

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #88 – Ngodup Lhamo (alias)
July 3, 2007**

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #88
2. Interviewee: Ngodup Lhamo (alias)
3. Age: 67
4. Date of Birth: 1940
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Gyashu
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: July 3, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Interviewee's residence, Old Camp No. 6, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 32 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Ngodup Lhamo comes from Powo Yikong and belonged to a farming family. She recalls the problems faced by Tibetan women during childbirth. Since there were no hospitals or trained medical personnel, the majority of the births took place at home. Birth-related problems were viewed as the result of evil spells so rituals and prayers were performed to promote an easy birth.

Ngodup Lhamo also recalls fond memories of typical childhood games she played and discusses enjoyable festivals such as *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year' when her family drank home-brewed beer from silver bowls and told stories of ancient kings.

After the Chinese invasion, the Chinese began arresting people in Ngodup Lhamo's village, falsely accusing them of helping the Defend Tibet Volunteer Force. She, along with five other families, escaped through Pema Koe and reached Tuting in India. Although they faced many problems as refugees, gradually the settlements in India improved, just as His Holiness the Dalai Lama assured them when he visited Bylakuppe in the early days.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, childbirth, religious festivals, life under Chinese rule, escape experiences, early life in Bylakuppe.

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Interview #88

Interviewee: Ngodup Lhamo [alias]

Age: 66, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: July 3, 2007

[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #88, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Question: What did her village look like?

Interviewee #88: The name of my village is Powo.

Q: Ask her to describe the village. What was it like?

#88: It is called Powo Yikong. My husband can describe it better than me. Our region was very vast. Tsang has upper-Tsang and lower-Tsang—similarly Toepa might have upper and lower Toe. In the same way...my husband can describe that. They [the interviewer and videographer] have come from a distant place to interview and they must get a good interview; I cannot give a good answer. My husband knows how many influential people were there in our village and how many were tormented by the Chinese. I told you I am nine years younger than my husband, so I do not know.

Q: What chores did she have to do when she was a little girl in her house?

#88: We were farmers and we did not know anything else. I did not know any skills and had no education; we were like fools. Before I came here in 1959, I had never been to a school. I am a complete fool. As I told you, through His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Indian government provided each of us with an acre of land. We cleared the jungle and worked very hard. Except working on that acre of land, I do not have anything to say.

Q: Did she ever witness someone being born in Tibet? Was she ever present at a birth?

#88: There were no facilities in Tibet, no hospitals. Children were born at home. Those who had a difficult birth would be in labor for three or four days. Some had an easy birth and gave birth in half an hour. That was it. The child was born at home and if you did not have work to do, you rested for a month. However, if you had work to do, you were up and working in a week or two.

Q: If somebody had a really long labor, would they do something to help make the baby come or what would they do to help the labor along?

#88: If the labor was very long, offerings were made to the monastery to read *shapten* prayer scriptures like *Boom* and *Kangyur*. Until the Chinese came, there were no hospitals. There were no doctors, except for one or two Tibetan doctors, so performing *shapten* and calling upon the lamas was followed in such situations. Once you performed the necessary rituals, the child was born.

Some suffered long labors, but the majority of the women gave birth while they were at work. If one was the wife of a high-class person, there were many servants and maids to do the work and she didn't have to go out to work. Such women became very heavy, and faced difficult births. The rituals were performed then. Those women who were used to working had easy births. If one didn't work, the child grew big in the womb and then it was a difficult birth.

Q: Did they believe that if the baby had a hard time coming into the world, like a difficult time being born, did they believe that was connected to some spiritual reason?

#88: When the birth is difficult, the Tibetans believe it is due to some evil harm, so just as I told you earlier *shapten* was read, lamas consulted, rituals carried out and offerings made to the monasteries to read *Kangyur* and *Boom*. It was like that until the Chinese arrived as there were no hospitals. After the Chinese came, they took the women to hospitals. When I was a child I saw my mother give birth at home. We have never been to a hospital.

Q: Did she have children in Tibet? If so how many children did she give birth to in Tibet?

#88: I was young when I lived in Tibet. I escaped at the age of 18 or 19. My children were born in India. I never gave birth in Tibet.

Q: So when women gave birth in Tibet, did they always give birth inside the house?

#88: Yes, they gave birth at home. However, the actual birth did not take place within the house. As childbirth is considered dirty, a bed was prepared in a small room and the birth took place there. The birth did not happen inside the house where people lived.

Q: Did they do anything special with the after birth, the placenta?

#88: The placenta was buried in the earth. It was taken away and buried in the corner of one's field. It was not thrown in the water; it was buried in the earth.

Q: Why did they do that?

#88: I don't know. It was not the custom to throw it in the river. I am talking about my personal experience with my mother. She gave birth three or four times and I saw it [the placenta] being buried in the ground. The ground was opened with a hoe and it was put in there. It was not thrown away. Also there was no river close by; it was far away. Since it was considered dirty, it was not thrown in the drinking water area. Our drinking water

streamed down from the hills. Everyone drank this water, so the placenta was not thrown there.

Q: Were men allowed in the house while the woman was giving birth?

#88: It depends on the availability of help at hand. If the woman had a mother, father, children and many relatives, the men needn't stay there. The mother and female relatives helped her. If the woman did not have parents except her husband, then the husband had to stay to help. The husband had to pick up the baby. It was not the custom to call anyone else for help because of the various discharges from the body which other people might consider unclean.

Q: Was this something that everybody kind of...most young women knew how to do? Most young women just knew how to assist at a birth and what to do?

#88: The mothers, female relatives, elder and younger sisters assisted with the birth. Nobody knew how to do it [at first]. When a child is born, it is picked up; the umbilical cord is cut off with a knife and tied with a string. The string would be kept ready by the side. In Tibet we had strings made from wool, which was kept ready close by to tie up the baby's umbilical cord, as also a knife. As soon as the child is born, the mother cut the cord and tied the string. Short strings were spun especially for this.

Q: Did they use any special kind of knife to cut the umbilical cord?

#88: There was a small separate knife to cut the umbilical cord. It was not the knife you use to cut meat. In Tibet, we cannot buy knives immediately like in India. Everyone, male and female carried small knives on their body all the times. That was the custom in old Tibet. A small knife was used to cut it [umbilical cord]. However, if a woman gave birth while working in the field, they would take any knife and cut it.

Q: Sometimes women give birth in the fields by themselves?

#88: It happens many times in Tibet. Many wealthy families in Tibet had many servants and maids. Sometimes the maids gave birth in the fields. Everyone carried a ball of string and a small knife, either to eat fruits or meat. The knife was taken out and it [umbilical cord] was tied and cut.

Q: Was there anything special that they used to wrap the baby in after it was born? Was there a special material?

#88: After the baby was born, we wrapped it in sheepskin in Tibet. Woolen cloth cut into squares was used to wrap the baby. In old Tibet, it was sheepskin and woolen cloth that were used to wrap the baby. If one had old *gonam* 'serge' clothes, the sleeves would be cut and made into baby wraps. In Tibet we had *gonam* and *puruk* 'blankets' which were made into wraps.

Q: Was there any special food they would feed the mother to help bring her strength back?

#88: After giving birth, butter was warmed and some women drank it straight with a little bit of *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley.’ Some women who were not able to drink warmed butter were given a cooked mixture of warm butter and *tsampa*. Also minced meat was cooked in butter and fed to the mother. The meat was minced smoothly so that it was not hard to chew. The mother was given a lot of *chang* ‘home-brewed beer.’ *Changkue* was made from *chang* by adding melted butter, *tsampa* and cheese to it. Bowls of *changkue* were given to the mother.

Q: The births that she saw, that she was at, were they any of her relatives or were they just like people in her village? Were any of them related to her or any members of her family she saw being born?

#88: When I was born, my grandfather and grandmother from my father's side were dead. My father had three children, two daughters and a son.

Q: Question is repeated.

#88: I told you about my father's wife giving birth. I don't know about other people, but it is similar with everyone. Even if I had to tell you about others, it [the birthing process] would be the same.

Q: Did she see her mother give birth to one of her brothers and sisters?

#88: I do not know about my mother giving birth because she died when I was 7 months old. Many years after my mother's death, my father married again and I told you about how the births take place.

Q: That was her stepmother?

#88: Yes, that was my stepmother. My mother died after giving birth to my older sister who was around 2 or 3 years old then and I, 7 months old. My mother passed away when she was 25 years old.

Q: So she helped her stepmother with the birth of the children?

#88: Yes, I told you about it. I was the oldest among all the children. I related to you all that I saw.

Q: How did her mother die?

#88: I believe even 7 months after birth she suffered from *bang tselo*. My father told me that she died after the fever returned to her womb.

Q: What is *bang tselo*?

#88: There is something called the *bang-tse* ‘womb fever’ after giving birth. If the woman does not recover well, the fever returns and she falls sick. She died due to fever.

Q: Did many women die in childbirth?

#88: There are several cases when the child is not able to emerge from the body and the mother dies with the child in the womb. I have seen such cases as a young girl. There are also cases of women dying after giving birth with an infant child left behind.

Q: Did it happen very often?

#88: It did not happen to everyone. They died maybe because their lifespan was at an end or they were unfortunate or due to some harmful effects. Some women died with the child in the womb and some after giving birth. Such cases happen.

Q: When a woman was pregnant, were there things that were considered unlucky for her to do? Things that she needed to avoid. Things that were considered unlucky for her to do like, unlucky for the baby; any superstitions around that, any beliefs around that?

#88: Yes, there were such things. Tibetans have such beliefs. A woman was advised to desist from eating at other people's homes and not to indulge in different types of food, lest the baby is harmed. She would be warned not to eat from the hands of barren women, which might harm the baby. Such things used to be said. Barren women were not considered good.

Q: Why? What was the reason for not eating from barren women?

#88: Tibetans called a barren woman *rabchay* because she does not have any offspring. It was said that one who cannot give birth is not good; she is bad and one should not eat from the hands of such a person.

Q: Was it considered good to have a big family, have many children?

#88: It was considered good to have many children. In Tibet it was considered good when there were many births. However, considering we do not have a country here, we have no lands and giving birth to many children would be a lot of hardship, so people restrict birth. Otherwise, it was good for families to have as many children [as possible in Tibet]. There were cases of women giving birth to 20 children! Some have 15 or 16 in Tibet.

Q: Was there an equal celebration if it was a boy or a girl or was it better to have one or the other?

#88: In Tibet people believed that a boy could take care of himself, so people said it was better to have a boy. However, unlike in India, there was no discrimination between boys and girls. Indians consider having girls to be very bad. Tibetan girls did what was expected

of girls and some girls were exceptionally good, so there was no distinction. However, the birth of a boy was considered more joyful. People remarked, "That family has so many boys. That's good. They can take care of themselves. They can go anywhere they need to." Girls had to give birth and that was considered a hardship.

Q: When women were in labor, did they scream a lot, like really scream or were they kind of brave? Like in the west, women scream really a lot when they are giving birth. I am wondering Tibetan women in Tibet, if they were quiet or what they did?

#88: There were no hospitals in Tibet. One should bear the labor pains and as I told you earlier one must pray to God. Women take blessings from the lamas and wear the sacred thread. Likewise, the family made offerings for the scriptures to be read in the monasteries, so in this way all the obstacles are removed.

[Question is repeated.]

#88: When one is in severe pain, they scream. Some women eat well and work hard during the pregnancy and their babies are not able to grow to a large size, so since the baby is small, they give birth in half an hour or an hour. Under the old system in Tibet, we had never seen a watch, except when the Chinese arrived. However, people measured time in hours like "that man really was fast, he took just an hour" or "this woman gave birth in one hour." So some women did give birth fast while some others took three, four or five days rolling around in pain. There was nothing to do but roll around in pain and bear it. Then when the time came, the baby was born. In India the baby would be helped out or something.

Q: Do people hear the sounds of screams outside?

#88: Some women endure and shut their mouth tight and do not scream much. Some did cry out *aru, aru* [expression of pain].

Q: After the baby was born, were there any signs that were considered auspicious or evil, like if an animal came to the house or something that would happen or the weather, whether they would consider like this is an auspicious sign for this child's life or this is an evil sign for this child's life? Would they have any belief like that?

#88: If the woman was giving birth to a *tulku* 'reincarnate lama', showers of flowers rained and rainbows formed in the sky. There were signs like rainbows and flower showers when a high *tulku* was being born in the family. Or it rained with the sun shining in the sky.

Q: It rained flowers?

#88: When it rained when the sun shone, people called it rains of flowers. Rainbows formed on the mountains and that was the sign to indicate that a *tulku* or an exceptional child was born.

Q: Was it ever considered good or bad to have certain animals or birds visit the house right after the birth?

#88: There were no such superstitions. There were no superstitious around animals or birds.

Q: How would the parents decide the name of the child?

#88: His Holiness the Dalai Lama was requested to give a name. He is the supreme lama of Tibet. Then we also requested high lamas that lived in the local monasteries to give names.

Q: Did her stepmother take her stepsisters and stepbrothers to a high lama? Was that easy to get to the high lama? How far away was he?

#88: Yes, we requested the high lamas. A month after giving birth, the mother and the infant visited a holy lama for *tisol rabnay* 'cleansing ritual' and *kago*. They received blessed threads and a name was given. In Tibet, the names were given by the lamas.

Q: The parents never decided the names on their own?

#88: Parents did give names in some cases. Some parents took a part of each of their names and gave it to the child. Such names were likened to a protective amulet.

Q: Who from here family did she come out of Tibet with? Who did she escape Tibet with?

#88: About five families of the village fled together.

[Question is repeated.]

#88: My entire family was left behind. My father sent me along with my uncle. My father planned to come later. He couldn't escape with me. At the time of my escape, my stepmother was pregnant. She was pregnant with twins and her belly was this big [stretches out hands] and so my father couldn't come. I was sent with my uncle. My uncle had already fled but he came back to fetch us. My father couldn't come because my stepmother's pregnancy stretched beyond nine months. They were left at home.

Q: Why did they decide to leave?

#88: In 1959 His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left for India. Nobody ever thought of staying back once he was gone. Once His Holiness was gone people thought, "Our country has become dark. The Chinese will cause us suffering. They are bound to cause us misery." Fearing this everyone said they were leaving. We were planning to escape, preparing our horses and animals.

However, there were not many who could go. Before we made our escape, the Chinese started tormenting a few rich people. A person who went to graze his animals was accused of being involved with the guerrillas of the Defend Tibet Volunteer Force who came from Kham in 1959. They [the Chinese] captured a few people who were grazing their animals, hung them by their hands up on the trees the whole day and swung them about. When people saw that, everyone remarked that they were certain to face similar torment and wished to escape. People of the village crossed over to the other side of the river.

However, only five families managed to escape. The five families were determined to escape come what may, whether we faced death or whatever. We herded our horses and loaded the animals. On the 26th of the sixth Tibetan lunar month of 1959, on a dark and moonless night, we encountered Chinese soldiers at Kongpo. They fired at us and everyone scattered. We lost all our belongings except for what we wore on our bodies and fled. Some were killed and some were captured. The rest of us managed to reach India. Some are living in Tezu, while most are dead by now.

Q: How long did the journey take to get out of Tibet?

#88: When we fled from Tibet to India, we walked on the mountains where there were no routes. We came to a place called Pema Koe, which is a pilgrim site. There were no routes on the mountains and we followed an animal called *tsip-nya*, which resembles a yak. If it climbed up a mountain, we did the same as we could squeeze through the path it had made. If it went down towards the water, we did the same. In this way we reached Pema Koe. We stayed there for a year. We thought, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama is in India. It is no use of our staying here." So saying this we came to India. Even though we did not have anything to carry with us, the Chinese still pursued us. At least we could reach the holy site with our lives intact. We reached the Indian territory of Tuting from Pema Koe.

Q: What kind of animal was it? Was it some kind of mountain goat?

#88: It was a wild animal. I see it on the television sometimes. It is a big animal with horns. It looked like the yak of Tibet. We found many such animals on the mountains. When it walked on the mountains, it crushed all the bushes underfoot and it did the same when it went to the river. So we were able to squeeze through the way created by it. We were in unknown territory and we prayed to the gods, to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and to Guru Rinpoche and reached Pema Koe. Then we came to India from Pema Koe. When we reached India on the Kopula, due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we were provided with food, rice, sugar and everything else. From this spot, we were sent in groups to Tuting. We flew by an airplane from Tuting.

Q: How long did it take them to reach Pema Koe?

#88: We were stranded there for about a month as the airplane did not come. It might have been a month or two. I do not know the exact period. My husband knows everything. Since you are asking me questions, I just told you roughly what I know. I do not have clear dates.

[Question is repeated.]

#88: The environment was mountainous, uphill and downhill. It might have taken us about two months.

Q: Did everybody survive the journey in her party?

#88: Yes, we were together.

Q: Can she tell us anything else about the journey like what were the most difficult things about the journey and how did they survive? How did they eat? What did they survive on?

#88: The people of the region were very good. The people of Pema Koe brought us food as if the parents of the house had arrived and said, "You have suffered a lot. The Chinese have tormented you. You have faced so many difficulties." They allowed us to stay in their houses and provided us good food. The food was millet and corn. They gave us boiled millet. The corn was in three types. The smooth powder was made into *pa* 'kneaded dough', the coarser one was cooked like rice and they gave us curries.

Q: Is Pema Koe in Tibet?

#88: Yes, it is in Tibet. Pema Koe is in Tibet. The people were sympathetic towards us for what we had endured. Later they too came with us. Many families of Pema Koe came to India. They are living in Orissa [an Indian state]. There are many Pema Koe people living in Orissa.

Q: There were no Chinese in Pema Koe right then?

#88: A long time back before Tibet was invaded; Chinese had held three or four districts in Methok Lhajong of Pema Koe. The Chinese used to be there and we saw many of their houses. Later in 1959 when the fighting started in Tibet, they were all gone. We saw the houses of the Chinese. In the later years after we fled, they [the Chinese] occupied this side of the mountain pass. The Chinese occupied the area. When we reached there [Pema Koe], the guerrillas of the Defend Tibet Volunteer Force arrived and there were no Chinese in that area; they went to Powo Tamo and Chamdo. When we arrived, there were no Chinese in the region of Pema Koe, so in that period, the people were able to make their escape. Many *Khampas* 'people of Kham, eastern province of Tibet' were also able to escape.

Q: How did she meet her husband?

#88: We met while we were on our escape journey to India. We did not have a marriage celebration like people do here because we were escaping and rendered paupers, so as paupers we met on the journey.

Q: Were they being chased by the Chinese at that time, or was it quite safe when they met?

#88: That happened after we had reached the pilgrim site of Pema Koe. Earlier we were being pursued by the Chinese. On the journey from Pema Koe to India, we sort of had a relationship.

Q: What impressed her about him? What was special about him?

#88: [Laughs with embarrassment] The Westerners ask such questions!

Q: I will tell her my story afterwards.

#88: [More laughter.]

Q: Was he handsome?

#88: In India boys and girls study together in school and they form a relationship. Likewise, we paupers came on the journey together. We did not have parents or siblings and we were in similar situations and we met. There was no choice as such.

Q: We just have a couple of questions about, going actually back in time to her childhood, just a couple of questions about her childhood in her village. One of the questions we wanted to ask is because we have spoken to many men and we've asked them what kind of games the boys played. What kind of games did the girls play together?

#88: Little children played many different games. Very little children played in the dust and threw balls. Girls also played that. Then girls played with small stones called *kyangka*. Wrestling games were played when one grew older. There was also tug-of-war.

Q: Was the wrestling played between boys and girls?

#88: Boys wrestled with boys, girls wrestled with girls, and boys and girls wrestled, too. Different kinds of games were played in Tibet. Boys tested their strength by lifting heavy stones. Little children threw balls and also coins. When they grew older, the boys threw stones. Some games tested the strength. A long log was cut with a knife. In Tibet we had trees called *thangshing* 'fir,' which you can see in Dharamsala. A fir tree was cut and a few men held it horizontally. A young man rushed with a knife and cut it like one would slice a radish. Such logs were piled at intersections. That game was a test of strength. Later I heard that the Chinese said that was wasting trees and the game was banned. The very young ones also played hacky sack.

Q: Did she have any toys? What would be an equivalent of a toy when she was a child?

#88: In Tibet we did not have any toys. The little children played with catapults. In the yard, a piece of wood was hammered [into the ground] and a wooden plank was placed on it. Then children leaned on that and played while it rotated. Then a plank was placed on a flat piece of wood and children played see-saw. The little ones had stones to play *kyanga*

with. There were also tops made from wood. Boys played shooting targets with bows and arrows. Children also played hide and seek. Swings were made using ropes.

Q: Was there anything like equivalent to the dolls? In many countries, little girls like to have dolls? Did she have anything like that?

#88: At that time in Tibet we did not have dolls. Sometimes we watched people with guitars that did puppet shows, but not everyone had dolls. There were some such beggars who had puppets. I don't know whether they came from India or elsewhere.

Q: Who were these people?

#88: When the beggars played the guitar, the puppets danced. Everybody was amazed and went to watch the show. Performers like *relpa* and *lhamo* 'opera' came. At such times, tents were set up in open grounds and they did the shows for two or three days. They came from distant places.

Q: Were the beggars Tibetans?

#88: They were Tibetans. I think they were Bapas 'people of Ba' from Kham. There were also *lhamo* performances just like we have here.

Q: Were those that did the puppet shows Tibetans?

#88: In Tibet we used to call them beggars. They performed and then went to Lhasa on pilgrimage and to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: Did they beg as they journeyed?

#88: Yes, they were like beggars and people gave them alms. People gave them food, butter, *tsampa* and meat. They took that and went on to Lhasa on pilgrimage.

Q: When she was a little girl, many little girls like to dress up in their mother's clothes. Did she ever do anything like that and dress up in her mother's clothes or older family members' clothes?

#88: Yes, I have worn my parents' clothes, which were huge for me. The Kongpos have an outer-dress called *goshup*; we would wear the dress back to the front and place the cap in the opposite direction as a child.

Q: Are you a Kongpo?

#88: I am not a Kongpo, I am from Powo. The Popas and Kongpos have similar costumes.

Q: Did she ever pretend that she was someone else like little girls sometimes they would pretend they were the queen or something like that? Was there someone they would pretend like they were somebody else, like a queen or a princess?

#88: Yes, we did that. We pretended to be queens and fathers and mothers of wealthy families.

Q: Did she remember any; I think the word is *dhuechen* like festivals, big time? Did she remember any festivals in her village or did they ever go to any festivals?

#88: The *dhuechen* were the 10th and 15th days of the months and the fourth Tibetan lunar month called *Sakadawa*. During such times, there were *cham* ‘dance performance by monks’ and incense burning ceremonies. Horses were decked in ornamental saddles and people wore fine clothes. The men carried swords and guns. Women wore all their finest jewelries and went [to the monastery]. Monks led the incense burning ceremony and people joined in. People circumambulated and went on pilgrimage. *Cham* was performed at the monastery on the 15th day of the first Tibetan lunar month.

Q: Did they ever actually fire their guns during this ritual?

#88: People invoked the blessings of the deities at the *lhara*, the place with many prayer flags. A number of fir trees at the *lhara* were pasted with prayer flags. The *lhara* was a large area and incense-burning ceremonies were held there. All the protective deities are said to come into our bodies on that day and one is supposed to gain blessings. Women wore all their fineries, including *dzi* ‘special agate beads’ and coral necklaces and silver ornaments. After the incense burning ceremony, the men fired once from their guns.

Q: What would they say? Would they chant anything during the time or say anything when they would shoot in the air?

#88: The guns were fired after the chanting of the incense burning ceremony. A target was set up and then the men checked to see if they had hit the target.

Q: Did she ever travel outside her area at all before she left Tibet? Did she ever do any traveling?

#88: I have never been anywhere. I lived only in my village. I never traveled to other places.

Q: Can she describe what *Losar* ‘Tibetan New Year’ was like when she was young?

#88: We celebrated *Losar* on a grand scale. The celebrations continued for a month or two. Every family of the village hosted a party for a day each. People invited us and we invited them and it was a lot of fun. There was *chang* and meat and everything. The grandest foods were prepared. In Tibet we did not have beds, so the heads of the families sat on cushions. Tea was served to them in ornamental cups and *chang* in silver bowls on the low tables. The mothers of the families sat on the other side of the large room. Everybody drank *chang* in silver bowls. They related stories about the ancient kings and the events that occurred during the kings' reigns.

[Interviewee shows a small wooden bowl and explains:]

It's a bowl [in which *chang* was drunk] similar to this, but much bigger in size. A part of the inside of the bowl is lined with a film of silver and also the outside bottom part.

Q: Does she remember any of the stories that they told at *Losar*?

#88: I do not remember such stories because in 1959 when I escaped I was just 18 or 19 years old. I only saw what the elders did, but I cannot tell you the stories that they told.

Q: When she came to India, was it very difficult to adapt to life in India?

#88: Yes, when we initially arrived in the settlement in India, the Indians themselves were economically poor. When we lost Tibet and came here, we were left in the jungle. We cut the woods and cleared the forest. It was very difficult at that time. Then we grew lentils first and then millets to test which crops could grow in the region. Later a person from Switzerland came and taught us to cultivate corn. Since then everybody grew corn. Then as years went by, gradually our difficulties were solved. Now the Indians as well as the Tibetans are making progress. Due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama all our difficulties are resolved. At first it was very hard when we had to work in the forest. The Indian government provided us with food and wheat, but that was not sufficient.

Q: Can she describe what it was like clearing the jungle and she said earlier about she had a baby on her back and a baby in her arms. Can she describe that again?

#88: We worked in the fields and raised animals. I had a child on my back and another holding my hand and those were very difficult days. So in this way we worked in the fields and gradually through the blessings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we toiled hard on the land provided by the Indian government. Initially it was so difficult that we thought of moving elsewhere. Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited here and advised all the people of the settlement, "In the future the settlement will become a good and happy place. At present it is difficult, but that is okay. You should work hard." His Holiness visited the area behind that hill [gestures] and used a knife to cut [a tree] with his hands. When His Holiness did that, the people settled down calmly and lived here. Then the Settlement became very good just as His Holiness said. It was hard initially and later the fields became fertile and the harvests were good.

Q: Did he [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] come to the hill here?

#88: He came to the hill there [gestures] behind Camp Number 6. Everyone was cutting the woods and His Holiness visited. At that time it was on everybody's mind that the settlement was very poor and it was not possible to struggle any more. It was so very difficult clearing the forest. Then the Buddha [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] arrived at the spot, took a knife from a person who was cutting the woods and used the knife himself. He said, "Everything will be fine. The settlement will be a place where all our Tibetan people

will live together in the future. You should all be firm in living here and your difficulties will be resolved." His Holiness thus advised the people and everybody continued to live [in the settlement].

Q: Was it true what His Holiness said? Did that come to pass?

#88: Just as His Holiness the Dalai Lama advised, we worked hard for the future of the settlement. Now most of the elders have already passed away except for some like me. Just as His Holiness has said, the settlement has become a happy place. Many of the youngsters are abroad and the elders are living in the settlement. It has happened just like His Holiness said. It came to pass because we stayed back acting on His Holiness' advice.

Q: Did she actually see His Holiness do that with her own eyes, cutting the jungles?

#88: My husband was behind the hill clearing the jungles with all the men. My husband can narrate it clearly. He said that His Holiness did that [used a knife to cut a tree]. I was waiting [for His Holiness] standing in a line with others nearby our houses. A person or two from each family was engaged in clearing the forest. The people said that His Holiness came walking over the hill and did that.

Q: What does she think is the most important thing to preserve about Tibet?

#88: We, the aged, are getting older and older. However, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is living. Although my parents are dead, all my siblings are living in Tibet. My sister lives in Lhasa and some others are living in my village. Their children now have children and the family members have multiplied. Since His Holiness the Dalai Lama is living and there are many foreign countries that support him, I have hopes that we will certainly get to go back to Tibet in the future. I always pray that we will go back to Tibet.

Q: If the young generation would listen to anything the older generation has to say, what advice would she give to the younger generation of Tibetans in exile now?

#88: My advice for the younger generation is that in the future even if we are dead, just as His Holiness the Dalai Lama always says that the children and the younger generation are the ones who should get Tibet's independence back, the students must study hard. Their parents and the older people might die in India. I have high hopes that I would get one chance to go back to Tibet but as I grow older, it is not possible that I will not die in India. So the children must strive to get our independence. With the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, many countries are supporting our cause. The children must be enthusiastic, study hard and stand united.

END OF INTERVIEW