous event in March 1959 when the population of the city came out to guard His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Dolma Yangzom was a witness to this event that culminated in the stoning to death of a Tibetan man who was believed to be a spy for the Chinese.

Dolma Yangzom was among His Holiness' entourage during his escape to India. She describes His Holiness' attire, the convoy and the hardships experienced during the journey. In India she and her father took up work in a carpet factory established by the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, Dalai Lama, first appearance of Chinese, Norbulingka, invasion by Chinese army, life under Chinese rule, March 10th Uprising, Dalai Lama's escape, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #42M

Interviewee: Dolma Yangzom

Age: 79, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 12, 2010

Question: Could you please tell us your name?

00:00:23

Interviewee #42M: Dolma Yangzom.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans to share with the younger generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and people in the outside world, so that we can document the true history and beliefs and culture of the Tibetan people.

#42M: Okay.

Q: Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use your interview?

00:01:14

#42M: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#42M: [Nods]

Q: If any time during the interview you wish to take a break, let me know.

00:01:29

#42M: Okay.

Q: If there is any question you'd rather not answer, just say "I'd rather not answer that."

#42M: Okay.

Q: If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would it make a problem for you?

00:01:52

#4M: There will be no problem. I will tell you the facts. I lived in Lhasa proper, all along [while in Tibet].

Q: That's perfect. That's what we want to hear. I very much appreciate your coming today to talk with us.

#42M: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la* 'respectful term for mother,' please take your time if you need some time to think when we ask you a question and anything you want to add if we don't ask, feel free to do so, okay?

00:02:34

#42M: Okay.

Q: We are not expecting you to know anything other than your own experience because you are an expert on what you experienced and that is really the only thing we are interested in.

#42M: Okay. Shall I relate them now?

Q: We will ask a question and please answer that.

00:03:00

#42M: Okay.

Q: Let's us go back to when you were 11 years old and that's a long time ago. What do you remember from your childhood when you were around 11 or 12? What are some of your early memories of your childhood in Lhasa?

#42M: I can remember that when the Chinese first arrived, I was about 11 years old. Behind the *lingkor* 'circumambulation route' in Lhasa there was a bridge called the *Mondoe Zampa* and they reached there, beating on drums that went "chem, chem, chem." Their faces were painted and they were about 100 in number. That was the first time in Lhasa.

Children and elderly women asked them why they had come to Lhasa. All the children spit on them and threw stones. The elderly [women] flapped their *pangden* 'multi-colored apron worn by married.' They [the Chinese] did not even glance at us. They were real cats. Gently and quietly, they entered the Lhasa Kyidhuk. I heard the Kyidhuk was the house where the Chinese used to live a long time ago.

Q: What's the significance of the beating of the aprons?

00:05:19

#42M: Beating the apron is considered extremely bad. Very old ladies with white hair flapped their aprons and wept saying, "Why have you come to our country?" And still they [the Chinese] did not glance at us. However much the children shouted, spit or threw stones, they marched on straight into the Kyidhuk, not even glancing at us. That was the first time the Chinese came; marching from across the *Mondoe Zampa* of Lhasa.

Q: What were the Chinese wearing? Were they the army? Had they on uniforms?

#42M: They were wearing colorful clothes with headdresses and had their faces painted. They went “chem, chem, chem” beating on something. There were only about 100 of them then. They were not adults but looked like children and did not even glance at us, pretending not to have heard us. They were real cats when they first came. It's incredible how silently they came in.

Q: If they seemed so gentle and were not dressed in military uniform and they were not carrying weapons or anything, why do you think that the people of Lhasa was so upset of them being there?

00:07:58

#42M: Then the people followed them and they entered the house called Kyidhuk, which is located in the Bakor 'Central Square in Lhasa' and shut the door. Then we came back. Following this, the Chinese numbers began to increase. Earlier there were no Chinese at all. I wonder what they were! They were dressed in colorful costumes; their faces were painted red and they wore [makes sign of headdress]. They looked very fearsome.

Q: What do you remember about some early memories about this time of your father and mother?

#42M: My parents remarked, "What a disaster that the Chinese have come here. They are liars. At present they are not reacting to us but they are liars. They are real cats. Nothing good will come out of it." They were real cats since they did not react. The children rebuked them so much. They entered the Kyidhuk and gradually their number increased. Much later, there were many Chinese dressed in the proper Chinese dress.

Q: When did the first Chinese in uniform arrive? How old were you when you saw them?

00:10:32

#42M: I must have been about 13 when I saw them. There were many who were dressed in blue. I heard the Chinese arrived at night, since they were not seen during the day time. The Chinese came at night and the next morning, we could see a host of them.

Q: Were they just all over the city or in certain areas of the city?

#42M: They were in the Kyidhuk at the Bakor. Kyidhuk was a large building. They arrived and directly entered this building.

Q: The Chinese in blue uniforms, did they stay in Lhasa or everywhere?

00:11:43

#42M: Those in blue gradually grew in numbers over time. People used to say that those were the real Chinese.

Q: Where did they live?

#42M: They lived in the Kyidhuk. The name of the house they lived in was called Kyidhuk. It was called Lhasa's Kyidhuk and was located in the Bakor.

Q: Bakor is like the center of Lhasa. Did you have any interactions with the Chinese people during this period when you were 11-13? Did you have any personal interactions with anyone?

00:12:39

#42M: There were absolutely no interactions. My family never allowed it. My family was involved in tailoring for the mother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Norbulingka [Summer Palace of His Holiness]. We did not have any interaction with the Chinese; that would never be allowed.

Q: Both your mother and father were tailors?

#42M: My father was a tailor while my mother stayed home to cook and do other household works. My father went to the Norbulingka every day. He also took me along with him to the Norbulingka.

Q: When you saw the Norbulingka for the first time, do you remember what surprised you? What impressed you about it?

00:14:12

#42M: We were permanently serving Gyalyum Chenmo 'Great Mother' [the mother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] at the Norbulingka. That was also why it became possible for us to make our escape. Otherwise we would not know that His Holiness was leaving. Gyalyum Chenmo once said, "Now there is no need to stitch any more clothes. This is enough." His Holiness' elder sister Tsering Dolma-*la*, who is no more now, would be told by Gyalyum Chenmo, "Do not stitch any more clothes. It is enough." Tsering Dolma-*la* would reply, "Mother, what are you thinking in your heart? I need clothes to change." Gyalyum Chenmo is the Jetsun Dolma and she knew [of the impending occupation].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Jetsun Dolma is?

Interpreter to interviewer]: The Goddess Tara.

#42M: Then when I turned around 16, countless number of Chinese arrived in Lhasa. The Chinese in blue were everywhere. When I went out to play, my parents advised me, "The Chinese will give you many presents but do not accept them." Many children were captured and put in trucks [by the Chinese]. Two truckloads of children were taken away. When the children cried, they were given goodies. Children were captured and loaded on to the trucks. They took away around two truckloads of children from Lhasa. The children did not return when we fled in '59. Many children were taken away.

Q: Do you know where they were taken?

00:17:37

#42M: I heard that the children were taken to school. It used to be said in Lhasa that they might have been taken to China because they did not return. They [the parents] were told that they would be brought back in two or three years, but that never happened. There were about two truckloads of children. When the children cried, they were given goodies which made them quite. About two truckloads of children were taken away. [Shakes head]

Q: When His Holiness' mother said to you "we don't need to stitch any more," how old were you when she said that?

#42M: I might have been about 13 or 14 or 15 at that time. She is the Goddess Tara.

Q: *Ama-la*, can you describe the Norbulingka to us? What did it look like? What was special about it?

00:19:07

#42M: The Norbulingka is wonderful. It is wonderful. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's residence had gold, pearl, coral and everything that was precious. And when His Holiness made his escape, he did not even have water to drink. An elderly person of Tibet was said to have told His Holiness, "You should not remain here. It is better for you to leave."

We came to know of it because we were serving at the Norbulingka. They [the Chinese] cheated us and occupied Tibet.

[To the interpreter] Please tell her [the interviewer] that His Holiness was very young at that time and they [the Chinese] cheated us and forcefully occupied Tibet. They cheated and forcefully occupied Tibet. His Holiness was very young and could not speak [to oppose the Chinese].

Q: What was the garden like in Norbulingka?

#42M: There were beautiful flowers; you could find the best flowers there. The Norbulingka of Lhasa was immensely beautiful.

Q: Were there any special animals there?

00:21:30

#42M: There were no animals there. There were a lot of flowers; different kinds of flowers but there were no animals.

Q: When you went with your father, could you describe what a usual day was like when you went with your father and when you arrived at the Norbulingka? Tell us what you would do?

#42M: When I reached there, I engaged in stitching clothes and many such things. I swept the floors and washed the clothes of Gyalyum Chenmo.

Q: Was your father just working for His Holiness' mother or were there other members of His Holiness' family for whom he also made clothes?

00:23:04

#42M: He stitched the clothes of Gyalyum Chenmo, Tsering Dolma-la, the elder of His Holiness, and there were other members, too. At times he was called upon to stitch robes for His Holiness.

Q: How did your father become the tailor of the family of His Holiness? How did that happen? Do you know?

#42M: We had been serving since the time of my father's father. It was since a long time ago. My grandfather was so old that his body was like this [bends low]. Before his death he told His Holiness, "Kundun, you cannot stay for long."

Q: Kundun?

00:24:23

#42M: We addressed His Holiness as Kundun because his mother addressed him so. Since his mother addressed him as Kundun, we were also in the habit of addressing His Holiness so. It was said that he [grandfather] who was very, very old told His Holiness, "Times are not good. You cannot stay for long." At that time His Holiness was very young and gradually it [the occupation] happened. He [grandfather], as an old man had a premonition about the terrible doings of the Chinese.

Q: Where did your father get the material to make the clothes for the family of His Holiness? Was there a special place where he would get the materials?

#42M: He purchased those in Lhasa. Such things were plentiful in Lhasa. Different kinds of fabrics were available.

Q: In the shops?

00:25:47

#42M: Yes, there were many shops in Lhasa. There were many shops in the Bakor that belonged to Muslims, Tibetans and Nepalese. The Bakor was surrounded by shops.

Q: Do you remember any special colors that His Holiness' mother particularly liked or His Holiness' older sister?

#42M: They preferred the color *mukpo*, like this [points to apron].

Q: Brown.

00:26:39

#42M: They did not wear many colors.

Q: He was mostly making *chupa* 'traditional dress' for them?

#42M: Yes, *chupa*.

Q: How did they treat you? His Holiness' mother and older sister, how did they treat you?

00:27:21

#42M: They were very...and then there was Ngari Rinpoche [the younger brother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama]. When one [I] went to the Norbulingka, one [I] was not allowed to dress in *chupa*. One [I] wore a pair of pants and had shaven head.

Q: Who?

#42M: I. One [I] had to go to the Norbulingka that way. One [I] was not allowed to go to the Norbulingka dressed grandly.

Q: You dressed in pants?

00:27:51

#42M: At that time I was very young. However, it was a must for elderly women to dress in *chupa*. Adults were not allowed in if they were not wearing *chupa*. I was a child and I had shaven head. I wore a pair of pants and a shirt. Gyalyum Chenmo would say, "Do not you have a *chupa* to wear?" She immediately sent someone to buy material and said, "Wear the *chupa* tomorrow." I did not even know to tie the *keru* 'belt.'

It was very far from Lhasa to Norbulingka and we had to go walking. So we started very early in the morning.

Q: How did His Holiness' mother and older sister treat you?

#42M: They would tell me, "Do the cleaning and stitching well. Make the place clean." I was a child and perhaps I did not do the cleaning too well at times. She would hold my ear and say, "That is dirty. See the dirt that is left there." [Laughs]

Q: Did you ever play with Ngari Rinpoche?

00:29:48

#42M: He played a lot!

Q: Have you played with him?

#42M: Yes, he played [with me]. If he had any delicacies, he would drop them around without my knowledge. When I found them, I would eat them as I was a child and he would remark, "That's dirty. Would you eat something that is dropped in the Lhasa Bakor?" He had been watching to see if I picked them up or not! I was a child and when I found something to eat, I ate it!

Q: Did you like him?

00:30:37

#42M: He was a very fine person.

Q: When your father would make clothes for His Holiness, would he actually go and measure His Holiness personally or would somebody else do it?

#42M: He did it. I was not allowed inside. My father took the measurements. I was a girl and was not allowed in the presence of His Holiness. My father took the measurements and did the stitching.

Q: So he did go.

00:31:34

#42M: Yes. My father went and took the measurements.

Q: What kind of clothes was His Holiness wearing at this time when he was so young?

#42M: The same clothes as he is wearing now.

Q: The monk's robes?

00:31:57

#42M: Yes, he wore the monk's robes.

Q: So he wasn't making any clothes that he wore during special occasions? He was just making monk's robes?

#42M: Yes, only that and no other clothes. He only wore that.

Q: When making the robes for His Holiness, did your father have to do any kind of particularly special things when he was making these clothes? Did he use different procedures for making His Holiness' clothes compared to other people's clothes?

00:33:00

#42M: While making the clothes for His Holiness, all the other clothes, belonging to the Gyalyum Chenmo or others must be removed. His Holiness' robes were stitched separately. Nobody else's clothes must be mixed with His Holiness' robes at the time of stitching.

Q: Were His Holiness' robes exactly the same as every other monk or was there anything slightly different?

#42M: It was the same. There was nothing different. He wore the same everyday.

Q: Can you tell us any other memory you have of this time because it was such a special time and you are the only person we talked to, who got inside the Norbulingka? Do you have any other memories that you want to share with us about this time in your life?

00:34:34

#42M: Not everyone was allowed inside [the Norbulingka]. There were security guards at the gate. Though we came everyday, still we were frisked every morning. They did not allow everyone to enter.

Q: What happened to the robes of His Holiness that he outgrew? What happened to those robes? Do you know?

#42M: The old robes were folded and stacked. During the time of His Holiness's escape, he had on a *chupa* 'traditional coat.' He normally never wore *chupa*. He wore a boot of yellow color and the dress on the escape journey. He was requested that he don those clothes and not the robes. He was offered a brown costume and as it was cold in Tibet, a yellow knitted cap and a pair of boots.

Q: Did your father make these clothes too?

00:36:57

#42M: The *chupa* was offered by His Holiness' steward. I heard he [His Holiness] refused to wear the *chupa* but was requested to do so. He was helped to don it.

Q: Did you, before this day when His Holiness left and we definitely want to get to the story of you leaving with him, ever see His Holiness at the Norbulingka?

#42M: It was only occasionally that I got to see His Holiness. If Gyalyum Chenmo lived here, His Holiness' quarters were that side, separately. It was very rare. I think it was Wednesday that there was an audience for the whole of Lhasa. On that day, one must be dressed in *chupa* to be allowed inside the Norbulingka. Except on those occasions, we could not see him.

Q: On these Wednesdays, what would happen? They would come around Norbulingka and how would they see His Holiness?

00:38:53

#42M: On this day the people were allowed to see His Holiness. One could not see him everyday. One could just take a glance and keep going. One must not cough and continue to move along silently. One had to dress in a *chupa*.

Q: Where was the audience given?

#42M: At the Norbulingka.

Q: Were everybody allowed inside?

00:39:14

#42M: No! His Holiness looked out through the window pane, but none could come inside the room. One took a glimpse of him through the glass. One could not approach His Holiness.

Q: So they were passing by the window and looking at him.

#42M: When His Holiness looked out through the window, one glanced at him. However, these days in India, one can see him like the sun. It was not like that in Lhasa.

Q: When you saw His Holiness; when you caught glimpses of His Holiness, what was he doing; not on the Wednesdays?

00:40:27

#42M: I could only catch a fleeting glimpse. He would quickly go into his room. I could catch a glimpse only from afar. He never walked towards us or spoke to us.

Q: How did His Holiness' family treat the people who worked under them?

#42M: There were not many family members, only Ngari Rinpoche and Semo Kusho 'Princess' [Tsering Dolma]...

Q: The workers.

00:41:17

#42M: His Holiness did not even come often to Gyalyum Chenmo. Inside His Holiness' quarters were the teachers and others who worked for him. His Holiness recited a lot of prayers. He recited in a very loud voice. Before Tibet was occupied, His Holiness used to intone in an extremely loud voice. He used to chant the prayers so much.

Q: You could hear him reciting his prayers?

#42M: Yes, I could hear him reciting his prayers.

Q: How did His Holiness' family treat the people who worked under them?

00:42:39

#42M: There were not many workers. Not many people were allowed inside the Norbulingka. His Holiness was served his meals separately. His sister Tsering Dolma-la used to cook [for the other family members]. Not everyone could enter the Norbulingka.

Q: What kind of food did you use to eat when you were there?

#42M: I mostly ate *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' If there were any vegetables, I ate it along with the *tsampa* and if that was not available, I ate the *tsampa* with tea. Meat and garlic were not allowed there.

Q: Meat was not allowed?

00:44:11

#42M: Meat was not allowed in the Norbulingka. Meat and garlic were never allowed.

Q: Nobody in Norbulingka ate meat including His Holiness and His Holiness' family?

#42M: I do not think His Holiness ate [meat]. When I took *tsampa* with me, Gyalyum Chenmo would ask me, "Have you brought meat? Do not eat garlic. Do not eat meat."

Q: Just in the Norbulingka?

00:44:57

#42M: Yes, she used to say that in the Norbulingka.

Q: Did the Gyalyum Chenmo eat meat?

#42M: No, she did not. She never ate it. She took milk. She never ate [meat].

Q: At all?

00:45:17

#42M: She never ate [meat]. She used to drink milk.

Q: Do you know why this rule was given—"no meat and no garlic"?

#42M: "Do not eat [meat and garlic] in the Norbulingka. Have you brought meat and garlic? Show me," she [Gyalyum Chenmo] would say and then search my bag in the morning when I brought my *tsampa*. I used to mix it [*tsampa*] with sugar and tea and eat it. "That is good. Do not eat garlic. Do not bring meat. Do not eat it. One must not eat a lot of meat," she would say.

Q: What about onions? Did she anything about onions?

00:45:17

#42M: We never used onions. I used to bring *tsampa* [from home] and they [Gyalyum Chenmo and family] provided me with tea. I ate that mixture.

Q: Do you remember any particularly memorable day at the Norbulingka in your childhood? Maybe something that happened that was unusual.

#42M: I cannot remember. When I reached the Norbulingka, I used to feel so relaxed. I felt relaxed and happy. My mother would wake me early in the morning. I quickly got up, washed myself and set out from Lhasa. When I reached the Norbulingka, I used to feel so relaxed. I felt so happy serving them. However, nobody was allowed to stay back at night. I had to set off to Lhasa at five o'clock.

Q: You mean none of the workers were allowed to stay?

00:48:26

#42M: Everyone left at five o'clock.

Q: Were you able to spend much time in the garden?

#42M: It was very beautiful in the garden. The flowers were so nice. If you just walked outside, there were many varieties of flowers. The flowers were extremely beautiful.

Q: Did you go there?

00:49:00

#42M: Yes, I went to the garden. I believe the flowers were brought from abroad.

Q: Did you ever pick any of the flowers?

#42M: No, I did not. You were not allowed to pick the flowers.

Q: I want to go back to the day His Holiness' mother said "we don't need to stitch any more." Why did she say that?

00:49:55

42M: The Goddess Tara [Gyalyum Chenmo] knew about it. So she said it was useless to stitch more clothes. Normally, Gyalyum Chenmo used to give away used clothes and she presented me this one.

Q: Which one?

#42M: This *pangden* [points to apron]. At that time I was young and unmarried. I told her, "Ama-la, who will wear this big one [apron]?" She said, "You will grow older and I will get you married with someone. You must wear it then." I went and told Tsering Dolma-la, "Ama-la gave me this, but who will wear such a big one?" "No, you must keep it. She has presented it to you, so you must keep it. Later you must get married. Gyalyum Chenmo will arrange that," she said. I was young and felt shy. The next day when I saw Gyalyum Chenmo, I felt so embarrassed.

This [touches her apron] was Gyalyum Chenmo's apron. She gave away a lot of slightly used clothes to people. She knew it [had a premonition about the occupation].

Q: When she was doing this, you were about 13 or 14?

00:52:16

#42M: At that time I was not married. I asked her who would wear such a big one because the girls of Lhasa wore small ones [aprons]. She advised me to keep it.

Q: So you were about 13 or 14?

#42M: Perhaps I was about 14.

Q: Who did she give her old clothes to?

00:53:03

#42M: There were people around, like the officials whom Gyalyum Chenmo knew and gave the clothes. Others requested for the clothes, not to wear them but to keep them as protection for oneself. "Take it, take it" she would say. She had the premonition even then.

Q: What was happening in Lhasa during that time that His Holiness' mother was giving away the clothes?

#42M: At that time, it [the situation] was not so bad in Lhasa. Then it gradually turned bad. Men were captured. We used to come very early to the Norbulingka and people spread the rumor that leopards lurked among the bushes of the tree lined avenue leading to the Norbulingka and that we would be eaten. There were people who spread such rumors. During such times, the Chinese seized people and beat them without any reason. From then on, it became worse and worse.

Q: Who beat whom?

00:54:47

#42M: The Chinese beat the Tibetans. They captured the people they knew that were devoted to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They were beaten until they were half dead, based on false allegations. The Chinese are liars. These days when I visit the temples and pray, I pray that there is the law of karma. Tibet was forcefully occupied. His Holiness was so young at that time.

Q: Did you see any of those things [the beatings] going on?

#42M: Yes, I did. My father's relative was very devoted to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. One day he was at the Bakor and a Chinese sidled up to him and shoved him. He exclaimed, "Why did you push me?" He [the Chinese] had pushed him but falsely claimed that he was pushed instead. He [the relative] was thrashed soundly. When I returned home in the evening, he was almost dead. I saw him with my very own eyes. I asked the reason and was told that the Chinese were starting to use force on us. He was beaten without even a word.

Q: Was he your father's brother, your uncle?

00:56:45

#42M: Yes. Later people were captured without any reason and thrown in jails. They indiscriminately caught people even though they had not said a word. They [the Chinese] were liars.

Q: As you said the situation started to deteriorate in Lhasa. Were the Chinese coming around Norbulingka at all?

#42M: They were not allowed. There were police guarding the place and they would not permit them. They did not come there.

Q: Did His Holiness' mother talk to you about the Chinese?

00:58:12

#42M: The next morning I reported to Gyalyum Chenmo about my relative who was beaten. She said, "[It has come to pass that] we have to bear such things. What a disaster." [To the interpreter] Look, she went like this [shakes her head] and said, "It is so bad. What a disaster."

[Cries] Gyalyum Chenmo shed one single tear. I asked Gyalyum Chenmo what was the reason and she said, "They have taken away so many of our children and none have returned so far. Times have turned bad."

Q: Can you describe, as you said the situation in Lhasa started to deteriorate, what you saw and what happened in Lhasa up until the day you left?

#42M: In the meantime, they [the Chinese] arrested people without reason and imprisoned them. They accused people on false allegations and beat some brutally without any reason whatsoever. They troubled us, but claimed that it was the Tibetans who were troubling them! They made deceitful claims. In that way, many people were beaten. Just before we escaped, they became more and more powerful. And then the Bakor in Lhasa was like this, so many walking around.

Q: Chinese?

01:00:40

#42M: Yes.

Q: I'd like to hear about your experience and your personal eyewitness point of view of the events in Lhasa in March 1959.

#42M: Before I left Tibet? I think he was called Chamdo Phakpa, who was a traitor. He was said to be arriving at the Norbulingka. All the people stood guard at the gate of the Norbulingka. Then he arrived wearing a Chinese dress and a pair of glasses. Nobody would let him inside the Norbulingka. He was a Tibetan but a cheat. Everyone threw stones at him and did not allow him in. He would not be let in because he was an informer [for the Chinese]. I heard he had on a protective amulet [shows sign of long cord around neck].

There was a huge *sangu* 'structure where incense-offering is made' at the Norbulingka. There, a little old woman was said to have hit him with a stone and then he fell down. Even though the people had stoned him earlier, he did not fall. That [little old woman] was the protective deity, Palden Lhamo.

Otherwise, he was trying to go inside. Then he died there and when his clothes were torn off this way and that way from his body, there was the protective amulet as also some pistols. That old woman, the Palden Lhamo threw the stone. That was what happened. And then [the situation] became worse and worse and His Holiness did not stay for long. As he lay there [dead], the people were teeming around and a Chinese vehicle arrived there and took him away in it. He was such a cheat.

Q: Was that Chamdo Phakpa or a relative of his?

01:05:28

#42M: It seems he was a relative of Chamdo Phakpa, the cheat.

Q: This guy was the brother? Was he a government official?

#42M: No, he was not. But he was a sort of an official. He fell only after the old woman threw the stone. People just could not take him on because there was no one to support us. He fell when the old woman stoned him. He had on all those [protective strings] around him.

Q: Why did people think he was a spy? Was it just because he was dressed in Chinese dress? Is there another reason?

01:06:45

#42M: There were some people who were in the know. When he arrived, he had on a Chinese dress, a Chinese cap and was riding on a motor cycle. Everybody was watching him and doing this [indicates nudging].

Q: This happened close to the boundary of the Norbulingka?

#42M: Just outside the gate was a *sangu*, where an old woman threw a stone and he died. That old woman was our Palden Lhamo.

Q: Did you see this yourself?

01:07:51

#42M: Yes. Nobody was allowed to stay home [that day]. Everyone went [to guard the Norbulingka].

Q: Were you there?

#42M: Yes. I stamped on him [the Chinese informer's body] and spit on him. I did not dare get close to him until he was dead. After his death, his clothes were torn off and he was dragged up and down. So I went and stamped on him and spit on him.

Q: Where did you stamp him?

00:08:14

#42M: I stamped on the head of the body, which was being dragged about. If not for the old woman, it was impossible to subdue him because there was no support [for the Tibetans from outside].

Q: Why did you have such strong feelings about this man?

#42M: I could hardly think at that time. The people of Lhasa believed this man to be the demon. Then a Chinese vehicle came and took the body away. People shouted after the vehicle that he was the demon. Then it [the situation] became worse and worse in Lhasa.

Q: Did you say that the man was dressed in Chinese army dress or civilian dress?

01:09:55

#42M: He was dressed in the Chinese army dress with a pair of glasses. He had on a Chinese cap and arrived riding a motor bike. We remarked, "Another Chinese has come riding on a motor cycle." "No, no, he is a spy" the whisper went around Lhasa and people nudged each other like this [moves elbow]. He looked exactly like a Chinese. I saw him with my very own eyes.

Q: Was he on his way to the Norbulingka when he was intercepted by the crowd?

#42M: Yes, that is right. The personal security guards blocked the entrance to the Norbulingka and all the people surrounded it. So he was unable to get inside. Who will allow him to enter the Norbulingka!

Q: How many people were around the Norbulingka that time, approximately? Was it thousands of people?

01:11:39

#42M: Inside?

Q: No, the people around the Norbulingka.

#42M: The population of Lhasa was informed that not one person was allowed to remain home or go to work [but were to assemble at the Norbulingka]. All the people stood in line and there's such a huge population in Lhasa. Not one person stayed home.

Q: Had you heard about the invitation that His Holiness had received to go to the show by the Chinese?

01:12:31

#42M: I heard that such an invitation was extended to His Holiness, an invitation for dinner. His Holiness would not go. At the Norbulingka, His Holiness' steward said that His Holiness would not attend it. They [the Chinese] had the nerve to extend an invitation to His Holiness to attend a dinner!

Q: Was that the reason that everybody was there; that all the Tibetans had been asked to come around Norbulingka? Or was there a different reason?

#42M: Yes, I heard the person who was killed had come to invite His Holiness to the dinner. However, the people shouted and did not allow him to enter the Norbulingka. Later the people came to know that he was a spy; nobody knew it earlier. Later he arrived dressed in Chinese clothes, wearing a Chinese cap and riding on a motor cycle.

Q: So he came to invite His Holiness to the show and then there was another day where he came when he was killed?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, [he was killed] that very same day. He had been acting as a Chinese spy much before, but the people did not know that. On this day it proved that he was a Chinese spy because he came to invite His Holiness.]

Q: When people were asked to come, how long did it take for everybody to get there? Did people just rush out of their homes and surround the Norbulingka?

01:14:50

#42M: It did not take long. People arrived immediately. Even if they were on the verge of drinking tea, they left it and rushed out. If required, the population gathered in large numbers.

Q: What message did they receive? What did they hear that made them rush out of their houses—that His Holiness' life was in danger or what was the message that they were hearing that made them put down their tea and run to the Norbulingka?

#42M: Perhaps one person heard that the person [Chamdo Phakpa's relative, the spy] was coming; that "today someone is coming to the Norbulingka to invite His Holiness" and we must go there. And this was spread orally from one person to the other. News spread very fast in Lhasa, but we did not have support from outside. Each person told the next one and that was how everyone assembled there.

Q: Were you still getting access in and out of the Norbulingka this time?

01:16:30

#42M: I could not get in. My father had received the message and said the previous evening, "Tomorrow we cannot go there. The whole population will be there."

Q: Can you tell us what happened after this man was stoned to death? What happened after that that you saw?

#42M: Though everybody stoned him, he could not be killed. Right in front of the Norbulingka, there was a huge *sangu* from where a little old woman threw a small stone which felled him. That was the act of the protective deity.

[Question is repeated.]

01:17:32

#42M: I was in shock. I had never seen anything like that and I was afraid.

Q: What did you see after that?

#42M: Then things did not happen right for us. The Chinese oppressed the people and occupied Tibet forcefully. We did not have support [from outside].

Q: What happened to you personally?

01:18:32

#42M: I found it fearful when I went back to the Norbulingka. I had to go back the next day and I was a little afraid. After that [incident], within a month we made our escape. Our escape came about this way. My late husband's father served in the Norbulingka. One very early morning he left, but did not tell us where he was going. He had told me, "If you wish, you can stay but it is not good."

Q: Who said that?

#42M: My late husband's father. He said, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left. He left around the break of dawn through the huge river near Lhasa, which he crossed in a boat. It is good that he has left because it is not good." Then there was no way I could remain at home.

Q: When you say your late husband...?

01:19:52

#42M: I married later, which was arranged by Gyalyum Chenmo. She said, "Now do not say that the apron is big. You must lead a life [together]." I wondered what was "lead a life [together]" and asked Tsering Dolma-*la* about it. I did not know at all. She said, "Now it is absolutely bad. His Holiness has left."

Q: Did your husband's father come to your house?

#42M: He came to our house very early in the morning. He had gone to see off His Holiness. There was a boat at the Ramoga in which he crossed the river. When presented with the clothes, His Holiness said that he did not want to wear the *chupa*. He was requested to put on the *chupa*, the cap, socks and boots. His Holiness did not want to wear them but was persuaded to do so. He left at around dawn break. At the time His Holiness was very young and they [the Chinese] forcefully occupied Tibet.

[To the interpreter] Please tell her [the interviewer] that.

Q: What happened after that?

01:22:05

#42M: After His Holiness had left, all of us escaped that very day. That very day we followed His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness took the route through Ramoga and via the mountains, while we pretended we were not on our escape journey and took the usual road of Tsethang for a short distance. It was only at the crossroad that we met up with His Holiness. I heard that during the day, His Holiness hid in the caves and walked the whole night.

Q: You took the road of Tsethang and were able to see His Holiness at the crossroad?

#42M: Yes, and until we reached India we were with His Holiness. His Holiness asked us [at the crossroad], "How did you get here?" We replied that after Your Holiness' departure, we took the detour route. The Chinese did intercept us, "Why are you leaving? Where are you going?" We told them that we were on our way to trade. We tried to speak in the Bhutanese language. One woman caught me by my dress and said, "You will not be allowed to go because you are a Lhasan." She was an informer for the Chinese. I told her, "I live in Bhutan. I am a Bhutanese. My lama is in Bhutan and my leader is in Bhutan." So I was let off.

The Chinese had asked us what His Holiness was doing. We told them that we did not know His Holiness and that we had been to Lhasa on trade.

Q: A very smart thing to do.

01:24:57

#42M: We told them we were Bhutanese with our leader and lama in Bhutan. We tried to speak in broken Bhutanese language and they [the Chinese] did not realize it! The woman told me, "You are definitely a Lhasan and will not be allowed to go." I replied, "What do you mean? I have my leader in Bhutan. Come with me to Bhutan. My leader is Bhutanese and my lama is Bhutanese."

Q: Were you scared during this interaction?

#42M: I was told not to be afraid. Do not ever get scared, they said.

Q: Who said that?

01:26:13

#42M: My late husband assured me that I need not be scared of these informers. It does seem frightful when you see them [the Chinese] come in a hurry to capture people.

Q: And then what happened?

#42M: Then we saw His Holiness at the crossroad. His Holiness asked us if came through that route and we replied, "Yes." Then we reached the place called Jora in Tsona. There were fewer Chinese in the Tsona region. We came across a rich family, who offered cups to

His Holiness, Gyalyum Chenmo, Ngari Rinpoche and Tsering Dolma-la. Until then there was not even a cup to drink water.

Q: There were four members in His Holiness' family?

01:27:18

#42M: Yes, there were His Holiness, Gyalyum Chenmo, Ngari Rinpoche and Tsering Dolma-la.

Q: Gave [the cups] to them and then pass on when they...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because they didn't have any drinking bowls to drink from.

Q: At this point you were with His Holiness' entourage?

#42M: Yes. In Tibet you had to look for springs to drink water from. [Drinking] water was not plentiful. When we reached a spring, Gyalyum Chenmo would say, "Kundun, drink some water." His Holiness would not drink and sat thus [drops head to one side and keeps silent]. He did not speak a word. If he drank water, he drank like this. [Makes a scoop with hand and puts to mouth.]

Q: There was no cup then?

01:28:31

#42M: No, there was not. Later someone offered the cups.

Q: How close were you to His Holiness' horse, where he was in the group?

#42M: I was at the back [of the group].

Q: How far were you from the royal horse?

01:29:20

#42M: I was at quite a distance at the back.

Q: What did you see...

#42M: [Interrupts] Ngari Rinpoche walked all the way. He walked along with the common people.

Q: He was walking and you were also walking?

01:29:55

#42M: Yes, we walked. Ngari Rinpoche was very young then. The road was extremely bad and as he walked he would sing. Gyalyum Chenmo would say, "Son, do not sing." He replied, "Yes mother, but it feels a little better when walking if I sing." He came walking all

the way. [Laughs] The song went like this, "We will go back to Lhasa. We will go back to Lhasa."

Q: Was he just making them up?

01:31:03

#42M: Yes, he did. "We will go back to Lhasa. We will go back to Lhasa," he repeated.

Q: Once people understood...words must have passed along ahead of the route that His Holiness was coming. Were people coming out of their houses towards the entourage?

#42M: It was before we reached Mon Tawang, at the place called Pangje [?] that people gathered to see His Holiness. [Looks up at a photograph on wall] Is that the picture of Nehru [former Prime Minister of India]?

[Interpreter]: No.

#42M: At that time, just before reaching the bridge, there were black men with guns; some said they were Indian soldiers, who looked very scary. Many of us cried out, "Alas, once again there are people with guns!"

Gyalyum Chenmo told us, "We have reached the Indian border. Do not shout." I did not know at that time, but they [the Indian soldiers] were saluting His Holiness because they put their guns like this [raises arms and joins hands]. The Indians were lined up and escorted His Holiness to Pangje. There a man spoke in Tibetan, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been requested to come to our country when a bad time arose for him and today is the day."

We crossed the bridge and we were at the Indian border. They provided us water. That was the speech that was given. We reached the Indian border. An Indian came and told us that we need not fear any longer. They gave us food—rice and lentils. However, we did not possess any plates to eat the food. I think it was banana leaf, now when I look back, in which we were given the food. Some people who had traveled before to India ate their food like this [shows eating with fingers], but we did not have that custom in Lhasa. We either ate with chopsticks or spoons. We commented, "How dirty! I wish they did not eat like that. It's so dirty!" In Lhasa no one ate with their fingers.

Q: Did they cross their guns?

#42M: They did like this with their guns [Raises arms and joins palms]. We cried out, "Alas, once again there are people with guns!" The men looked so scary, tall and black. I had never seen Indians before.

Q: Before you reached the Indian border, were Tibetans coming out of their houses to greet His Holiness as he traveled through?

01:35:34

#42M: Since His Holiness secretly left [Tibet], there were no such people waiting. Not until the Indian border; the Tibetans were too scared [to wait to greet His Holiness]. Later when we were to reach the Indian border the next day, a white airplane flew from the direction of Lhasa. I believe they were the Chinese in search of His Holiness who'd escaped. That whole night we journeyed to the Indian border. After [His Holiness] reached the Indian border, only then did the Tibetans know of it.

Q: When did you see the airplane? A day before you were to reach the Indian border?

#42M: Early one morning, a man spoke on the wireless, "hello, hello" and walked up and down.

Q: Where?

01:36:26

#42M: During our escape journey from Lhasa. A man came and rushed to His Holiness' side and spoke something to him. Everyone was told to lie down and we did that. I heard that the Chinese had come in search of His Holiness on hearing about his escape.

It was after we had passed Tsona that a white airplane circled and went back towards Lhasa. We were told not to move and to lie down still. At that time, we had no knowledge about bombs, so we were told that fire crackers would be fired from [the airplane], which would kill all of us. While we lay down still, the airplane circled and returned towards Lhasa.

Q: You said that Ngari Rinpoche was at the back of the entourage with you and that his mother said something to him.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, she didn't say Ngari Rinpoche was at the back. She was at the back.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But she said that she saw him singing. So how did she see him if she was all the way at the back? Did she move around?

01:38:35

#42M: We were moving along together on the escape journey. His Holiness was in the front and we were at the back. Ngari Rinpoche always walked among the common people. There were horses but he never rode them. He walked all the time.

Q: Do you remember anything else about the journey you'd like to tell us?

#42M: We passed villages on the journey, but I do not think anybody knew about [His Holiness'] escape until we reached India, as it was very sudden. However, after we crossed over the Indian border at Pangje and His Holiness left for Mon Tawang, then groups of villagers arrived. They waited on the roads and served us tea, *tsampa* and ladles of corn

flakes. That was after we crossed over the Indian border. By then people realized that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had taken flight. Until then it was a secret.

Q: So they were waiting to receive him at Tawang.

01:40:20

#42M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] Yes, it was like that. Kundun never spoke a word. I have the habit of addressing [His Holiness] as Kundun because his mother used to call him that. So I got into the habit. Here some people wonder why I say Kundun. Tibet was forcefully invaded and occupied. [Becomes emotional]

Q: Just the different environments that you had to go through and it was winter. Did you have to cross any frozen rivers, for example?

#42M: It was very cold. We sort of managed. It was not too bad.

Q: What other difficulties did you face on the journey?

01:41:54

#42M: It was not too bad except for [finding drinking] water. In Tibet you came across water only occasionally. Except for the water, we managed so-so. We had to wait to find a spring. You did not have plenty of water in Tibet as you do here. When we found a spring, there was only one cup, which a lady had brought. One person drank and then passed the cup on to the next. Water was not plentiful as it is here.

Q: Did anyone get sick on the way?

#42M: No, no one became sick.

Q: So you all made it safely to Tawang?

01:42:58

#42M: Yes, everyone reached Tawang. From Tawang, His Holiness journeyed on ahead. His Holiness told us, "You should come later. I have to go to Mussoorie. You will be escorted by the Indian soldiers later." We did not know the way and the soldiers escorted us.

Q: So what happened?

#42M: His Holiness had told us earlier that we would reach villages on the way and they would offer water, tea and things to eat and that we must thank them. After crossing over into Mon Tawang, we met people who gave such to us on the way.

Q: He addressed the whole group?

01:44:27

#42M: Yes, he advised us, "There will be people who will provide for us. Accept willingly and thank them profusely. Now we have to beg." [Cries] Then everyone shed tears. All the people cried so much. His Holiness said, "We have to beg as we go along. Our country has been occupied by the Chinese. We have no country." Everyone felt sad. The Chinese have forcefully invaded our country.

[To the interpreter] Please tell her [the interviewer] that. We did not have any support [from outside] and His Holiness was young.

Q: Where did you go after that?

#42M: From there we were taken to Guwahati [Assam] for registration and paperwork. I think His Holiness had also to register as he was escorted earlier. Later we were taken there and provided with passes. Then I was dispatched to Dalhousie [Himachal Pradesh]; from Assam we were sent to Dalhousie.

Q: How did you travel?

01:46:29

#42M: I went to Dalhousie from Assam. Earlier we were asked where we wished to go.

Q: Did you go by train?

#42M: Yes, we traveled by train and then just before we reached Dalhousie, we went by a vehicle. I lived at Dalhousie until I came here [Mundgod]. There [in Dalhousie] I worked at weaving carpets. Carpet factories were started by the Tibetan Government.

Q: Did your father continue to work as a tailor for His Holiness in exile?

01: 47:36

#42M: He was asked to make carpets by the Government. He was taught to use the sewing machine because he was accustomed to hand stitching [while in Tibet]. However, he did not get used to the sewing machine in India and thus made carpets. We lived in Dalhousie for about 11 years doing carpet weaving.

Q: I just have a couple of questions and one of them is, were you happy with the husband that His Holiness' mother found for you?

#42M: Yes, as per her advice, it has been good for many years. Much later after we came to the settlement, he... We had three sons and a daughter while in Dalhousie. They live here in the settlement.

Q: Did he [your husband] pass away here?

01:48:59

#42M: Yes, he passed away after we came here to the settlement.

Q: I have one more question for you. If somebody asked to buy your *pangden*, would you sell it?

#42M: No, I will not sell it. Several people have expressed their wish to buy it earlier, but I refused to sell it. I will not until I die. Never. I consider it my good fortune. After we came to the settlement, we have faced many difficult times. People have offered to pay me a good price for the *pangden* but I told them, "It matters not even if I have nothing left to eat and am forced to beg, but I will not sell it. Even if I have to beg, I will not part with it."

Q: Thank you so much. It was so interesting to talk to you. It was a pleasure.

#42M: [Smiles]

Q: Can you tell us what it was like to talk about the things you shared with us today?

01:50:45

#42M: It has been good. Thank you. The Chinese have forcefully invaded and occupied our country. I would like you to know that. His Holiness was young [at that time]. Please extend us your help.

Q: I need to ask you one more time, if this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would it make any kind of problem for you?

#42M: There will be no problem. I do have two sisters and a brother living in Lhasa, but there will be no problem. What I told you is my truthful experience. I have my relatives still living in Lhasa.

Q: Is it okay for us to use the name "Dolma Yangchen" for you in this project?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Dolma Yangzom.

01:52:18

#42M: Yes, you can.

Q: Thank you so much. Is there anything else you want to say?

#42M: I think that's about it.

Q: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW