

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #72 – Lobsang Tashi
July 3, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #72
2. Interviewee: Lobsang Tashi
3. Age: 74
4. Date of Birth: 1933
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Ngari Dhargayling
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: July 3, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 14A, New Camp No. 2,
Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Bylakuppe,
Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 51 min
12. Interviewer: Martin Newman
13. Interpreter: Lhakpa Tsering
14. Videographer: Jeff Lodas
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

As prosperous nomads in the Ngari Dhargayling region of Tibet, Lobsang Tashi's family held the title *Tsorpon* because they owned the most cattle in the region. Lobsang Tashi describes his family's work of caring for their domestic animals and traveling to Jang Tsakha to gather salt, which they bartered for grains in Bhutan. Lobsang Tashi also explains the annual horse races that took place in his village, detailing how the Tibetans trained the horses to race and prepared them for the event.

When Lobsang Tashi was only 16 his father died, making him responsible for the family, including tending the livestock and paying taxes. Living far from Lhasa, he and others in Ngari Dhargayling did not experience harsh treatment from the Chinese. Nonetheless, Lobsang Tashi was aware of the Chinese oppression in Lhasa and the subsequent escape of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to India.

Anticipating hardships imposed by the Chinese to eventually reach his village, Lobsang Tashi and his family fled to India via Nepal. He describes his life as a refugee in Nepal and India.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, nomadic life, religious festivals, customs/marriage, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #72

Interviewee: Lobsang Tashi

Age: 72, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Martin Newman

Interview Date: July 3, 2007

Question: Hello.

Interviewee #72: *Tashi delek* ‘Greetings.’

Q: Please tell us your name.

#72: Lobsang Tashi.

Q: Lobsang Tashi, do you give your permission to the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#72: It is okay to interview me. The other day Pema Delek was here and he brought with him the written permission of the Representative [of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] Office [to conduct interviews]. I asked him if he had acquired permission and he replied in the affirmative. "If you have, give it to me," I said. I have a copy of the written consent with me. If the Representative has given his permission, I do not have any objection. If you are conducting this interview without the permission of the Representative, these days there are many people who take advantage and make money out of such things. I do not like that. The Representative's permission [letter] is with me.

Q: I see. This is not the case here. His Holiness the Dalai Lama requested that we record your experiences.

#72: [Nods to show consent]

Q: This is strictly so that future generations of Tibetans will be able to have a picture of life in Tibet as it was in the past.

#72: [Nods]

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

#72: [Nods]

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

#72: [Nods]

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or discuss some issue, please tell me.

#72: [Nods]

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

#72: The Representative is appointed by the Tibetan government, which is under His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I have his written permission with me. When I have his consent with me, I don't think I will face any problems. If at all I do face a problem that is for the cause of Tibet. So it is fine.

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

#72: *Tashi delek.*

Q: To begin I'd like to get a sense of your childhood and what your life was like before the Chinese invasion. Could you tell me where you were born?

#72: In Tibet there are many districts. I was born in Ngari Dhargyeling, in Saka District.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#72: In actuality there was my father, mother, mother's mother, mother's father, which makes four adults and six children. From the six children three died and the three surviving children are all living in India, at present.

Q: What did your parents do for a living?

#72: They were nomads. You [to the interpreter] were born in India and may not have set your eyes on yaks and sheep. We raised yaks, sheep and goats. Like families have motor bikes and cars these days, in my country we had horses.

For our livelihood we traveled with our yaks and sheep to Jang Tsakha to gather salt and then to the south to Bhutan to barter it for grains. That was our main livelihood. Then from the *dri* 'female yaks' and ewes, we acquired wool, milk, butter and cheese, which we used.

Q: Did you go on a salt trek, were you went to a lake and brought the salt? How did you bring salt?

#72: The salt is formed in the sea [lake]. The salt has to be taken out from the water. There were people in that region who gathered salt.

Q: They brought it to your father or your father went and got it?

#72: My father has never been to gather salt. He belonged to a noted family and he was a fortunate person. My father lived a comfortable life.

Q: Who went to bring the salt?

#72: I was the one who went to bring salt from the age of 17. We lost our country when I was 26 years old. Since I was 17 to the age of 24, I went to bring salt.

Q: What kind of house did you live in? Did you live in a home or did you live in a tent?

#72: In tents. There were no houses there. The hair of the yak was spun and woven into tents. Those were better than the poor houses of these days. Water did not leak inside. The size could be as large as a house, depending on the economic condition of the family.

Q: It must be very big because a lot of people had to live in it.

#72: It was large. [Interviewee shows a picture of a tent] That is the tent, made from the hair of the yak.

Q: Do you have any special memories as a child before you went to school of things you like to do around your home?

#72: There were no schools you would hear of or see with your eyes in our village. I can recall memories from the age of 8 years. In general we had servants and maids and my mother, while I went to graze the animals. Though I ate human food, I grew up in front of the animals.

Q: You lived with the animals. Were you alone with the animals? Did you bring dogs with you or did brothers and sisters come with you?

#72: I took dogs along with me. My father never went with the animals. My father and my mother's mother stayed in the house caring for the children and the many servants—both male and female who looked after the sheep and yaks. It was imperative to take along three or four dogs when you took the animals to graze because there were wolves.

Q: While you were watching over your animals, did you encounter any other animals were you were?

#72: Of course you can see your own animals. Besides in the hills you could see wild animals, which belonged to no one. We could see them, but they were not beneficial to us in any way.

Q: What kind of wild animals did you see?

#72: There was an animal called *dong* [wild yak], which looked similar to the yak. Then there were deer whose antlers look like that [points to the wall]. Each side of the head had five horns, ten in total. Wild sheep had huge horns. There were blue sheep and Tibetan wild ass similar to the ones called “zebras” in India.

Q: When you weren't watching over your animals, did you ever go into town?

#72: There were no towns. We were nomads and at the most only five or six families in tents lived in one region.

Q: What did you do in the winter when it got very cold and you could not go outside with the animals?

#72: Even if it snows in winter, one cannot stay without taking the animals out to graze. We took them to places where long grass grew and the animals ate the tips of the grass. We wore sheepskin dresses and did not feel the cold.

Q: Did you ever move to another location that was not so cold in the winter or did you stay in one place?

#72: There was one particular place we stayed when it was cold in winter. We lived in that place. Basically, nomads went to the summer site in summer and to the winter site in winter. There were two different places.

Q: Tell me again when you started going to school?

#72: [Gestures in the negative indicating there were no schools.]

Q: Was there a monastery nearby? Did you ever go to the monastery?

#72: There was a monastery. I did not join as a monk. There was a monastery and my brother was a monk at the monastery and he now lives in Kollegal [a settlement in India].

Q: Did you ever go to the monastery at all yourself?

#72: I have been to the monastery.

Q: Were there any special celebrations or holidays that were special that you remember?

#72: Yes, I remember. I remember the official festival of the Tibetan government. Here [in India] it is called *Tungkar Dhuechen* ‘Birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama,’ in Tibet it was not called *Tungkar Dhuechen*, but *Tunglha Yarsol*. We celebrate the occasion in our village. We celebrated *Losar* ‘New Year’ and then there was *Lhabab Dhuechen* ‘Buddha Shakyamuni's Descent from Heaven.’ The festivals were celebrated at the monastery and I witnessed them.

Q: What is *Tunglha Yarsol*?

#72: *Tunglha Yarsol* is the other name for *Tungkar Dhuechen*. These days the *Tungkar Dhuechen* is celebrated on the 6th of July. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was born on the fifth day of the fifth Tibetan lunar month. That is called *Tunglha Yarsol*. When the date was converted to the Western calendar, it corresponds in the month of July.

Q: Do you remember how you celebrated that holiday when you were a child? What kind of things did you do? What did you see? How was that day celebrated?

#72: There was no special celebration. The men of the family rode their horses and the women carried baskets of *chang* ‘home-brewed beer’ and food and went to the site of the local protective deity. There they offered prayers to the deity, put up prayer flags, made incense offerings, drank *chang*, sang songs and then returned home tipsy.

Q: Were there any horse festivals at that time?

#72: The monastery that was in our village was considered our local head. A horse race was held on the fifth day of the eighth Tibetan lunar month annually.

Q: Did you participate in that? Were you part of the horse riding at any time?

#72: Yes, I have participated in the horse race.

Q: What did you do? Was there a particular event that you did?

#72: A breed of horse called *gyukma* was used during the horse race. The others were *goma* and *phowa*. The horses were not fed grass for seven to eight days. They were trained to race and fed tea leaves. If they were fed grass, it was done very early in the morning before daybreak and then they were made to run a distance from here to Camp Number 1 [two miles]. Then water was sprayed on them. They were not made to feel the heat of the day and the cold of the night. For seven days they trained in that way and then on the eighth day, about 46 horses took part in the race.

Q: I guess they were hungry.

#72: If their stomachs were not empty, they couldn't race. For seven days they were not allowed to eat grass except very early in the morning. Then they were prevented from feeling hot during the day and cold during the night. They were fed with black tea and brown candy.

Q: Did you ride in the festival at any time yourself?

#72: Yes, I have ridden. The horse race took place once in a year. I don't know the western date, but it was on the fifth day of the eighth Tibetan lunar month. On that day about 46

horses took part. There were horses belonging to two regions. I have raced horses. I raced from the age of 12 to 22. I have ridden on my horse as well as horses belonging to others.

Q: You must have been a very good rider?

#72: [Nods for assent] In a horse race, the rider just sits on the horse. However, I used to [demonstrates bending on his right and then bending on his left while sitting on the horse] pick up *khata* ‘ceremonial scarves’ from the ground. My name is *Tsorpon* Lobsang. I am the child of a *Tsorpon*. I must be a good horseman to be named *Tsorpon*.

Q: Which means?

#72: The region or *Tso* of Dhargyeling had 15 villages and among them the owner of the highest number of animals was called *Tsorpon*.

Q: At that time, did you ever hear any stories that elders or perhaps your older relatives would tell about days of the past in Tibet? Were there any special stories that used to be told?

#72: Regarding the stories about the days of the past in Tibet, my father was a very gentle person and did not speak much. However, my mother's mother, my grandmother used to tell stories, but I don't think they are of any relevance in this age. She did used to relate stories. She told us about the lives of the people.

Q: Do you remember anything about them even if they don't make any sense? What were they about?

#72: I do remember. They are stories of the old and who knows if they are true or not for I have not seen them. Since they are not reasonable tales, I don't think it is correct talking about such in this interview. However, from the age of 8 to 16, I cared for the animals. My father passed away when I was 16 years old.

Q: What happened then when your father passed away? How did your life change?

#72: Before my father died, we were the *Tsorpon* of the region, owning the highest number of cattle. My father passed away when I was 16 years old. My father was 64 years old then. From then up to the age of 26, I observed the laws of the Tibetan government and engaged myself in paying taxes. If you have questions regarding the payment of taxes and its systems, the number of *Tsorpa* in the district, the names of the *Tsorpa* and the methods of tax payment to the Tibetan government I can tell you. I was 26 years old when the Chinese arrived in my region and the same year, I made my escape.

Q: You knew a lot of people around the villages?

#72: Yes, I did.

Q: Did you take over your father's job then? What happened when he died? What, then, was different in your life?

#72: The change that occurred in my life was that when my father died the responsibility of my family, the servants and payment of taxes to the Tibetan government fell on my shoulders. When the responsibility fell on me, I performed my tax duties to the Tibetan government to the best of my ability, until the age of 26.

Q: How did that feel to you? Did it feel like too big a responsibility or was it an easy responsibility?

#72: It was a big responsibility. It was not a small one. Firstly, the biggest responsibility was paying taxes to the Tibetan government in accordance with the system. Secondly, I had to serve the local monastery. The third was providing for the many servants and maids. That was not a small responsibility, but a big one. These days one does not have any responsibility to shoulder. It is enough if one can fill one's own stomach. That is due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: It sounds like a lot of work that you had to do.

#72: There was quite a lot of work. Much more than the work was the pressure in the mind. I had to manage to pay off taxes to the Tibetan government and provide for the family and servants. I had a lot of pressure on my mind.

Q: So you became the head of the family? Is that what happened?

#72: Yes. I became [the head of the family] when I was 16 years old, since the time my father passed away.

Q: How long did things go along like that before things started to change?

#72: I was in that situation until I was 26 years old and Tibet was lost.

Q: How could you tell things were changing at that time? When the Chinese invaded what started to change? How did you know something different was happening?

#72: You mean the change that occurred after the Chinese arrived?

[Question is repeated]

#72: Until the age of 26, I lived in my country and performed normal tasks like caring for the animals, paying taxes and observing the law. At the age of 26, I left whatever I possessed, carrying a little and leaving the rest behind, and then made my escape from my village in 1959.

Q: But before you escaped, I am wondering what things were like just before you escaped? Did the Chinese come to your village area? What kinds of things happened before you escaped?

#72: I have seen much, where the Chinese are concerned. When the Chinese came to my village, they were on their way from Lhasa to Ngari. At that time they did not loot nor seize [anything]. We transported their arms on our yaks and they paid us wages in cash. They paid a sum of ten *dhayen* 'silver coins' per yak. I have seen hosts of Chinese.

Q: So the Chinese made you use your animals to carry their weapons for them?

#72: Yes, that is right. They [the animals] were hired for transportation like we have vehicles for hire here [in Bylakuppe]. Since there were no vehicles in Tibet, the nomads' yaks and horses were hired for transportation and we received payment.

Q: How did they treat you?

#72: At that time there was no reason why they were not good. Until 1959 when His Holiness the Dalai Lama lived in the Potala Palace, the Chinese did not ill treat anyone in the region of Thoe Ngari.

Q: When did they start then to treat you differently?

#72: They started ill-treating us in 1959, as they gradually began their invasion from Lhasa. Lhasa is our capital city and when things turned terrible in the capital city, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was forced to escape. After His Holiness escaped, they started their ill-treatment. They [the Chinese] segregated the people into three divisions; *choepa* 'religion practitioners,' *ponpo* 'leaders' that were called *ngadak* and then there were the *chukdak*, who were economically well off.

Q: When did they start to change?

#72: They started in 1959 just before His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped. When that began, it was the reason that forced His Holiness to leave. His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped in 1959.

Q: How did they treat you personally?

#72: Prior to the invasion of Lhasa and until the escape of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to a foreign country, they did not particularly ill-treat us in our village. After they occupied Lhasa, which is Tibet's capital city, it was natural that they would persecute us and so people escaped.

Q: Due to fear of harassment?

#72: Yes, assuming [that there would be] persecution. Moreover, I had to flee because I was among the *chukdak* group.

Q: You were 26 years old, were you married by then or did you have a family yourself?

#72: I was married and two of my children had died. When I fled, I had two children with me, one who was six years old and the other four months.

Q: How old were you when you got married?

#72: I was 17 years old.

Q: Was it a love marriage or an arranged marriage?

#72: It was arranged by the parents. In Tibet marriages were arranged by the parents; not like in the present times when couples speak over the telephone and then get married.

Q: Who arranged this marriage for you?

#72: My father had to ask a person in another village to go and request for the girl's hand in marriage, but the other person would not readily give [his daughter] upon asking for her hand. Then my father passed away. On the day my father died, the father of the girl, whose hand was sought, coincidentally was passing by on the road. My mother called him in. By then my father could hardly speak as he was on his deathbed. My wife's father's name is Jami and my father was called Bhutuk Pasang. My father said, "Jami, from your three daughters, the middle one..."

Q: Then what happened?

#72: I was 16 then and before my father passed away, my wife's father came to my home and he said, "Jami, please give your middle daughter in marriage for my son. There is no hope that I will recover. As we have spoken earlier, please send your daughter to this home. My wife and her mother are here. Please help look after them." Speaking these words, my father died.

Q: The father-in-law gave permission to marry?

#72: That day the agreement was spoken. Then my father passed away. As was the custom of our country, no words were spoken about asking for a girl's hand in marriage for one year [after a death in the family]. After performing the one-year ritual, which is also observed these days, my mother and grandmother sent across people to ask for the girl's hand. When I was 17 she came to my home.

Q: And she agreed?

#72: Then they gave us their daughter. I was a wayward youth like the ones we have here. I used to play *sho* 'dice' and *bak* 'game similar to dominoes' and ventured in trades irrespective of making a profit or not. I was not exactly a good man. So my wife's father

said, "I have no choice but to give away my daughter [in marriage]. I reached his bedside when he was taking his last breath. He asked me for my daughter's hand and then breathed his last. Considering the delicate situation, I have no choice but to give away my daughter." Then she was given to me.

Q: Did you deal in illegal trade?

#72: It was nothing bad. I dealt in horses and guns. At times I purchased guns and sold them and at times I exchanged guns for guns.

Q: Were you happy that they finally agreed? Did you like her?

#72: There is nothing to be happy about it. There is neither joy nor sorrow. A boy needs a girl and on the other hand, a girl needs a boy. The parents arranged that and there was nothing to talk about likes or dislikes. It depends on the boy and girl how successfully they lead their lives.

Q: Just to back up to something you said before. Who were you selling guns and buying guns from?

#72: There were people in our village who sold guns and bought guns.

Q: Among the Tibetans?

#72: Yes, among the Tibetans. I don't know where they [the guns] came from, but at that time the long-barrel and short-barrel rifles were considered the best and were in great demand. Bullets were in plenty and they were very expensive. Eight, nine or 10 horses and 30 to 40 *dri* 'female yaks' and yaks were the going exchange rates per gun. They were very expensive. The long and short-barrel rifles were English-made guns.

Q: So there were many nomads who were interested also in buying guns that you had for hunting and things like that?

#72: Yes, they did buy. The bullets for the English rifles were in plenty. There were other types of guns, but bullets for them were very rare. The bullets for the English rifles were not only plenty, but they were cheap. The cost of one bullet for an English rifle was five *gomo* 'Tibetan currency.'

Q: A lot of people didn't like that you did this kind of work?

#72: People might have viewed me as bad. Everyone thought, "If we go to Lobsang, the son of the *Tsorpon* we may profit from dealing with him and if we play a game of *sho* with him, we may get some money out of him." There were people who indulged in such things.

Q: So to fast forward to the point where the Chinese had come and you had heard that the Dalai Lama had escaped, at what point did you yourself think, "I must go now."

#72: In the country of Tibet it is His Holiness the Dalai Lama who is our lama and our leader. Unable to bear the suppression of the Chinese, His Holiness left. Once our leader was forced to seek refuge elsewhere; had the people of the three provinces of Tibet stayed back, they were certain to suffer hardships in time and never see happiness. That was the reason I escaped.

Q: The people around you, did they think the same way as you did; that you almost leave or did some people say, “Oh no, no. It will be okay.”

#72: Different people have different thoughts. In my region of Dhargyeling there were 130 families. From the 130 families, 100 families were able to reach Nepal. However, some went back [to the village] from Nepal and some stayed there. These days there are only 20 to 30 families of my village spread all over India. A hundred families arrived in Nepal while around 30 families did not leave the village.

Q: So most of the people thought like you did that “We must go now.”

#72: Yes, that is right. We all came together until Nepal. From Nepal only about 20 families were able to come to India. There are many of our people in Nepal.

Q: You said you left with your wife and your two children, one was six years old and one was four months and what happened to your other two children?

#72: The other two children passed away when they were very young in my village. I brought the two children along with me when I came here. We had more children after coming to India. I have five children now.

Q: What did they die from in Tibet?

#72: What is there to say when people die? They died from illness.

Q: What did you think when they died?

#72: There was nothing to think. My father also passed away. We mourned for a few days and made prayer offerings, as is the Tibetan custom. Besides that there is nothing more to do. The older [child] passed away when he was about four years old and the younger one passed away when he was hardly a year old.

Q: Did your religious beliefs at that time help you with your despair?

#72: It is the way of the world that we perform the rituals and make offerings to the lamas. Apart from that you cannot ask the dead to come back to life. One day I have to also die.

Q: Can you tell me how you planned your escape and how that began?

#72: When I planned to escape, there were many things in my house which were useful while I lived there, but that I could not carry on my journey. So I piled all those things at the local monastery. Then I drove my animals. The largest load we brought contained our food. I had about 46 yaks on which I loaded grain, rice, meat and butter. On the night of the 19th day of the 12th Tibetan lunar month of the year 1959, as the moon rose in the sky we made our escape.

Q: You went with 40 yaks?

#72: The load bearing yaks were about 46 in number. In general there were over a hundred yaks. I also had 500 sheep and five horses. Driving those animals, we arrived in Nepal.

Q: How many people came with you besides your family?

#72: Besides my family, there were five servants, three male and two female. In all we were nine myself, my mother's mother and two children.

Q: So it was just your household that went and no other families?

#72: There was only one other family who accompanied us. Though many people were fleeing, there were many different routes and mountain passes. I took the route through Lo while the others went through Nar and Nyenyang. There were many mountain passes and we took different routes in the Nepali territory.

[Tape change]

#72: The questions that you are asking me are about my life and my growing up from childhood and how I led my life. I grew up with the animals until I was 16 years old. From the age of 16 when my father passed away and until the age of 26 I served the Tibetan government and paid my taxes and observed the laws. If you would ask me questions in regard to that, I would not relate you untruths. I would like to narrate what I know. What I don't know, I will say so to the questions you ask.

Q: We are honored to hear it. Where we left off: you were just starting your escape and I want to back up and ask you something else here before your escape. You were selling arms and I was wondering; did you sell any arms to the Tibetan resistance?

#72: To be able to sell guns to the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas, I possessed only one gun when I made my escape. I had only one single gun with me.

Q: I mean when you were dealing in guns earlier. Who were you selling the guns to?

#72: Yes, I was dealing in guns, but I was selling them within the community. Just as we have the old and new settlements here, it was like selling within the settlements. I only had one gun with me when I escaped.

Q: Was there any moment you thought, 'I should go and join the resistance myself.'

#72: No, never. The thought of joining the resistance and fighting never entered my mind. At that time I was too young. I was 26 when we escaped and that was a young age. Normally we have always possessed guns. There were thieves, bandits and wolves, the worst predator that ate our animals. It resembles a dog, an Alsatian dog. It was in order to defend ourselves against them [that we owned guns]. There were thieves and bandits.

Q: So you never had personally bad contacts with the Chinese?

#72: There was never any need to fight the Chinese until we made our escape. The Chinese were gentle with us. They asked the nomads to sell them curd. We gave them a vessel full and never asked for money, but they paid us a *dhayen* for it. If we did not accept the money, they left without the curd.

Q: You left based not on your personal contact with the Chinese, but when you heard that the Dalai Lama had escaped?

#72: The Chinese had plans in their mind to impose hardship on us. Before they could reach our village, before they could execute their plans, [we fled]. They had already forced tribulations in Amdo and Kham provinces by capturing the rich and the influential people. They already seized the high lamas. Lhasa is the capital city and when they came to invade Lhasa, His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped. Before they could wreak havoc in our village, when His Holiness had left, those who wished to leave, did.

Q: So now we are back to your escape with your yaks, horses and your family and you are on the road from Lo to Nepal. How long did it take you to get to Nepal from where you were?

#72: It was quite close by. Lo, which is in Nepali territory was very near. There is just a mountain pass to cover. One could reach the border between Tibet and Nepal in one day if you rode on horseback; however I was moving with a lot of encumbrance, so it took us 10 days to reach there.

Q: Did anyone try and stop you?

#72: After we entered Nepali territory, they checked us at the border. They checked to see if we carried guns or any types of weapons. They did not look for anything other than that. They let everything else through. I told you that I had a gun with me. There was a white village called Zalung Karpo at the border between Nepal and Tibet. All the Tibetan refugees coming from Tibet converged at that point. Everyone carried arms with them. Then we were told that we could not take the weapons with us, so we wrapped the guns in cloth and thinking that we would be back soon. We hid them underground. We marked the hiding places hoping to be back soon.

Q: So you saved them for a future return to Tibet?

#72: We believed we would return soon. However, we have not been able to go back and came further and further away to India. The guns are there under the ground, whether they have rotted or eroded. Nobody else would have found them. They are still there.

Q: So it took you ten days. Was there any particular hardship suffered during those 10 days on the way to Nepal?

#72: I did not face any hardships for the 10 days until we reached Lo. [When] we reached Lo, I only had the gun, which I could not take with me. There were 150 bullets and I had to discard them. What we call police in India is called *Sepen* in Nepal. Other than those things [gun and bullets], I could bring everything else to Lo.

Q: And your wife and children, they came through okay as well?

#72: Until we reached there [Lo], we did not face any hardships on the way. We reached it very well. We faced problems once we reached there.

Q: What problems did you face?

#72: I told you I had with me about 500 sheep, 100 yaks, another 46 yaks with loads and five horses. I reached Lo with all my animals. In general, the region of Lo has very scarce grass and was prone to snowfall. After we reached Lo, within a week snow fell on two occasions. During the snowfall, my entire flock of animals died under the snow. Only the five horses survived at that time. All the sheep and yaks died under the snow. After the second snowfall, I was finally left with only 100 sheep and 13 yaks and *dri*. Then I sent a servant and a maid with the remaining animals back into Tibet. I gave them a tent, utensils and food to eat to return to Tibet.

Q: To take them where in Tibet? Where were they going to take them?

#72: Back to Tibet where the animals would get grass to eat. Once one was in Tibet, there was grass for the animals. I sent them back where there was grass, away from Nepali territory.

Q: But your maid and your servant where were they going to stay? How were they going to live tending your sheep in Tibet?

#72: They have to tend the animals in Tibet just like many other people living there. I sent the servant and the maid, with about a hundred sheep and 13 yaks and their provisions to graze the animals there.

Q: You sent them just over the border or all the way back where you came from?

#72: If they stayed in Nepali territory, there was no grass to eat. If I sent them back, though they did not go to my village, there was good grass for the animals in the regions of Tibet. I sent them back to Tibet in the second Tibetan lunar month of 1959.

Q: After you did that, then what happened to you in Nepal?

#72: Once in Nepal, I sent my animals back. Then I, two man-servants, a maid, my wife, two children and my mother's mother lived at Lo Monthang. While we lived there, the food we had brought with us lasted for a year. However, we paid for water and firewood. You couldn't go to the hills in search of it [firewood] because of the snow. We had to buy grass for the horses. First, I sold one horse for grass to feed the other four horses.

Q: Then what happened?

#72: I sold one horse to feed the other four, but that was not sufficient, so I sold two horses at 150 Nepali rupees each. One horse died of illness and only one horse remained.

Q: Then?

#72: The remaining one horse fetched me quite a good price. I sold the horse to a Nepali friend who paid me 800 Nepali rupees for it.

Q: Now you had no horses.

#72: Now I had no horses. There were three servants, one maid and two man-servants. I sent the two servants to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force at Lo. Now we were my family and the maid. While we lived in Lo for two years, my grandmother, who was 86 years old, passed away there. The utensils that we'd brought with us from Tibet were made of brass. If we sold a brass vessel of this size [gestures] to the Lopas [people of Lo] they gave us a *pathi* full of grains. We had to accept whatever they gave us. We were not in a position to quote any price.

Q: Then what happened?

#72: My grandmother was dead. She was old and died at the age of 86. We became paupers. We owned some articles we could neither carry nor would they fetch a good price if sold. I had quite a lot of them. There was a monastery at Lo Monthang and I left the things there for safe-keeping. Then I carried one child and holding the other and with my wife, I came to India.

Q: Then what happened?

#72: First I left Lo for Nepal, from Nepal to Dorjiden [in Bihar, India] and from Dorjiden I went to Dharamsala.

Q: At the time when you had lost a lot of your money and possessions and your grandmother had died, what were you feeling at that time?

#72: There was no feeling in my heart. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had come to India like a pauper. I am just a common man. Whenever I could, I bought some food and at other times during the journey from Lo to Nepal, we begged.

Q: When was this that you begged?

#72: That was in 1962. I arrived in Dharamsala in 1962.

Q: So you are saying that allowed you to do all this was the thought that if the Dalai Lama could escape, then I can also endure whatever I have to endure. Is that true?

#72: Yes.

Q: Please continue. You came to Dharamsala.

#72: I reached Dharamsala on the ninth of January 1962. That was a Monday. I saw His Holiness the very day we reached there. We were 11 people around the palace.

Q: How did that come about? You just arrived in Dharamsala with your children and your wife and then you have an audience with the Dalai Lama. How was that arranged?

#72: It was not just us alone. We saw many people gathered at a meeting place. His Holiness arrived on the dais. Until then I had only heard about His Holiness, but never seen him. He was a monk in monk's robes. He had on a pair of clear spectacles. As soon as he arrived there, I felt happy as well as sad. I shed tears.

Q: Then what happened?

#72: After seeing His Holiness, we stayed for five days in Dharamsala. I had two children with me of whom one was very small. I heard from people who arrived earlier that children were admitted to a kindergarten in Dharamsala. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's older sister was the one who accepted the children. I left one child there. The younger was very small, so I left the older one there. I wondered what to do because there was nowhere to go and nowhere to stay. Then the home department of the Tibetan government said that I must go to work for road construction.

Q: Did you go on the road crew?

#72: The home department in Dharamsala issued me a letter. They said some groups of Tibetans were in Kangra Yamipur. I was to contact the group leader named Chonze Tsemphel, a person hailing from Tewu in eastern Tibet. We were to go and work on the road crew there. I was sent there with the letter.

Q: What happened when you were sent there?

#72: I reached the road construction site on the 14th of February 1962.

Q: Where is Kangra?

#72: It is in the south of Dharamsala. We reached there on the 14th and met the leader on the 15th. There were many people engaged in constructing roads. A group consisted of 20 workers. There were eight such groups when I arrived.

Q: How long did you do that for?

#72: Then we were admitted into the road construction group. I was accompanied by eleven people. Nine people who had reached there earlier and who had not yet joined any group were included in my group and I was appointed the group leader. I did not have to work. During road labor, we changed sites according to the summer and winter seasons. In winter we moved to the warmer locations and in summer, we crossed the mountain pass into Garya, Keylang and Spiti. I worked at road construction for seven years. We continued to move from place to place.

Q: Were your wife and children nearby?

#72: One of my children was already left [in Dharamsala] before I joined the road crew. Later I admitted my second child also there. I had a good wife. My wife and my mother were with me.

Q: What happened after seven years?

#72: After laboring on the road construction for seven years, I was sent to this settlement in 1969.

Q: Were you happy to come here?

#72: There is nothing to be happy or sad about it. When we lived there [at the road construction sites], we had to live in our tents. When it rained in summer, the tents leaked and if it snowed in winter, the snow covered the tents. Those with older people and young children faced a lot of hardships. When we first arrived at the settlement, we lived in bamboo huts with tiled roofs. Then when we were provided houses, the anxiety of the children and wives dying under rain and snow vanished.

Q: In Bylakuppe you had a tile roof, so that made you happy?

#72: The anxiety that the children, women and elders might perish under rain and snow vanished. However, the workload was the same. We left our earlier place in groups. I came along with people from seven groups [for road construction] and we worked jointly. I was

appointed the group leader. There were 86 people in the working age group and around 40 children.

Q: So you are a natural leader?

#72: Yes.

Q: So you settled in Bylakuppe. Did you have more children here?

#72: I had two children in Bylakuppe. The youngest is a daughter.

Q: How many children do you have in total now?

#72: I had eleven children including the dead.

Q: You had more children during the seven years that you were working on the road crew?

#72: Two children were born while we were working as road crew. One child that was born in Dharamsala is the one who is driving you in the vehicle. The other passed away. After coming here [Bylakuppe] we had two more children. One, a daughter lives right across and the son is serving in the Indian army. I told you I had two children when I escaped from Tibet. The younger one, Wangyal serves in the old settlement's gas station and the oldest one lives in the United States.

Q: So you are surrounded by your family.

#72: That is Wangyal's house [points to house], my daughter lives here and Gyamtso over there. Three [of the children] are here. The oldest son lives in the United States and the youngest son is in the Indian Army.

Q: You are literally, in fact, surrounded by your family.

#72: [Laughs]

Q: Now that you have arrived here and successfully settled here, if you could go back to Tibet would you go back?

#72: If I could get the chance to go back to Tibet, where would I stay by not going back? There is a Tibetan saying, "However bad your country is, that is the world; however blissful another's country is, that is borrowed ground." So if we get a chance to go back, why should I stay here which is another's country? It is only due to the blessings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the generosity of the Indian government that we are here. We do not even own a handful of soil to lead our life.

Q: What advice would you give to the younger generations of Tibetans? What do you think is most important about Tibetan culture that needs to be preserved?

#72: If only the younger generation would listen. I do not know much about the religion of Tibet, except that I am a Buddhist. If one were to advise them, there is advice to be given. Tibetan religion, culture and traditions are very important. These days the youngsters do not have much interest in religion, culture and traditions of Tibet.

Q: Why do you think that is?

#72: We are living in India. The Tibetan government started it [a trend] by sending a thousand people to the United States of America. Now people are going everywhere, officially and personally. They are running after this [makes gesture of paper money]. By running after it, they lose interest in religion, culture and traditions. I know finance is important but in this world, I think finance alone cannot preserve one's country.

Q: Is there anything that you would like to say that I haven't asked you that you think is important to tell me?

#72: There is nothing important in particular left to say. Tibet is now lost. However, if you have questions pertaining to the system of tax payments and the laws of the then Tibetan government, I have some information. Other than that, after arriving as refugees in India, the Indian government has been most helpful due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. And in particular all the foreign countries including the United States of America have supported the cause of Tibet for which we are very grateful. However, since our opponent is China, nothing has moved them. I think the Tibetans must learn to stand on our own feet and start a stronger movement. That is my thought.

Q: What do you think they should do?

#72: We must learn to stand on our own feet. However, we cannot go and confront the Chinese nor do we stand a chance if we fight them. We cannot rival the Chinese in war. In India the Tibetans belonging to the three provinces are not united. They must stand united and carry out His Holiness' wishes. Our aim is firstly, the complete independence and secondly, the Middle Way approach as advocated by His Holiness and adopted by the Tibetan Government. The three provinces must stand united on these two objectives, but that is not so now.

Q: Thank you very much. It has been an honor hearing your story.

#72: [Laughs]

Q: I want to thank you so much for telling your story to us, so please accept this in gratitude. [Hands over gifts from the Project.]

#72: Thank you. Could you take a photograph of me with those? [Points to trophy placed on the family altar] This year the people of Ngari region made a Long Life Offering to His

Holiness the Dalai Lama. I went to Dharamsala for that and this is the certificate and the memento of that event.

[Photographs are taken.]

END OF INTERVIEW