

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #92 – Cho Lhamo  
June 2, 2006

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #92
2. Interviewee: Cho Lhamo
3. Age: 65
4. Date of Birth: 1941
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Kongpo Tham-nyen
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: June 2, 2006
10. Place of Interview: Private residence, San Francisco, California, United States
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 49 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tashi Chodron
14. Videographer: Kerry Rose
15. Transcriber: Yeshe Dolma



### **Biographical Information:**

Cho Lhamo was born in Kongpo Tham-nyen to a Khampa father and a Kongpo mother. She recalls her childhood days as being extremely happy. She played games, rode horses, danced, sang and dressed like boys to play pranks on other girls. Cho Lhamo married at the age of 21. She fondly describes her village as a very beautiful place with mountains, forests, fruit trees and big rivers.

When the Chinese came to Cho Lhamo's village, they were initially friendly. Then, gradually, life under Chinese control became more oppressive. Cho Lhamo's family was targeted for arrest and torture so they tried to escape. She and her mother were captured by the Chinese and her father was killed. Cho Lhamo and her mother were allowed to return home if they agreed to changer their "way of thinking."

Their second attempt to escape was successful and Cho Lhamo and her family finally reached India. On the way the family met His Holiness the Penor Rinpoche, who was then at Pema Koe near the Indian border. Cho Lhamo travelled to Tibet in 1987 and was able to visit her relatives.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Childhood memories, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, brutality, thamzin, resistance fighters, escape experiences.

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**Interviewee: Cho Lhamo**

**Age: 65, Sex: Female**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: June 2, 2006**

[Begins with interviewee praying]

Question: *Tashi delek* ‘Greetings.’

**Interviewee #92: Tashi delek.**

Q: I'd like to begin by asking you where you were born.

**#92: I was born in Kongpo. My father was a Khampa [a person from Kham province in eastern Tibet], from the region of Dege. My mother's mother, my grandmother was a descendant of Ling Tashitsong, a leader, and married the son of Jesong Sonam Rinchen from Dege Maronong. My mother was a Kongpo.**

Q: So Ama-*la*, welcome to the Tibet Oral History Project. How old are you today?

**#92: I am 65 years old.**

Q: What year were you born?

**#92: I was born in the year of the dragon.**

Q: That sounds like that was 1941.

**#92: [Nods]**

Q: What country were you born in?

**#92: I was born in Kongpo Tham-nyen.**

Q: What village?

**#92: Kongpo Tham-nyen.**

Q: What province was that?

**#92: A river flows downwards from Lhasa to Kongpo.**

Q: What was your father's name?

**#92: My father's name was Khampa Norga.**

Q: And your mother's name?

**#92: Nyima.**

Q: How many siblings did you have in your family growing up?

**#92: There were five children.**

Q: What were they boys or girls?

**#92: There were two boys and three girls.**

Q: Can you give me the names of the two boys and the three girls?

**#92: The boys were Kunga Gyaltzen and Chimi Dorjee. The oldest girl was Chonzom, the next was Yangchen and I am Cho Lhamo.**

Q: Are you married? Did you get married?

**#92: [Nods]**

Q: How many years have you been married?

**#92: I was married at the age of 21 and I had my first child at 22. How many years is that? It's been 40 odd years.**

Q: How many children do you have?

**#92: I have five children.**

Q: In Tibet, what was your father's work? What did he do?

**#92: We were farmers in Tibet. We worked on the farm and we owned many goats, sheep, horses, *dzo*, *dzomo* 'male, female domestic animals bred from yak and cows' and cows. We tended those animals.**

Q: And what did your mother do?

**#92: My mother cooked food and cared for the children. She supervised the laborers and served them food.**

Q: About how many people were in your family when you were growing up?

**#92: We were five siblings and my parents in my family. There were eight or nine poor families who lived as tenants of my family. They came to work in our fields.**

Q: What was your childhood like in Tibet?

**#92: To tell you about my childhood, I led an extremely happy life before the Chinese invasion.**

Q: Can you tell me what was a typical day like growing up for you as a child?

**#92: I remember I was good in riding horses, racing and wrestling. I would catch hold of a strong horse with a rope and rode it without a saddle. I rode into the woods clinging on to the mane of the horse with my head bent against it and we rode away. I rode until I had a sore bottom!**

Q: Did you go horseback riding by yourself?

**#92: I used to go riding by myself.**

Q: What was the land like? Were there many wild animals, dangerous mountains?

**#92: My region was a very beautiful place. In the far distance was the river and pasturelands nearby. Next to that grew small bushes and the people lived at a higher ground which was flat. Further away behind the village were mountains with forests. When I looked out of my house, it was just like this [place of interview]. The area was beautiful. It was one of the most beautiful places in Kongpo. Have you been to Lhasa?**

Q: Yes. Do you have any favorite memories besides horseback riding from your childhood; any other special memories that you have?

**#92: I enjoyed dancing and so we danced a lot. I loved to play *mah-jong* with the boys and men of the wealthy families. We played the whole night through. We placed bets and played. During auspicious days, we practiced dharma and recited prayers. Normally not many children practiced dharma, but I loved to. When I was asked why I practiced dharma and accumulated prayers on my rosary, I used to feel shy and hide my rosary under the *goshup* a gown worn in Kongpo. I counted my prayers on the rosary beneath the gown and at night too.**

**My father was a spiritual person and we practiced on all auspicious days. All the rich families performed a *pooja* 'rituals of worship' on the 10th day of each Tibetan lunar month. My father took part in it. After the day's work was done, all the young men and women circumambulated the temple. We recited the *benzaguru* and *mani* mantras as we circumambulated the temple. I had a very good friend with whom I used to go with. At that**

time I was very beautiful and the boys would tease the friend who accompanied me, "Are you the bodyguard of Cho Lhamo?"

Q: Then?

**#92: Then I used to go out at night dressed in man's clothing with a hat. They [the boys] then asked my friend, "Where is Cho Lhamo?" Many beautiful stylish girls were around and I would drag one to the open ground—I was very strong—towards the back of the temple and she pleaded, "Please older brother, please [let me go]." I would drag her towards the walnut and apricot trees in the dark and she pleaded. Then I pretended to release her. The pretty girl was so scared and ran away!**

Q: Was it more fun or do you think to be a man or to be a woman growing up in Kongpo?

**#92: I love being a woman, but I dressed as a man because the boys teased my friend for being my bodyguard.**

Q: You said it was kind of fun to go to the monastery and have fun. What kind of things did you do that was fun at the monastery?

**#92: While we practiced dharma, we were totally absorbed in that. But in the evenings it was time for the young men and women to circumambulate the temple. We also recited the mantras in a loud rhythmic tone, so it was fun.**

Q: You said that you liked to sing in those days and it would be wonderful if you could. Can you remember some of the songs that you used to sing and could you sing one for me?

**#92: [Interviewee chants a mantra in a sing-song tune.]**

Q: Beautiful. Thank you.

**#92: It was said that there was a lama called Tsesam Lama who lived in retreat throughout his life in the Riwo Tse-nga [holy pilgrim site] in China. This lama who was never seen was said to have sung the mantra that way.**

Q: Beautiful tune.

**#92: It was believed that singing the mantra once has the same benefit as reciting it a hundred times.**

Q: Your family was Tibetan Buddhist?

**#92: Yes, they were Buddhists.**

Q: For many generations?

**#92: Yes, we were Buddhists.**

Q: You said there was a monastery in your village. What was the name of the monastery and how many monks were there?

**#92: There was a Karmapa Monastery close to our village. At a distance was the Zamdong Pari Monastery. The village was called Phushoe and the Golden Temple was there in the village. A little further away was the Zamdong Pari, which was the monastery of the Dhuejom Rinpoche. It was a Nyingma Monastery.**

Q: When you were a young girl, did you have to take any lessons or do any learning as a young girl, go to school or anything?

**#92: There were no schools in my region. We only had to learn by ourselves.**

Q: And what did you hope to do when you grow up? Did you want to be a nun or be a mother?

**#92: We were three sisters and we used to talk among ourselves. The sister who now lives in Tibet had a husband who worked in the fields. I told her, "You have a husband who works in the fields. I will not take such a husband. I will take a husband who trades in silk and brocades."**

Q: Did your father do business?

**#92: He did not do business, but he was a *genpo* in Dege, a leader in Kham. Every two or three months, he had to attend a meeting at the district office. Every three or four years, he went to Lhasa. I don't know how many times he has been to Lhasa when I was a small child. When I was 15 years old, he took me, and my younger brother to Lhasa with him.**

Q: What is your memory of Lhasa when you were 15?

**#92: At that time Lhasa was a happy place. One day we went to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Norbulingka. His Holiness sat on a high throne. He had a colored band with which he blessed the people. On either side of him were two huge men who were the bodyguards. I looked up and saw that he was so fair and rosy. I thought His Holiness the Dalai Lama is really god. The guards ushered us out quickly.**

Q: If you were 15 that would have been 1956.

**#92: Yes. At that time His Holiness the Dalai Lama was around 22 years old. I think he was 23.**

Q: How did you get from your home to Lhasa? It's a long distance.

**#92: At that time before the Chinese arrived, we used to walk or ride horses. We reached Lhasa in 15 days. During the time I went [to Lhasa], the Chinese had constructed a road a day's journey from my village. From there we traveled by a vehicle.**

Q: I wanted to go back and ask you to describe your village a little bit. What was it like?

**#92: It will be difficult to follow if I describe the village. There are mountains with forests. There are many mountains and a huge river. I think the river flows from the direction of Lhasa. If one walked for eight or nine days from my village, the territory of Kongpo ended and you reached the pilgrim site of Pema Koe. The lands were stony. Kongpo is a beautiful region with moderate climate. Every type of grains grew in plenty as well as walnuts, apricots and different kinds of fruits. You found plenty of mushrooms in the forests. The soil was very fertile.**

**The Khampas, after visiting Lhasa and when they were on their way back, they stopped at Kongpo and found the place so beautiful that many Khampa men and women settled there by marrying the locals. When new Khampa arrived in Kongpo, whether traders or those who escaped from Chinese atrocities, they came to my house as my father was a Khampa. My father was very good to anyone who came, offering them food and grass for the animals. He was normally very generous.**

Q: What kind of food did you eat then, like in the morning, anything for lunch or evening? Can you tell me about the meals during the day and what kind of food was typical?

**#92: In the morning, we cooked *thukpa* 'noodle soup' in which we added radishes and meat. Together with that we ate thick rolled out bread and at times meat curry or butter. That was our breakfast.**

Q: This is just for the morning meal?

**#92: Yes, for breakfast.**

Q: And you had lots of energy to ride horses.

**#92: Yes.**

Q: Did you eat at lunch, in the middle of the day or wait until evening for your next meal?

**#92: We ate in the middle of the day. We made pancakes from buckwheat flour, two for each person and a bowl of *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' Along with that we ate curds, buttermilk and drank *chang* 'home-brewed beer.' There was also a curry.**

Q: And what did you have for dinner?

**#92: For the evening we again prepared I with turnip and meat. We also ate a big bowl of *tsampa*.**

Q: It sounds like there was lots of food for everybody and that no one was starving or hungry. Is that correct?

**#92: There was hardly anyone who was hungry because there were many rich families and if a poor family depleted their grain stock before the harvest, the rich families loaned grains to the poor. In my family, too, if someone came to ask for grains, my father loaned them. After harvest, they gave back the grains.**

Q: Were there any memories of your childhood that you would like us to know about or that you could tell your children and grandchildren, any memories that we forgot to ask you about?

**#92: I have said it all. If I tell you too many, I will take too much time.**

Q: When did you first realize that your life was changing because of the Chinese?

**#92: During the time the Chinese arrived, there was no change. When the Chinese first came, they were very good and spoke very nicely. They showed books with pictures of parties and of Chinese as good people. They gave books, which had pictures of people enjoying themselves, whether they were nomads or farmers. They were good.**

Q: When did you first notice something was changing because of the Chinese?

**#92: First, the Chinese were good and later they began to be severe just as it is mentioned in the prediction that the Chinese would arrive in such a year and that they would cause misery in such a year. My father read it out from the predictions by Guru Rinpoche. My parents used to say that the times would be bad and that the Buddha dharma would decline. I thought, "What would the Chinese do to us?" However, I did not think about it too much because I was quite young. Later the Chinese said that we, the younger ones, would have to go to school to China. So whenever the Chinese came, we had to hide. We feared that we would be taken away to school. As soon as we saw a Chinese in the distance, we hid.**

Q: How old were you?

**#92: I might have been around 14 then or perhaps 13.**

Q: Why do you think the Chinese came to Tibet?

**#92: When they first came, I did not really take much notice, as I was young.**

Q: After the Chinese started to come, what changed in your life?

**#92: Initially the Chinese were good and then they inflicted misery. The rich families had many people working for them. However, though they [the poor] were made to work, they were provided with food and clothing. But the Chinese said that they [the poor] were**

subjugated and ill-treated. So they wanted to destroy all the rich people. They accused the rich of being liars and of having abused the people. They [the rich] were punished. The father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, son, daughter-in-law, even the pregnant women were punished.

Their hands were tied at the back and they were made to kneel on small pieces of stones. They remained in that position while all the villagers collected. They [the villagers] were instructed to accuse them [their employers] of abusing them even though they hadn't. They [the poor] had received food and clothing in return for work. The servants were to say that they were forced to work and that they had been beaten. They [the poor] were told to beat their employers back and say that they had been abused. Thus, they [the rich] were beaten.

Q: Why did the Chinese say that these people should be beaten up?

**#92: Many poor people who came from different regions, and did not have shelter were taken in by the rich. They were provided with shelter, food and clothing and were expected to work for the rich family in the fields and graze their animals like horses, cows etc. There was a lot of work to be done. They [the Chinese] claimed that keeping those workers was abusing them.**

Q: Did you know any of these wealthy families that were arrested and tortured and beaten? Did you know any personally?

**#92: Yes, one of the wealthy families was called Tham-nyen Shika. The man and the woman of the house are dead. I don't know if their son is living. The older people of the house are dead. Then there was Tham-nyen Gonglo and Dickey Khangsar. The father of the Gonglo family was called Sangay Dorjee. They are all dead now.**

Q: Did you see them getting tortured?

**#92: Yes, I saw it. It was compulsory for everyone in the village to attend the meeting. We had to remain there for the whole day for the meeting. What happened the entire day was that each of the people was made to beat them one by one. They [the wealthy] were kneeling and next to each of them stood a Chinese. Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were kneeling on gravel. When they were beaten, they fell down and the Chinese pulled them up by their hair back to position.**

The poor people thought that if they beat them [the wealthy] harshly, the Chinese might favor them [the poor]. So even though they [the poor] had not suffered any abuse, they said that they did and beat them, pulled their hair and hit them with sticks. They [the wealthy] were bleeding from the heads.

Q: Which family was that?

**#92: That was the Tham-nyen Shikha. The father's name was Ada Kya.**

Q: Did your family have an experience like that?

**#92: My family was to go through the same thing after a month. The Chinese had appointed many poor people as leaders. Since my father had been kind to them, he had friends among them. We were warned that we were to be beaten in seven days.**

Q: How did you escape?

**#92: When we were told that we were to be captured by the Chinese and beaten in a week's time, my father's younger brother's family and our family fled in the night. We carried some provisions, wore our clothes and ornaments and leaving behind all our wealth, we escaped. My older sister was given away in marriage in another village along with the younger one, so it was my two brothers, me and my parents. We fled in the night. We had requested a friend living in the village on the other side of the river to send a boat and we crossed the river at night.**

Q: Was your father with you?

**#92: Yes, he was with us.**

Q: Can you tell me more about your experiences escaping? You are about 15 or 16, how old?

**#92: Perhaps I was 17 at that time. We fled the whole night. There were Chinese appointed leaders in the villages. We fled the whole night and when day began we hid in the forest. We drank cold water. We didn't get to eat hot food. In this way we walked for seven days. We walked in the night and slept during the day.**

Q: Then?

**#92: Then after a month the territory of Kongpo ended and we came to Pema Koe. We met many Khampas and other escapees fleeing towards Pema Koe. The Chinese had arrived on the other side in the night. From across the river, we heard someone yelling in the dark, "Oh, Khampa Noga. The Chinese are coming." There were many people fleeing and hiding on the other side of the river also. There was a village too. As we did not have a house, we set up a tent on open ground. When we heard the scream, we fled. My older brother and our animals hid in a different area and we fled with many people across the river.**

**After a long walk, we came upon a rocky mountain called Nyusong. At daybreak we rested below the mountain, drank tea and ate food. There was an exodus of people and all the men stayed atop the mountain to resist the Chinese while we fled over the mountain. My father sent my mother, brother and I with Kharwang Tulku and his retinue. My older brother was hiding in another area, so my father and all the men stayed on the Nyusong Mountain pass to resist the Chinese who would arrive through the valley. We walked for about five hours and it made me sad that my father was left behind. Then we came to a region called Taklung Silung. A river flowed through and there were rocks and stones. My father**

voluntarily joined the group to resist the Chinese, but he never told us that he was going to do that.

Q: Please continue.

**#92:** I was very sad and cried as we walked along. I felt miserable and unhappy. I just did not want to go on thinking of my father. Kharwang Tulku was renowned for giving true forecasts, so I asked the lama, "I have a sore on my foot and it aches. And my father is left behind. Please foresee what is good for me whether I should continue or remain here." The lama did the *mo* 'divination' and predicted, "It's bad whether you stay here or go on." So I said, "If the prediction is bad both ways, I am not going to go along since my father is back there." We came across a mountain and instead of taking the path, my mother, my brother, another person and me climbed higher up and found a cave.

Q: Was that person a woman?

**#92:** Yes, she was the mother of a poor girl. The girl and my older brother, who is there in the picture, were sent to another region to care for the animals. It was raining heavily as we huddled in the cave. The floor of the cave was gravel and water flowed below it. We had some butter and *tsampa* with us. My mother, my little brother, the old lady, a young man and I spent the night in the cave. The raindrops fell on us, but we just had the clothes on our backs. When we felt hungry we got up, scooped some water that was flowing under the gravel, added some *tsampa* to it and ate. We spent two days there.

After two days, we could see far away something blue go up in the sky in the morning. We thought that a bomb was dropped. Then something red went up in the sky and fell down. Those were not bombs, but a ruse to scare the people. My father had a dog, which always stayed with him. One night the dog arrived where we were. It was a long way off [from where father was], about a day's journey. My mother said, "Your father has probably been killed by the Chinese. The dog would never leave his side. He has been killed by the Chinese."

We were high up on the mountain, so we could see the path far away. We could see someone coming and thought it was a Tibetan and felt happy that someone was coming. The man walked on the path and then sat on a huge rock. After sometime someone joined him. Later one more person joined them and then we became alarmed. We now thought those were not Tibetans but the Chinese. As we watched, a host of Chinese arrived. The path was not even ground. There were mountains and rivers. A swarm of Chinese arrived there. My mother said, "The dog will start barking. What a disaster!" We placed a stick in the dog's mouth and tied it up with a string. We were at hearing distance [from the Chinese] for if someone called out from the path, we would have heard it.

Q: Then what happened?

**#92:** So we just sat there. I think there were about 2,000 Chinese. All of them then went down the slope and away towards the direction of Pema Koe. We spent that night there

after the Chinese left. The next morning the boy who was with us asked us if he should go and look for our father. He said if he found my father, he would not come back but if my father could not be found, he would return where we were. We agreed and he left. We spent two days in the cave after the boy left us. We waited to see if he would return, but he didn't. So we felt my father might not have been killed by the Chinese and decided to go to the place where he was.

My mother, little brother, the old lady and I retraced our steps. It was a day's journey to the place where my father was. I had a knife of this length [gestures with hands about a foot length] in my *amba* 'pocket in a Tibetan dress' to defend myself though I have not fought with it. I always had the knife in my *amba*. When we reached the mountain where my father was, we saw bullets and stones scattered on the mountain after an encounter. Some of the bullets were empty and some were not. I collected those that were not empty in my *amba*. There was a cave in the mountain, which we had passed on our earlier journey and an open ground close by. From atop the mountain we saw a Tibetan walk from the ground and enter the cave in the mountain. We were so happy to see the Tibetan and came down the slope. As we reached lower, we could see some white clothes left to dry on the rocks. We were afraid that there might be Chinese around. So instead of taking the route to the cave, we went towards the river and walked along its edge.

Then the Chinese saw us. I saw a Chinese come charging from afar pointing his gun at us and saying, "Kill, kill, kill." I was desperate and just stood there thinking, "Let them kill me." However, my poor mother, she crouched near a rock covering her face with her cap and was pleading [with the Chinese]. I was numb and just stood there. More Chinese arrived and some said, "Don't kill them." They were quite a distance away and I was nearby the river. I had the knife and bullets with me. I feared that they might question me about a gun or if I had a husband, so I threw the knife and the bullets in the water. Then we were captured by the Chinese. It was fortunate that my mother did not jump into the river. If she had, we would have followed her into the river.

Q: Then?

#92: Then the Chinese captured us and bound our hands. They led us to the cave. The boy who had gone to look for my father, instead of finding father had been captured by the Chinese and was tied up there in the cave! There were two other men whose hands were also bound. They [the Chinese] had asked the boy if he knew us, and he'd replied in the affirmative. When they asked me if I knew the boy, I replied that I didn't. They told the boy that we didn't know him while he'd told the Chinese that he knew us. So they beat him up. We were kept there for four days.

They [the Chinese] themselves did not have anything to eat. They fired on the cows and pigs of those people who'd fled, boiled the meat along with barley and ate them. We were also given that to eat. They questioned us, "Your thinking has still not changed. You are thinking like the reactionaries and running away. Are you fleeing on the advice of the reactionaries?" We were actually on the return journey.

It used to be said that in the pilgrim center of Pema Koe, there was unending supply of *tsampa* and rivers of milk and that people didn't have to work to make a living. Pema Koe was a holy site and if one walked two or three days, one reached Indian Territory. It would take many days of difficult walk to go on a pilgrimage. There were rivers to ford and rocks to climb. We were returning towards the country and they asked if we had followed the words of the reactionaries. We lied to them saying, "We did go following the words of the reactionaries who said there was unending supply of *tsampa* and rivers of milk. However, we didn't find them, so we are returning."

Q: Did they hurt you when they were interrogating you?

**#92:** As we were women, they did not beat us, but our hands were tied. As a protective amulet, my father had icons of the Buddha, Guru, Dolma, Chenrezig and others. A Buddha icon was opened and thrown there [in the cave]. My mother told me, "Your father has been killed. His Buddha icon is opened and thrown there. Your father has been killed."

Q: What happened then? Your mother saw the icon and knew it belonged to your father.

**#92:** There was nothing to do about it. We whispered to each other. We wouldn't dare speak in front of the Chinese. We'd told the Chinese that we didn't have husbands. They'd kept asking us about husbands and men. Had we said there were husbands and men they would be more severe with us, so we said we had no husbands.

In four days, all the 2,000 Chinese arrived there, including their leaders. When one Chinese finished interrogating us, the next one came and questioned us as to why we were escaping. I sat between my mother and the old lady, holding their hands. My little brother was too small to realize anything. I was able to do some explaining. The Chinese said, "Did you listen to the reactionaries and decide to go?" I replied, "Yes, we listened to the words of the reactionaries who said there was unending supply of *tsampa* and rivers of milk [at Pema Koe]. But there were no such things and so we are returning." I nudged my mother and the old lady to keep quiet because each of us might give different answers. From the army of over 2,000, about a hundred of them interrogated us and I repeated the same thing every time. They asked if I was willing to change my way of thinking and I replied yes. We proceeded on and spent four days at another place.

Then the routes meandered through forests and rocks. Fleeing people had dropped many of their belongings and they [the Chinese] made us carry the good ones like Kongpo dresses. I suffered a lot of pain in my foot and I was unable to walk, so my load was added on to my mother and she had to carry the loads of two people. In this way they led us on.

The region was entirely deserted. There were no houses and no people. The path in the forest was rocky and stony. I walked slowly leaning on two canes. It was an entire day's walk. I walked slowly through the mountainous forest while the Chinese led away my mother and the others. They were way ahead. I thought, "Has my father been killed or not? Shall I run back to [look for] my father?" Then I had second thoughts, "If I run back, my mother will face a lot of sufferings. She is old and cannot escape. My mother and my

little brother will suffer. I must not run away." I carried on using the walking sticks. I had nothing to eat that whole day. Then I saw that my mother had left a piece of *pa* 'dough made from *tsampa*' on a rock by the wayside. I picked it up and without thinking of eating it, put it in my *amba* and walked on crying.

We walked for many days and reached close to the office of the Kongpo district administration. We had crossed over the mountains and now the region was flat. It was dark when we arrived there. I was walking with the help of two sticks and a Chinese came to me and said, "Are you coming? Your mother is very worried. I came to look for you. You can come slowly." Saying that he went away and I continued on. I reached the office and my mother was at the door. She hugged me and I hugged her and we cried. From then on, it was a journey of four to five days to my home and there were no other incidents; we just walked and slept and walked again. They [the Chinese] asked us, "Will you escape again? Will you think differently?" We replied, "We will not escape again. We have changed our minds. The Chinese are very helpful. They are very good. We will never flee again. We will live here."

Q: Did you go back to your own home?

**#92:** Just before we reached our home, there was a big Chinese office where they asked those questions, which were similar to the ones that were asked during our journey and then they put us back in our home. We found that all our wealth, animals and grains had been distributed among the people. Except for something to eat, everything was given away. They [the Chinese] had left some food for us saying that we would be back.

Q: This was a very hard time in your life and I wanted to know what helped you survive this period. Where did you get your strength?

**#92:** There's more story left. When we reached back home, we requested the Chinese to send some people to look for my father. Two of our family friends were sent to check if my father was killed or not. They returned and said he was killed. I wept and wept and wept, so much that I almost died. However, I was a survivor. We had to live there but the thought of leaving was there in my mind. We performed the prayers for my father and the Chinese were good to me.

We lived at home for about seven months. To convince the Chinese that we intended to stay back, we cultivated the fields and collected much firewood. At first we did not think much of fleeing, but later we were forced to attend meetings called by the Chinese. I was a young girl and gradually my sadness lessened while my mother was still in mourning. I used to sing Chinese songs and was carefree. The Chinese leader said, "The daughter has changed her mind. However, the mother has not changed." He told me, "You must go home and educate your mother."

We'd heard stories that the Chinese make sons beat their fathers and the daughters to beat their mothers. I thought in my mind, "Now I am being told to beat my mother." I felt extremely miserable. I went back home in the dark after the meeting got over and cried.

My mother asked, "Did the leader scold you? What happened?" "No, he did not scold me. He said I had changed my mind while you had not. So I am asked to educate you. How can a daughter teach her mother?" Saying thus I cried and cried and cried. Earlier I had thought about escaping again because one of my brothers was still left there [at another location during the escape]. But things relaxed a bit and we were happy.

Now when I feared that I might be made to beat my mother, I sent word through some people from my brother's region who attended the Chinese meetings. I sent a message to my brother asking him to come and take my mother and I as we wanted to escape, giving him a time and date. On that particular day my brother arrived with a colleague on the other side of the river. People we knew helped them cross the river by boat to our side. Behind our village was a mountain with thick forest.

When my brother and his friend arrived, they couldn't risk staying at home because there were many families nearby [who might give them away to the Chinese]. I made them hide in the forest and pretending to go look for firewood, I took them food. In the evening when I attended the meeting, the Chinese leader told me, "Your brother might have come around here. If you ask him to come back, we will not do anything to him." If the Chinese found my brother, they would certainly imprison him because he had joined the Defend Tibet Volunteer Force and fought the Chinese many times. I thought the Chinese definitely knew [about his arrival] and that the village people who knew about it might have informed them that my brother was back. We were very scared and so immediately after the meeting the following night, we made our escape.

Q: With your mother?

**#92:** Yes, my mother, my little brother, all of us escaped together. My older brother had come to fetch us and so we once again crossed the river and followed the same route.

Q: Where did you go?

**#92:** We followed the same route that we took earlier because my older brother lived that side and some of our belongings were hidden in that region. If we took another route, we would reach India in two days' time. My mother told me that we should go that way to India. However, I told her that older brother lived on the other side and our wealth was hidden in the mountains there. If we took the other route, we would be separated from my older brother, so we walked following the course of the river.

We were on the same route of our earlier escape. Then we came to the area where our wealth was hidden, but someone had taken it away. We were in a deserted area and set up our tent. We met five men, one of whom was a young boy and two were sturdy youths. All the five men carried long knives. My older brother accused them of stealing our hidden wealth and asked them to give it back. They said that they hadn't taken it. We disputed the whole day and then there was a fight.

I grabbed one of the sturdy men and held on tight to him. He struggled to get away while the others were clashing. The man said he would stab me if I did let him go. I released him and when I looked up I saw that my older brother was bleeding from the forehead. I thought my brother had been split in two and without a care for myself, I ran and lunged at the man and gripped him tight. My brother and his companion were grappling with four of the men. The man told me to release him or he would stab me. I didn't care if he stabbed me and held tight on to him. I was very strong and managed to hold him. Khampas considered stabbing women very bad, so he squeezed my throat. But they were defeated and left, one of them was bleeding from the back and another from his hand. They left saying, "If not today we will meet you tomorrow." Then I released the man I was holding. When my mother pleaded with them not to fight, one of the men hit her with a rock and broke her hand.

Q: Where were these men from? What village?

**#92: They were not Chinese. They were people from other regions who were bandits and knew no religion.**

Q: Did she get to India?

**#92: It was still a long way [to India]. However, I will not relate the entire journey. We crossed rivers by walking, by boats and by using ropes. It was a long, long journey. With loads on our backs, we climbed up and down mountains. When we stopped for the night, we could see last night's camp just close by down there! That was how difficult the way was.**

As we reached the territory of Pema Koe, even though it was difficult, we were very happy. We didn't have much to eat, but there were plenty of greens, so we boiled it and made *thukpa* by adding grains to it. Four to five families cooked separately side by side. Whoever finished cooking first, we joined them while some spent their time playing *ba* 'a gambling game.' Pema Koe is a pilgrim site and I was happy. The place was so holy that if a person died, a rainbow formed. Not just for humans, even if a dog died a rainbow appeared. Birds chirped the mantra '*om mani padme hum*' and called out the names of *tulku* 'reincarnate lamas' like "Kongpo Tulku, Kongpo Tulku" and others. We were very happy in that holy land. In Pema Koe *tsampa* was made from wood. It was very tasty. We were new people and did not know how to make it, but we purchased it from the locals.

Q: So what helped you survive?

**#92: So in this way we lived there for more than a year and then we came to India.**

Q: It took almost a year?

**#92: Yes, definitely.**

Q: What year was that?

**#92: We fled in 1959. We went back and spent the New Year. Then in the third Tibetan month, during the sowing season, we fled again. We fled in 1959, the year of the pig. We were captured by the Chinese and returned home and spent the New Year. We fled again in the third or fourth Tibetan month.**

Q: Where did the family land in India? What city or place they went to?

**#92: We saw His Holiness the Penor Rinpoche at Pema Koe. Then we arrived at the Indian border. When we saw the border security, we thought they were Chinese and we were very afraid, but they were Indians. The Penor Rinpoche was staying at Tekong in Pema Koe. He looked just like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, like a god. I had seen the Penor Rinpoche once in Lhasa when I saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We made offerings to the Penor Rinpoche on account of our father's death. Since then we were together with Rinpoche.**

Q: Then you reached India?

**#92: At the border of India and Pema Koe, we saw the Indian soldiers and were extremely afraid mistaking them for Chinese. However, they were Indian soldiers and they took us to the airport, close to a mountain where there were many houses. They gave us rice and other provisions.**

Q: You saw so much violence towards your Tibetan family and other Tibetans. How did you make you feel about the Chinese?

**#92: The times were like that and I do not have any extra feelings [of anger] towards the Chinese. Partly it [the invasion] must have been because of our people's actions and times that changed. Partly it must be our karma from our past lives. Now part of our people are here [outside Tibet] and the rest are left behind under the Chinese. That is each one's destiny. For one, it is sad that we are separated from our country, the beautiful land, but on the other hand, we get to practice the dharma and I think it is the same wherever we are.**

Q: Since you had to leave Tibet with your family, what do you hope will be preserved about Tibet for the next generations? What do you hope your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren and the world will remember about Tibet?

**#92: Besides religion and culture, I think it would be good to teach the growing up children our script and different languages. Although I think a lot about it, I am helpless because I do not have education.**

Q: Is there any advice that you would like to give to the next generations of Tibetans after all that you have been through? What advice would you like to give?

**#92: You mean Tibetan children here [or in Tibet]?**

Q: Both.

**#92: My main advice is that they should not lose our culture and tradition. They should be cordial with other people. They must practice the Buddhist dharma. They should be cordial and it would be good if they could learn different languages.**

Q: Is there anything that you would like the world today to do for Tibet? What would you like the world or the people around the world to do to help Tibet?

**#92: I think the growing up children should learn the religion and culture of Tibet. If they learn different languages, that would empower them to do anything, be it a leader, a lama, a doctor or whatever.**

Q: Tibetan independence?

**#92: If we talk about the law of karma, we will get our independence. If we could just go and get our independence, I would run at once and get it. But that is not so.**

**If everyone is educated, the well educated ones in Tibet and those excelling in studies and languages in [exile] can unite and strive for independence together.**

Q: I think that is a wonderful place to end. Only the last thing I wanted to ask is, what would you do if it was possible to return to Tibet?

[Interpreter clarifies that interviewee did go back.]

Q: Did you ever go back, *ama-la*?

**#92: Yes, I did. I went back in 1987.**

Q: You did go back to Tibet?

**#92: I went in 1987 along with the Penor Rinpoche.**

Q: Where did you go?

**#92: I went to Lhasa. The Penor Rinpoche was giving teachings. Is it fine to just say in brief? The Penor Rinpoche then left Lhasa for Dege Palyul and wherever Rinpoche went, I did too because my son was studying the *cham* 'religious dance performed by monks' at the Palyul Monastery for three years.**

Q: [Did you go] to your own village?

**#92: At Palyul, I met a sister of my father who was in her eighties.**

Q: How were things changed in your village or area?

[Interpreter clarifies: She went to eastern part of Tibet. She lived in Kongpo.]

Q: She couldn't go? Okay.

**#92: It was my first visit there. There were many relatives and at that time the Chinese were treating them well. Religion was being practiced at the Penor Rinpoche's monastery and there were many monks in it. People practiced dharma and also enjoyed parties. People enjoyed themselves. That was the period when the Chinese were treating them well. That was the best period.**

Q: Were there any big changes that you saw?

[Interpreter explains: She has never been to the Kham before. That was her first visit. She wouldn't know any change.]

Q: Maybe in Lhasa?

[Interpreter to interviewer: Ask her whether she went to Kongpo and what changes she saw.]

Q: Did you go to Kongpo?

**#92: Yes, I went to Kongpo. From Palyul, I went to Ganze to meet my husband's many relatives. Until there I was with the Penor Rinpoche and then I traveled alone. The journey was long and it took five days by a vehicle to reach Lhasa. First I reached Lhasa and then went to Kongpo.**

Q: What was it like in Kongpo?

**#92: Kongpo was like that...When I reached Lhasa, the Chinese were fighting in Lhasa. There were strong protests and Chinese shops were being burned. During this time, I left for Kongpo.**

**It was a few days after I reached Lhasa from Palyul that the protests began. The vehicle stopped there for seven days and then left for Kongpo. They [the authorities] asked all those people who were traveling to Kongpo if they had their passes. I had my travel permit from India. However, if one said that she did not have her pass, she was asked where she wished to go and then they just let her through. If one showed the pass, they looked at it and asked where she wished to go and let her through. I was asked where I came from and I replied that I was from Lhasa. On being asked where I wished to go, I said that I wanted to go to Kongpo to meet my sister. I was asked for my pass but I replied that I did not have a pass. I hid my Indian permit in my pocket. There was a lot of turmoil and a lot of suspicion then.**

**There had been a riot in Kongpo Shigatse and people had resisted the Chinese. There was a tall sturdy man with a shaven head. He had his pass but [Chinese authorities] said that he**

resembled a protestor in Shigatse, and he was pulled away by two men [authorities]. He possessed a pass but it was useless. So I did not show my pass to anyone and in that way, I was able to get through.

I felt that if I showed my pass, which said that I was from India, they would suspect me and I would not be able to see my relatives. Just before I reached my village, one had to cross a river. The Chinese boatman asked where I was going. I told him to Thamyen where my sister was. When asked where I came from, I replied Lhasa. I carried with me a handbag which had been purchased in Delhi. It had English letters written on it but I never thought about it. I had my rosary in my hand and a bag on my back. After I'd placed it in the boat and was saying my rosary, the boatman's assistant told him that I was not from Lhasa. "Why?" he enquired. He replied, "She comes from Indu [India]."

Q: Did they speak in Chinese?

#92: Yes. He said, "Have a look at the *thipo*." He meant the handbag.

Q: Did they speak in Tibetan?

#92: They spoke in Chinese. I know a smattering of Chinese, but I have forgotten it now.

Q: And then?

#92: I could hear all [their conversation] and I was very scared. I prayed with my rosary and sat still in the boat without saying a word. After the boat was anchored on the other side, the boatman walked beside the river while the assistant went towards the Chinese office. There used to be a big Chinese office there. I thought it would be better for me to take the detour route by the riverside and reach my home. On second thought, I felt this might make them suspect me and I should take the direct road to the Chinese office. I carried my bag with the help of a rope and walked. The boatman told his assistant to take me to the Chinese office. "Why don't you let her go?" he asked. She doesn't have a pass," he said.

Q: Then?

#92: The boatman's assistant told me to wait by the fence of the Chinese office. There was a pile of firewood and some girls nearby. I put my bag on the pile of firewood, while the boatman's assistant entered the Chinese office. He brought a Chinese official with him who asked me, "Where do you come from?" I replied that I'd come from Lhasa. "Who do you have here?" he asked. I told him that my sister Yangchen lived here and I was going to meet her. He then said, "Where is your pass from Lhasa?" I replied that like everyone, I did not have a pass.

Then he asked, "Have you come from India?" and I said, "Yes. I come from India." "Where is your passport?" he asked. I was nervous and replied, "The Indian pass is here. How could I come from India without my papers?"

**He looked at my passport. I had taken the detour route by the riverside and he questioned me why I did not take the other route. He said that I must go to the Chinese office and put my signature there. I told him, "I have never been here before and have no idea. I am here to see my relatives. Others before me have told me that this route is easier which is why I took it. I have never been here, so I do not know."**

Q: What was different when you went back to your home in Kongpo? How did you feel?

**#92: The mountains, the soil, the people, everything did not look as good as it used to long ago. I felt, "Alas, everything has deteriorated!" They did not know the Buddha dharma. They said that they felt ashamed of monks in red robes.**

Q: Was there a change in economic level?

**#92: The food was the same and like earlier, people worked in the fields. There was not much trade in lower Kongpo while it was different in upper Kongpo, where there was trade and good progress. Lower Kongpo, my region was isolated and there was not much development. They were somewhat poor.**

Q: What was the feeling?

**#92: I found everyone poor. When I first got to go to Tibet, I prayed that I should get the chance to go to Kongpo Benri [a holy mountain], which I could, thanks to Rinpoche. I was able to see all the holy places. When I reached Kongpo, I found all the families quite poor, sort of meek. I felt myself tall among them.**

Q: We are drawing to a close for now. So I think it would be lovely if we could end, if you could sing ...

[Break in tape and interviewee explains about her family home.]

**#92: He was not a Chinese. He was a Tibetan who was like a Chinese. He was a Chinese official. We used to be friendly with him. He is the one who has taken over our home.**

**The whole song will not fit in one minute.**

Q: That's okay. We want the beginning.

[Interviewee sings a spiritual song and ends with a prayer]

END OF INTERVIEW