Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #93 – Tsewang Khangsar
June 12, 2006

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number:	#93
2. Interviewee:	Tsewang Khangsar
3. Age:	57
4. Date of Birth:	1951
5. Sex:	Male
6. Birthplace:	Yancho Tangkar
7. Province:	Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet:	1959
9. Date of Interview:	June 12, 2006
10. Place of Interview:	Private office, Berkeley, California, United States
11. Length of Interview:	2 hr 1 min
12. Interviewer:	Marcella Adamski
13. Videographer:	Kerry Rose

Biographical Information:

Tsewang Khangsar, who is from Yancho Tangkar in the south central part of Tibet, lost his father at an early age. He and his sister were brought up by their mother, who faced many challenges in raising her children by herself.

Tsewang Khangsar gives a vivid, in-depth account of Tibetan people's beliefs, customs, language and their unique characteristics as "human beings." He describes the Bon religion and its influence on Tibetan culture.

Tsewang Khangsar describes how Tibetans held on to their sanity despite the suffering and trauma that they underwent from the Chinese occupation of Tibet. He discusses the Chinese invasion and the subsequent cultural, ecological, historical, religious and social annihilation of the Tibetan identity. He presents his ideas on how the Tibetan people can meet these difficult challenges. He also explains his theory about why Tibetans have the strength to endure such hardships and deal with their anger towards the Chinese.

Tsewang Khangsar served as a teacher, headmaster and principal of Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala, India, for 20 years before immigrating to the United States.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, Buddhism, Bon, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, brutality/torture, Chinese oppression, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Age: 57, Sex: Male
Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
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[A picture of the interviewee and his family is shown]

Question: Please say again where you are in the picture?

Interviewee #93: At the Taj Mahal. The world famous Taj Mahal is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Me, my wife and my son, sometime in 1991 or '92, I don't recall.

Q: And what are your wife's name and your son's?

#93: Tseten Khangsar and son, Tenzin Khangsar.

[Another picture is shown]

Q: This is a photograph of you and your family in America, and you are living in the Berkeley area now?

#93: In Richmond.

Q: In the Richmond, California area. I understand Tenzin Khangsar is your child and he is 26 years old now. Is he going to school or what's he doing?

#93: Right now he is here helping me with my store. Actually he is 25 now.
[Showing a black and white photograph] That was my first photograph.

Q: Where was that taken?

#93: This was in Mussoorie in India in the early 1960's.

Q: About how old were you then?

#93: I think I was in my teens, maybe 13.

Q: Could you point to yourself again?

#93: That's me and I took care of this little boy up here [pointing in the photograph]. In those days we were in the Homes Foundation, which is kind of a foster parenting; it was kind of a family type. There were 25 homes taking care of Tibetan refugee children and I was in home number 17 with this other boy and this little one, which I took care of.

Q: It was like your own family, another family?

#93: Yeah, I take care of. [Showing another photograph] This is the core family that came from Tibet. My brother, my sister and me right there. Our mother died sometime in the early 60's in Lahul-Spiti [in northern India] where they were doing road construction work and we three survived.

[Another photograph] This is my brother's family. My brother is sitting, next to him is his wife, his children and in the center is my wife. That is my brother, his wife and his family.

[Another photograph] Here is my sister, her husband and her children. My sister is standing, her husband is sitting there and these are her children.

Q: Where was that taken?

#93: I think somewhere in India, most likely. This is the last one. [Showing a photograph] That's my son and wife.

Q: Your wife and your son.

#93: Yeah.

Q: And that's here in the United States?

#93: Yeah.

Q: Beautiful.

#93: My wife and my son.

Q: Thank you so much for bringing them. Maybe we can begin now? Tsewang-la, we are just going to briefly go back over a few of your biographical information. Right now your age is what, please?

#93: 57.

Q: You were born then in?

#93: In Yancho Tangkar, it's in the south central part of Tibet.

Q: And what year was that you were born?

#93: Roughly 1951. January 1, 1951. I made up the dates, but the year is 1951.

Q: So you are from south central Tibet?

#93: Yeah.

Q: And the village was Yancho Tangkar? This is in the Utsang province?

#93: Utsang.

Q: And your father's name?

#93: Tashi.

Q: And your mother?

#93: Tsamchoe.

Q: You had two siblings. Who were they?

#93: My brother Wangyal and my sister Kyikyi.

Q: I understand that you are now married?

#93: Yes.

Q: What year did you get married?

#93: 1980, I think.

Q: How many children do you have?

#93: One child.

Q: And his name?

#93: Tenzin Khangsar. He is the one in the picture.

Q: I know, remember you said that. You certainly left Tibet and that would have been sometime when?

#93: In the early 60's. In some memories, I may put 1962, 1963. I don't really recall it. You are struggling to survive and you keep yourself alive. There was no time to think what year it was and then you went through the school and you never bothered what the years were, then you try to recall and it is all blurred.

Q: I understand that when you left Tibet, you went to what city or country?

#93: We trekked and walked, maybe for about three months across the Himalayas, but finally we ended up in Kathmandu city in Nepal.

Q: Who was on that walk when you did that?

#93: Myself, my mother and my sister. My brother, he escaped before us because he was a monk. The Chinese were not very friendly with the monks. The monks all over the country had to run before the laypeople did, so that's what he did.

Q: Do you remember the name of the monastery he was with?

#93: Chatur Gonpa. That's the Chatur Temple. It's a Bonpo Temple, Bon religion.

Q: The Bon religion. Interesting.

#93: He was a Bonpo monk.

Q: Why don't we talk a little bit about, you grew up in Tibet, certainly before you had to flee to India. What was your father's work in Tibet?

#93: I never got to meet him, but he was kind of a part-time small trader, part-time transport person. He had a few yaks and he transported goods for people, and on the side he did his own little business.

Q: You just never met him?

#93: No. I think he died the year I was born.

Q: I am sorry. What did your mother do for a living?

#93: She was a weaver, but not by profession. She sort of weaved cloth for neighbors, for any purpose who wanted to do that and get paid for it.

Q: Who was in your family when you were growing up in Tibet?

#93: My mom, my sister and me. And of course my brother but he was in the monastery, most of the time.

Q: What age did he go to the monastery?

#93: I really don't know. Maybe even before his teens.

Q: Was it before you were born?

#93: Definitely.

Q: Before you were even born, he was in the monastery.

#93: Yeah.

Q: How many years age difference was there between the two of you? Like 5 or 10 years?

#93: No, 24.

Q: 24 years difference. He was a lot older than you.

#93: Right.

Q: Can you please tell us what your childhood was like in Tibet? What do you remember about your childhood?

#93: In the childhood I think, in the remote kind of material society like that. It's kind of imagining from United States or from what the people who are going to hear me, it was kind of, very bleak, I think to say the least. We didn't have much to play with but it was peaceful, it was kind of carefree. We didn't crave for a lot of things as kids do here. There wasn't much to crave.

Anyway, you played with the sticks and the mud, chased each other. Puppies were the best, and we played family roles all the time. The kids get together. The ladies play the mom or the sister and the boys play the dad and the brother and then the little ones play the small children. That kind of a game goes on. Then in the winter we skated and snowball. In summer we would go and swim in the river.

Q: What was your village like?

#93: It's a small village, maybe 50 houses or so. There were two monasteries. One, I think Gelukpa, or maybe Nyingma Monastery in the south end of the village and in the north end, there was the Bonpo Monastery.

Q: How would you spell that, the Bonpo Monastery?

#93: B-O-N-P-O

Q: That's where your brother was, in the Bonpo Monastery?

#93: Right. It's called Chatur Monastery.

Q: Was that a Tibetan Monastery?

#93: Yes, definitely. Bonpo, that's where Tibet comes from, the unique Tibetan culture.

Q: The original.

#93: That trickles down from the Bon.

Q: Can you tell us a little more about the Bon?

#93: That will take another chapter by itself. Bonpo is the earliest spiritual practice of Tibet's indigenous. It's something of Tibet's own achievement. We have medical systems, we have spiritual systems, social systems, all evolved out of the Bon spiritual traditions.

I think our forefathers were great people. They were magnanimous in the sense that they were kind of looking for a good spiritual tradition and also medicinal tradition and also social traditions. They developed something of their own, but they were not afraid to go out and look into the neighboring countries like India and China and Nepal. Then they got the best out of these countries and incorporated them into their own system. They made it their own unique Tibetan spiritual tradition, cultural tradition, medicinal traditions. They were great people but as the years advanced, the Tibetan nation evolved. I think we became, kind of, a little bit smaller and we closed the doors.

There were times, you people will remember, that Tibet was closed to the foreigners for many, many years. Maybe because of Chinese political pressure, but also because of Tibet's own. Maybe we just wanted to be left alone. We thought we had enough of the things we wanted. That may be the thing, but our ancestors were definitely open-minded people, adventurous people who sort of developed things for themselves and then did not hesitate to incorporate better systems from the neighboring country. That's how Tibet became unique.

Q: When your brother was in the monastery there, did you ever visit him?

#93: Oh yes, many times.

Q: What was your relationship like with him?

#93: He was a monk. And laypeople and monks always have a kind of an unseen wall between them. You always maintain a certain distance, a certain respect. Apart from that he is my brother and I am his little brother, so I think the world over it's the same. He plays the big brother and I play the small brother.

Q: Did you ever fight in the monastery?

#93: Oh, yeah. He is very skilled in making things with the hand. He used to make these magnificent horses and other animals with clay and I used to steal them. He used to paint them and I used to steal them and take them home. Of course clay toys are clay toys. Half

way home the horns broke or the strap is loose or something. Then I had to fix it and I am not as skilled as he. So, I get caught and scolded.

Q: Why did you steal them? Didn't he give them to you?

#93: He does give, but there are so many things that he knows that if I touch then, it's going to break. So he doesn't want me to touch it, but then kids are kids. You try to stop them from doing something and they want to do it more. That was with me too.

Q: What would you say a typical day was like when you were growing up in your family? When you were, say 7, 8, 9?

#93: Your village is like your playground. You can go any place. You can go swim in the river in the summers or play snowball, play with other kids or chase each other or go play with the tricks and mud. We also used to play with the yak horns. Yak horns were great play stuff. They are tough and we also used to play with the ankles. There's a little bone in the ankles of the sheep and goat. Those are collected. They are kind of big toys for us. We color them, we shape them. Kids spent their entire day playing.

Q: Were most of the people that lived there, they earned their livelihood in what way?

#93: Not in the sense like, get up in the morning and the job. No, no, no. It's an age of timelessness, where time is at your disposal. You work when you think you want to work and you rest when you think you should rest. Nobody has to reach any point at a certain time. You go when you please and you stop when you please. I think it's a self-sufficient kind of a village. A village that has everything. We were not exactly having a luxurious life or a plentiful life, but we were not starving. Words like 'famine' and 'starvation' may be in the dictionary, but Tibetans have never seen it, never heard it. We were totally self-sufficient. What we grew in the field, what we got from the animals or we got from the surroundings, was enough to support the 50 little houses.

Q: So they were farmers and they were yak herders?

#93: Yak herders and some business people. They may be having certain time, like they may want to meet somebody at a certain time or something like that. Other than that, weavers like my mother. Each one has their little job and we just do it and that's it.

Q: When you mentioned there was no famine and no starvation, I was curious what kind of food did you eat? What did you have for breakfast, lunch and dinner?

#93: Oh no, not in the sense that you understand here. It may be dreary, in the sense that you maybe eating almost the same thing each morning, each evening and in the afternoon. But whatever we were eating, we had enough of it. Like, *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' is the staple food. That is served in different ways. In the morning you eat it in a different way, with tea. In the afternoon you kind of rolled it into dough, a little ball and maybe you eat with meat or some vegetable, something like that. In the evening it can be

again put in the gruel or maybe some porridge. So something like that. That's more or less it; not much of a variety. But then we didn't crave for one. It was enough nourishment for everybody. There was no craving for variety and things like that.

Q: Did you go to school at all in your village?

#93: No.

Q: How come?

#93: We've got two monasteries. That was actually the school, the college, the university, everything. We didn't have a lay person school. If you want your kid to learn something, you go to the monastery. In the monastery too, there are lot of levels. You don't have to have everybody get up at a certain time and line up and go to school, go to classes, nothing like that. There are monks who may study, there are monks who just learn to observe certain rules and learn certain prayers, but never learn to read and write. It's very relaxed. To go to the monastery, is up to you. You don't need to have money; you don't have to get permission except from your parents and from your monastery to go there. Other than that you don't have to fill out forms, nobody is denied admission into the monastery.

Q: There were no formal classes for children at the monastery?

#93: No. Each teacher will take care. Like, if I go join the monastery, I will be assigned to a teacher. It's the timetable between the teacher and the student. It's one to one.

Q: But if you didn't join the monastery, then you don't have any way of learning in your village because there's no school at that point in that area?

#93: No.

Q: What kind of cultural traditions were a part of your life as a child? Spiritual culture, what things do you remember or look back on?

#93: The spiritual part is always there. You just can't escape from the spiritual influence in your life. The moment you are born until you die, you are guided by this, the whole thing consciously and unconsciously. That's the way things are conducted. Even the marriage ceremonies are solemnized by spiritual blessing. Then after that a child is born and his birth, it's again being blessed by more spiritual practices, more spiritual like doing *pooja* 'rituals of worship' or something like that. So parents making offerings to the altar the day you are born, going to the lama to get your hair cut or maybe get your child a name and then taking to the monastery and getting blessings from the deities.

It's just a sort of thing that you do that makes you a Tibetan. You are not even really thinking it. You just do it, without somebody dictating it to you. You just do it automatically. If a Tibetan sees an insect struggling in the mud, his first instinct is to go and try to help that little thing to get out of that place and dry the wings and try to fly it off.

So that is his first instinct, not to squash it like a nuisance. Nobody tells him to do that, but he does it because it is something that has seeped into him. There is no one saying that you have to believe this, that Buddhism is the best of the religions or Bon is the best of the religions, without this you are going to go—nobody threatens you, like you are going to go to hell if you don't believe in anything. However, the moment the first thing you hear when you get up in Tibet is prayer. Your parents are saying their prayers.

Q: What do you pray for?

#93: Pray for the well-being of the sentient beings. Of course, your well-being is very important but most of our prayer is for the well-being of all other beings. In the Buddhist theology, and the Bon theology, it is the same. Your prayers are answered if you pray, but your prayers are not only answered, it multiplies if you pray the same for all other beings. That's why we pray for all other beings. Since you are included in that prayer, your prayer is not only answered, but it multiplies that many times. That's why, the first thing you see in the morning, the first action is to prostrate, to remember.

Q: To remember?

#93: That you are a guest on this planet; you don't have forever to live. To do your prostrations, to do your spiritual thinking, to start the day with a good thought and kind thought and say the prayers. What you don't hear is music, no TV, no music, you don't hear that; the first thing, the prayers of your parents. Then when you grow up, you do it automatically. Nobody tells you to do that. Just do it.

Q: What are you taught is the purpose of a life?

#93: Not really. There are no formal teachings, none whatsoever.

Q: But I mean, when it is such a part of you. What would you say then…how did the Tibetans feel? What is the purpose of this human life that they have? Why are they here?

#93: Actually, in the Buddhist theology or in the Bon theology, if you are to believe, you create your own karma. By doing good things, you are actually favoring yourself. Like by praying for other beings, you are actually favoring yourself. Because since you pray for the other beings, you earned a karmic kind of account. That builds up your higher level of understanding, higher level of evolvement; finally you try to get out of this circle of birth and death, and that's your final achievement. If you can get out of that circle, then you have finally achieved that. Whatever you do is building towards that end to get out of your circle of existence, of birth and death. I know next to nothing about religion but that's one little understanding from a layman's point of view.

Q: Well, it's helpful because it shows me how you lived your life as a child, how your spirituality was so much a part of your everyday life, of the Buddhist tradition and the Bon tradition. So what I want to know is how did your life in your village start to change or when did it change? What events happened that you remember?

#93: Oh, yeah, when the Chinese came in.

Q: When do you first remember that they were coming? How did you know that?

#93: They just walked in. We were playing and it was about, maybe towards the evening; the sun was about to set and then we saw these Chinese soldiers all riding up and coming on horses and some walking with their horses towards our village. There were maybe 100 or so Chinese soldiers. They just walked in.

Q: What did they do?

#93: They took over, of course, the village. They wanted the best, the biggest house, the biggest stables and everything. That's what happened.

Q: What did the people do?

#93: What could they do? We had nothing, but stones and sticks in our hands. We were not ready to fight them. We had no way of fighting them. They came with their machine guns and they just walked in and they took over.

They called everybody for a meeting and they said, "We are here to stay." And so the village had very delicate balance to maintain because whatever we had is for the 50 houses. And we had just enough to go around. Now when you have a hundred more mouths coming in out-of-the-blue and they are to stay for a number of years and now of course, they are here forever, for the last 45 years and they are still there. All of a sudden, all your resources diminish [snaps fingers] like that.

There was no hay for the horses, the animals, the food grains, everything, we sold them everything. They gave us money and it is like being given a gold nugget in the desert when you need water and not really the gold nugget. The money was nothing to us. There was nothing to buy. Where would a Tibetan go to buy? The piece of paper was paper, really a piece paper.

Soon there was nothing to eat. The soldiers were hungry, we were hungry and then they started killing the dogs. They killed the cats. All the street dogs started disappearing and of course, then they started hunting the wild animals. Between my village and my monastery, you would see wild asses galloping away. Almost every second day, you have these blue sheep, you've got rabbits, all these animals, they were constant. All these wild animals started disappearing one after another because the Chinese soldiers had to eat. That was immediate. Within a week we saw that village economy had been totally upset.

Q: What were the people's reactions? What were they feeling?

#93: One of the objects is terror. What can we do? There you are—for generations like my village, they've never seen war, they've never seen anything. No fighting, no war, no army

and all of a sudden these 100 soldiers turned up with machine guns and start tearing your social structure apart.

Q: Do you remember how you felt as a little boy?

#93: Oh my, we were kind of a mixture of maybe fear and excitement. There were lots of things going on there, so that made us excited but then a lot of fear. Everything changed, overnight, just like that.

Q: What were you afraid of as a little boy?

#93: Maybe ghosts.

Q: Ghosts? Like what?

#93: Or animals. You get the stories told, so you are afraid of the villains in the story. The ghosts were some of the villains in our stories. Some animals are villains in your story, like the wolf or something. But the Chinese were the new fear. The real fear, The fear that was there with us.

Q: So as a child you were afraid of the villains in your fairy tales but when the Chinese came, were you afraid of them?

#93: Oh, yes.

Q: You were?

#93: Not just the children, but the entire village, which was in shock and in fear.

Q: What did they do?

#93: Within a week, as I said, they not only knocked down the economy system there, the balance of ecology was knocked down. All these wild animals started disappearing, beginning with the dogs in the street. Even the monastery, which was the center of our faith, our social life, our spiritual life, they were closed down. Later on, they were destroyed altogether.

So now your entire spiritual, social structure is totally gone. Then you are not allowed to pray. If you pray, you are considered a green brain, backward, so you cannot pray. You cannot confide your fears to your neighbor because he may or she may report it to the authorities and you could get into trouble. That friendly village which lived like a family for uncounted generations, centuries; now each one is afraid of their next-door neighbor.

If you are going east, they will say I am going west. The purpose of lying was so that nobody would try to follow you. You are always, constantly in fear. Even children's games changed. Instead of playing household with sticks and mud, now people actually took sides,

children took sides. Made swords with little pieces of wood and started fighting battles in the street. Even the children's games changed. No more circumambulation, no more going to the monastery, no more blessings, no more prayer.

Q: What would happen if you wanted to go to the monastery and pray?

#93: Oh my goodness, then you'd end up in jail. You can't do that. The old way of living, as they would say.

Q: Did you see people arrested?

#93: Yes.

Q: Did you know any of them?

#93: The first people they arrest are the village mayors and then in our village, which also happens to be the border between the nomads and the farmers in Tibet. It's kind of a trading post where we exchanged things. The nomads bring their animal products and farmers bring their farm products; they exchange. So there were the people appointed by the central government to take care of trade and these people were the target. The mayor was the target, lamas were the targets, monks were the targets, and they were all arrested.

Then they were given the "denouncing" in the public meetings. People were called together and these people had their hands tied behind their back, dragged into the center of the crowd. Then some people from the village were made to accuse them [officials] of wrong doings to them [villagers] and then they had to act like they were angry. They have to kick them and pull their hair, curse them, spit at them and do all kinds of things. So they did those things to our leaders, one by one.

Q: Did you see that when you were a child?

#93: Oh, yes. It's a little village and they did that in the village center. The kids were around and everyone was watching. The Chinese wanted everybody out of their homes and watching these programs. There were soldiers going with their machine guns, circling the gathering. There are soldiers in the circle managing the crowd. Then there were the soldiers who kept watch over everyone else.

Q: So you were like prisoners?

#93: Yeah.

Q: The whole village was like a prison. Did you see anybody killed in this process?

#93: No. I saw them being beaten. I saw them being kicked, especially the leaders, but fortunately, I didn't have to witness the slaughter of a Tibetan.

Q: And were some of them taken to prison?

#93: Yeah, all of those who have been accused. They were taken to prison somewhere in Lhasa and then we never heard from them. They all disappeared.

Q: So you lost your leaders?

#93: Yeah, all our leaders. That's the first thing they did. Then they appointed somebody from the village, maybe somebody who they considered as the poorest person or somebody who is more open towards them and they [the Chinese] make them leaders. Little did they know that leadership needs training, leadership needs understanding, and leadership needs education. Just appointing somebody doesn't make him or her a leader. That's what they did. They appointed all these Chinese collaborators, if you will, into leadership. These people had very little conscience. That's why they could desecrate the place of their worship. They could so easily forget everything, who they were.

Q: What happened to the place of worship?

#93: In the beginning they were closed. The Chinese knew very well that Tibetan monasteries are not just monasteries; they are the treasure troves. Many people think monastery means maybe a place of worship, maybe two or three statues. No, it's everything. It is the foundation of the Tibetan societal existence, spiritual, traditional, whatever. It is a school, a university, it is a college, it's the final place of refuge and it is also a treasure trove. Unaccounted work has been collected over the years, offerings made by the faithful and these are kept there accounted. Nobody dares to steal anything from a monastery.

All these offerings are made and the deities are decked with the precious stuff and so they first looted all these things. They took them away. What they could not take was the huge life-size statues, maybe bigger than life-size, that they couldn't take. So they broke them apart, they made them to break them apart. And then they told the people that believing in religion is like believing in poison.

Q: Did you see them destroy the monastery?

#93: [Nods]

Q: You did.

#93: They scattered the Holy Scriptures into the air. They were wrapped in cloth and also they had nice well-decorated pieces of wood that gave them the security for the books. All these were used as firewood, the cloth was stolen to make into clothing and then the scriptures, they just threw them into the air. For many, many months, you could see them like sheep covering the whole valley or mountainside, with all the scriptures.

Q: That was a great desecration.

#93: Yeah.

Q: In the people's hearts, you know you said earlier that if you see a wounded little bug you wouldn't kill it. You would try to help it. What feelings did the people have towards the Chinese given their Buddhist belief in non-harming? What did they feel?

#93: I think one of anger and outrage. That's what most people felt. Then thinking, sort of, in a more karma sense; they realize they cannot physically oppose them. So just take it. That's how I think most of us dealt with the problem. Of course there were monks and nuns and other laypeople, who are more spiritually aware and they had different ways of taking care of those things.

Q: How?

#93: They would, like I walked with Ani Pachen, the nun who was in prison for 33 years and I had the fortune to walk with her for two months from here to Los Angeles for a Free Tibet Walk. She was asked this question, "How was she able to maintain her sanity after 33 years of imprisonment?" No, not 33 years. Sorry, 26 years. Thirty-three years is the monk Palden Gyatso and I walked with him too. Anyway, she said she practiced *tonglen*.

***Tonglen* is to give and take. In that Buddhist practice what you do is, you give your love, your compassion, your respect, everything that is positive about you to the people who don't have it. Then you take all their suffering, all their misery, all their anger onto yourself. You practice that. You imagine that. Even in the prison you imagine that you are giving your love, your kindness, your compassion — even though they've been cruel to you—to them and then take their anger, their frustrations, their ignorance onto yourself. This daily practice eventually brings your sanity back to you.**

That's individual level. That's how they dealt with it. So it didn't make them bitter, but that didn't mean that they forgave the Chinese. They did not forgive the Chinese for the wrongs that they did, but they did not have that scorching hatred that would burn them and that would burn anyone who they come in contact with, nothing of that kind.

I remember His Holiness, when we just came from Tibet, the first time I heard him speak was in Mussoorie, in India and I was in home number 17 with that boy there [points to black and white picture again] and we heard him speak for the first time. We were all in tears and crying. We'd just come across the border and literally bleeding mentally and physically, and he said, "We must forgive the Chinese." I just could not understand it. We were literally, physically bleeding. Not to talk about the mental torture and trauma that we went through, even as a child we were. I heard him say that and I just couldn't believe it. How could he say to forgive the Chinese after all that they did to us?

If we invaded China, and if we did something wrong against the Chinese, and if they come back and punish us, well, we can understand that point. However, when we did nothing, they desecrate, kill our people, destroy everything that we believe in and vandalize, ravage

and raise to the ground everything that was sacred to us, I just can't understand. How could he say that? It took me many, many, many years to understand why he said that. Because he is a Buddhist monk in the first place, of a high caliber, he is somebody who understands Buddha's message and took it to the heart. He has forgiven the Chinese already, and he also knew that the strength is not in the anger. Strength is in the forgiveness. If I nourished that anger, it's like an acid in me. It's going to eat me from inside. Before it could have eaten me from outside, it would have destroyed me, before I could destroy China. The only way for me to survive was to deal it from the spiritual point of view. And His Holiness knew that. That's the only way to survive. Now I understand why he said it.

Q: How long did it take you to let go of that anger?

#93: Many, many years. Even now it's not all gone, but now I understand that getting angry at China is wasting so much of my energy. When you are angry you discharge so much of your energy and that's all a waste. There's no point in wasting all that energy that doesn't pay you in return. It's better that you try to understand it and deal with it from a more spiritual point of view. I think that's good for us and good for China too.

Q: Do you think the majority of Tibetans are trying to do that?

#93: Yeah, I think a lot of Tibetans do. That's how we manage to maintain our sanity. Otherwise, if a people have to go through the kind of tragedy, the trauma and the horror that we went through, I think you will find half the nation with a lot of mental problems. I know of just a few Tibetans who actually lost their sanity. Luckily, maybe three at the most.

Q: Tibetans from your village?

#93: Yeah, from the Tibetans as a people, as a nation. I lived in exile for the past 40 years and I know only three people who actually went crazy. Imagining the kind of experiences that we went through, there should be many, many more.

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: When the Chinese...

#93: When the Chinese came, I don't know. Maybe 9, 10 something like that.

Q: So if you could say over again "When the Chinese came into my village, I was 9, 10." Can you say that again?

#93: Sure. When the Chinese came to our village, maybe I was 9 or 10 years old.

Q: You described a lot of the things that happened in the village. But what do you remember what was the most difficult thing for other people that happened during that time?

#93: Actually, a lot of things. For one thing, you could not do any spiritual practice, which became, kind of, almost, an unconscious effort for every Tibetan that when you get up you say your prayers. You go to the monastery that has been your place of refuge, your solace. Then, of course, you talk with your neighbors, but now all that has changed. There is no monastery to go to, you are not allowed to say your prayers and your neighbors are the suspected people. You can't talk to anybody on friendly terms, on neighborhood terms as you did before. You have to, kind of, watch your words, who to talk, when to talk, where to talk, that kind of thing.

Q: Were there some people who inspired you during these difficult times and why?

#93: In the early days, we did hear about His Holiness a lot. In old Tibet, in the normal situation, we wouldn't have heard about him so much as we did then because we expected some kind of miracle from him or from other lamas, because we had those sacred monasteries and high lamas and protective deities. We all thought something might turn up and sort of chase the Chinese out of Tibet and leave us alone. But not really in the sense of the leadership that people may, at that time, may have looked up to except His Holiness. But His Holiness was in Lhasa, and Lhasa for us, is like the moon from my village. Who would go to Lhasa? It takes seven or eight days by horse. Not very far, but in old Tibet you are born and you die, maybe in the same village. You don't travel much and Lhasa is a very far off place.

Q: Why do you think the Chinese invaded Tibet?

#93: There were lots of reasons.

Q: Why?

#93: I think the Chinese invaded Tibet for a number of reasons. In the beginning, of course it's a Communist policy to subjugate all the neighboring countries, whether they are part of China or not, it does not matter. They just want to control everything that's in Asia. Tibet being a huge country, the size of western Europe with only six million people and occupying a strategic position from a military point of view. It's a country that they must have. It's easy to take over and very important to keep. The Chinese name for Tibet is Xixang, which they tell me translates to "Western treasure bowl."

They imagined that Tibet being an old plateau must be filled with mineral wealth, which she does have. A lot of mineral wealth, but it takes wealth to extricate that wealth. Now they may have realized that, but in the early days that's what they thought. Apart from military strategy, apart from the mineral wealth, it's national pride. China wants to be big and powerful and control an area that's as big as Western Europe. Those may have been some of the primary reasons in the beginning why they wanted Tibet. Of course, that may have changed, but now most of those reasons, logic does not exist, but even then China could not let go of Tibet for other reasons.

Q: When you recall your experiences as a child and the Chinese coming in to the village and all the changes, what was the hardest thing that you personally had to endure?

#93: As a child growing up in that area, I think the loss of friends, the friendliness, a friendly atmosphere, and the carefree atmosphere that existed there. Now even kids when they play, we have to be careful what to say, who to play with things like that. The kids, as we play we cannot be too careless when we talk. All the restrictions became almost like you are in some kind of a prison camp. You are watched, so you cannot play the way you played carefree, you cannot walk and do things that you did before. You always have to look over your shoulder, if you will. That made things very difficult and then of course, when you destroy the sacredness and sanctity of a place, it turns into some kind of a vacuum, emptiness that's what was felt, when the monasteries were no longer there, when monks were no longer there, when the usual festivals and the get-togethers were not there, everything seemed to have vanished with it.

Q: What helped you survive this period or this time in your life? Was there anything?

#93: What helped me then was that even though the monasteries were not there, it was a kind of faith, that belief in the spiritual practices. That our deities, gods or the Dalai Lama, somebody is going to take care of us eventually. We thought that somebody will come to our rescue. So that kept us going on.

Q: How were your personal Buddhist beliefs in non-violence affected by the violence that you saw, you endured? How were your own Buddhist beliefs affected?

#93: Actually, I am not a very religious person myself. I am open to any kind of spiritual belief. Luckily, I didn't have to see the blood or the killing or slaughter of the people. Somehow I've been spared of that tragedy. Since I didn't see so much of violence, apart from the people who were beaten and our imprisoned leaders—that was the only violence that I've seen. It didn't affect me as much as it did some other people who may have lost their faith for others. But the majority of Tibetans, even to this day with all that trauma and tragedy, maintained their faith.

Q: What do you think should have been done to help the Tibetan people?

#93: I think that one way to help the Tibetans is to support our cause. The Tibetan cause is not just a passionate claim for independence. Tibet was independent for 6,000 years. Until 1959 nobody walked into Tibet, nobody conquered Tibet. People invaded and so did we. We invaded other countries; that doesn't make those countries part of Tibet. So in the same way, we do not feel that we are a part of anybody. China is not going to walk out of Tibet very soon. Therefore, I think if one is interested in helping Tibet, they need to help Tibet preserve our cultural identity. Tibet may stay under China for another 200 years, but if we can maintain our cultural identity, keeping it even in exile, even in America, even in Europe, in Africa where Tibetans live today or India, Nepal, anywhere. If we can maintain our cultural identity, a day will come when Tibetans can go back to Tibet and be Tibetans again.

Q: How do you think Tibetans can preserve their culture? What do they need to do? Can you repeat what you were saying about what you think will help Tibet if they kept the culture?

#93: My thinking is, Tibet as a political entity, for it to exist, you have to keep your cultural identity alive. If your cultural identity remains alive, then even though Tibet may have been taken—it's already taken over—it may stay under China for another 200 years, but we as a nation, we as a people are not going to die, not going to vanish if we maintain our cultural identity. You may be living in America, you may be living in Europe or in India or Nepal, it does not matter. If you maintain your Tibetan identity, Tibet lives not in Tibet but in America, in India, in Nepal.

If you lose that national identity, then you lose everything. Your country is taken over by China, and you are now in India or in Nepal or in America, you lose your cultural identity. Now look at my face. This face can pass off as maybe more than 75 percent of humanity. I could be Chinese, I could be Japanese, I could be a Korean, I could be a Malaysian, I could be a Native American, I could even be a Mexican. I've been called Jose here in America.

In fact in one of the Costco shops here, somebody called me Jose. Another time when I was doing this walk from San Francisco to L.A. about six years back, in fact, there were two girls who came and wanted to share a table with me at UC [University of California], Santa Cruz. I welcomed them and I said you can share your table with me and after a while they looked at each other and then one of the girls asked, "Father Miguel, why are you walking with these people?" They thought maybe one of their priests by the name of Miguel. He may have looked like me, so the girls mistook me for a Mexican Father.

So you see this face, the Tibetan face is a mongoloid. It's a fourth of humanity. Without my culture, I am a stray dog, no identity, nothing. With my culture, I am somebody. I am a Tibetan. So if we preserve that culture, even in America, even in India, even in Nepal, China may stay in Tibet for another 300 or 200 years—does not matter—Tibet lives in us.

Q: How?

#93: Now for the culture to survive, we have to first and foremost keep our language alive. Language is the root, it is the key for all culture. Without your language, your culture is going to diminish. Your culture is going to disappear one day. We have to teach our children to talk in the language, to read our language, to know our language and through that they can learn their spiritual roots. They can learn their cultural roots and through them they can appreciate these things.

Because in this day and age, in the world where there is so much bloodshed, so much mistrust, so much violence going on, a culture that talks about compassion, a culture that talks about love, kindness, thinking for other humanity, I think that is the culture that is worth preserving. It's not only for Tibetans; it's for the goodness of the world. The world is such a small place.

The day 9/11 happened here, it affected not just New York, it affected a shoe shiner in India. Two months later I went to India to pick up things for my store. At Delhi in one of the bazaars, the market, there was this shoeshine boy who wanted to shine my shoes. And so I said, "Okay, go ahead and do it." And he shined my shoes. I gave him five rupees and he went away without any argument. I called him back. Normally, they would not accept, they would feign that this was too low and want more money; they'll fight for it. He didn't, he just walked away. I called him back and said, "Aren't you going to argue?" He said, "No. With Bin Laden doing what he did, there's no tourist coming to this country. This is the first five rupees I got for this day."

You see, it's not just New York. The world has shrunk. It's a very small place. We cannot be careless with our thoughts and our ideas and our power. We have to think about everyone else. So a culture that's based on universal brotherhood, a culture that is based on love and compassion, as the Tibetan culture is, I think it is worth preserving not just for the Tibetans, but for the posterity of the entire humanity. So that's why.

Q: What do you feel would be the things that you would want preserved about the Tibetan culture? You are saying love and compassion. Can you talk about what is the heart about Tibetan culture that you think needs to be preserved?

#93: I think the most important part of our culture is our spiritual and the basic affects of belief in humanity, belief in your brotherhood, belief in your neighborhood. His Holiness the Dalai Lama always says, "If you cannot help somebody, don't harm somebody." That's the least that you can do; at least do not cause pain and frustration and anger to other beings. That way our spirituality, spiritual practices and it's wisdom, that's what needs to be preserved. That makes somebody who is humble, who is conscientious, and who is concerned about other beings.

Prayers like *Om mani padme hum* we say every…when we say this we are thinking not just about humanity, we are thinking about the entire sentient beings of the six realms that exist. We think about all the sufferings going on in each of these realms. And so when you say *Om mani padme hum*, each letter represents the six realms of existence. When you say *Om mani padme hum* you are thinking about the six realms, you are thinking about the different suffering going on there and then you ask whoever is capable of freeing these beings from those suffering, please free them. Your heart has to grow, your vision, your horizon has to go beyond yourself to cove all other beings, so that you can live in peace and brotherhood. That's what I mean by preserving the spirituality part of it.

Q: What do you feel if anything has been lost forever at this point?

#93: I think we lost Tibet, as a nation, as a people. We lost the innocence, we lost the sanctity, we lost the sacredness of what Tibet was. It was a pristine country not only in terms of its geography, but it was pristine in lots of the evil designs of the humanity. We were kind of sheltered by the mountains from all kinds of human ugliness that we have with the humanity trying to be greedy, trying to take over neighbors, trying to have influence over other people. Even though you have your own country, you want more. All

this greed, influence, power, everything we were sheltered from that. That was broken with the Chinese invasion; then the sacredness of Tibet, the sanctity.

That land has not seen the blood, the war in the scale that the outside world has, and the sacredness. It's a land of deities. That's why the Tibetans never scarred the environment. We don't mine. We know gold is there. We know there are the precious stones. We don't mine it. We don't want to imbalance the environmental energies. We don't want to disturb the spirit of the earth. We don't want to scar the mother earth. Not that we don't want those things, we want them as badly as any other people. But the sacredness and the sanctity are more important to us than the wealth that we may get out of it. All that is lost. Now Tibet is no more sacred, no more a sanctuary; it's no more pristine; it's no more innocent; it's no more mysterious; it's all gone forever.

Q: What do you hope will be preserved about Tibet for future generations? What do you hope?

#93: Still our culture and our spirituality. These are the things that even outside Tibet, even inside Tibet, today, with the limited freedom that the Chinese Government seems to show, the Tibetans are coming out with the ancient way of life; their spiritual practice, their cultural practice. That I think has to exist, there's no way. Either you have them or you are dead as a people, a nation, a race and a culture. It's your life, it's your soul. Without our sacred spiritual belief, without a culture, we lose our soul. We have no choice but to preserve them. That will drive us towards this end of preservation.

Q: What advice or message would you like to give to the next generation of Tibetans living in Tibet or exile? What advice?

#93: My advice for the next generation—there are many, actually. I always say the preservation of our culture and spiritual practice is the most important because that is our identity. Without your identity, you are nobody. For our future generation, we are looking for a long, long time for China to get out of Tibet or for Tibet to be…for the Tibetans to have to stay in Tibet. It may take many, many years or it could happen like the Berlin wall. You never know, but my guess is that it will take a while.

There was a time when I thought of my own age and then started saying "Okay, it's not going to happen in my lifetime," and then think that's a long time. For one person, I think his own lifetime is a long time but for a nation, it's nothing. Twenty years, 30 years, 200 years, it's still young. America is a young nation though it's over 200 years old. So for a nation it is still young. Things can go—I mean it has to change. It's the only way. China is right on top. It is like climbing Everest. You are on the top. What do you do? You have to either stay there or come down. It's time for China to come down. Come to their senses. Then our turn will come.

Q: If you were going to give some advice or a message to the next generation of Chinese young people, what would you say to them or want them to know?

#93: To the young Chinese, I would like to tell them that China was and still is a big nation. It's a powerful nation with an ancient, rich culture and as a people, as a nation they have a lot to deal with without having to gobble up their neighboring countries. China is better off being the Chinese and just go with all their problems rather than trying to control everything in Asia.

Mongolia is not China; actually China became part of Mongolia. Mongolia ruled China for 200 years. We all know that. History knows that. The Chinese border stops where the wall of China stops. The wall of China is at least a hundred miles away from the Tibetan border. This wall is the only man made structure they say that you can even see from the moon. We did not build it. The Chinese built it to say who are the Chinese and who are the non-Chinese. China is better off being who they are and doing what they are best at doing without having to spent more money and lose face trying to control all these satellite states.

If a Chinese leader comes to the United States today, they have to go like a thief. They have to come from the back door of a hotel and get out the back door of the hotel. They can't walk through the front of the hotel because there are too many people demonstrating against the Chinese; from their own people, from the Tibetans, from the Taiwanese, from other people.

Dalai Lama may be a person without a country, but when he comes to the United States, he comes in a motorcade, walks through the gate of the hotel and gets out of the gate of the hotel. There are people greeting him with scarves, not flags and placards condemning. So these are the two different things. If they want to see respect for China, then do the respectful thing. Let go of the satellite states; let them do their own thing. The Chinese are better off without Mongolia, without Xingjian, without Tibet and maybe Manchuria too. I think Manchurians are not happy with the Chinese either.

Q: In your opinion do you think the average Chinese person knows about Tibet?

#93: In my opinion, the average Chinese person knows almost next to nothing about Tibet. When Henrich Harrier returned to Tibet and wrote a book as a result of it that also says "Return to Tibet." He talked to people who are most likely to have some information on Tibet; people who work for the postal system, people who worked for travel agencies, people who catered for the hotels, things like that. He says most of them have almost no idea what Tibet is in the first place, let alone Tibet being a part of them. So most Chinese they know next to nothing.

When I came to UC [University of California], Berkeley about 12 years ago, then my wife was here—she was part of the 1,000 families who got lottery to go here—so I came for a vacation. Somebody invited me to attend to a talk in UC Berkeley. The topic was…I forget the topic… Anyway, it was part of a class that they were taking. They wanted real people to talk about the real problems, Chinese and Tibetans. "Conflict Management"—that was the class. The day I went there, it was the Chinese turn to say what they know about Tibet. There was this young person from Beijing and he said he grew up in Beijing and went to school and college there and now he is in UC Berkeley. His idea of Tibet—he only knew

what was written in the textbook at one stage of his school. Tibet is a remote country somewhere in the west, they eat raw meat, people do not wash and they believe in Buddhism and most are called lamas.

That was all he knew about Tibet. He was a son of a doctor in Beijing. People who have access to some information for privileges and they know that much about Tibet. Then he said that we Tibetans, we many not be the same people, but we can't let Tibet go because China is composed of 56 nationalities and Tibet is one of the five main nationalities or the stars. The Chinese national flag has five stars. One is for Mongolia, one is for Xingjian, one is for Manchuria, one is for Taiwan and one is for Tibet. So if they let go of Tibet, they have to let go Xingjian, they have to let go Mongolia, they have to let go Taiwan and they can't do that. Knowing that Tibet and China are two different things, they still cannot let go of Tibet. That's what this young man says. I really felt that he spoke honestly and truthfully.

Q: If it were possible to return to Tibet, what would you do?

#93: Oh, lots of things. Now I have seen America. No, I am not going to export any of this stuff here, but I do admire your road systems. I do admire the little grassroots democracy that you practice here. I think most of the Tibetans do that. We would be exporting something of that, rather importing something of that to Tibet. The grassroots level of democracy where people get to talk what kind of trees you would have on your street, the fruits, the fragrance of the flowers because they actually do affect peoples' lives. You get to talk and discuss, debate about those things if you don't like a tree and it smells you can go and talk to the city councilor and lodge a complaint. That kind of openness, that kind of—maybe too much of democracy, but that's what it takes at the grassroots level that people get to talk about the smallest of their issues without any qualms about—without any having to fear about it. That's what we hope that future Tibet will inherit.

Q: Would you return to Tibet if you could?

#93: Definitely. I'm an American. I got the American citizenship, but…

Q: Definitely, I…

#93: Yes, I would definitely go back to Tibet.

Q: Why?

#93: Because that's my country. That's who I am. I am here not because of choice. I'm here because of circumstances. This is the best I can have.

Q: Tell me about the circumstances that led you to leave Tibet. What happened?

#93: The circumstances that led me to leave Tibet—the Chinese invasion. After the invasion, everything that we believed in, everything that we held sacred, holy, our social system, our cultural system, our spiritual system; everything is destroyed. And not only

that, now we have no freedom to even talk to your next-door neighbor. There was no way we could live in Tibet. We were kind of forced out. There's no way you can have a normal life in Tibet. Even parents have to fear their children. Children have to fear their parents. How can you live in a…live alone in the country, but in the family, within the family children are taught to inform on their parents and parents are lectured to inform on their children's behavior. So the Communist government knows everything.

Q: How did you and your family escape from Tibet?

#93: Me and my family, ours is a small family. My father died when I was just born, I think, and so all I know is my mom, my sister and my brother who, being a monk is also seldom seen in the house, but he had already escaped to India. With the circumstances as it was, with everything that we held sacred destroyed, village life destroyed, village neighborhood, friendliness; everything is destroyed. So there was no way we could live.

One day my mom talked to me and my sister and said, we need to leave the country. And then to leave the country in Tibet is not packing a few things and call a taxi and go. No. You have to carry everything you need for the next three or four months as you go across the Himalayas on your back. No taxi, no horse, no nothing. We were kind of a poor family, in the sense that when father died, the only breadwinner is gone and so mother had to raise two children and still the Chinese looked at my family as a middle class family. Knowing that there is only mother to work and two children to feed, they still classified us as middle class. She somehow knew that if we don't go, they are not going to be very friendly with us.

And so that time what happened was, there was the Chinese authority in the village who told the people that if you recall family members from your family who are in Nepal and in India, if you call them back to Tibet, we are going to give them a double share of what we gave you. That lured some of the families in the village. They actually did go to Nepal and called some of the people who had escaped before the Chinese came to our village, back to the village. They were actually given double the share of land and some other things.

Q: Why did the Chinese want to do that?

#93: I think just to show the outside world that Tibet is fine and it was the bad old government. The new Chinese Communist government is fine and people are returning to Tibet. It is a big propaganda for the Chinese. So, actually, some did come back.

Luckily or unluckily, our brother being a monk, he had to escape and now my mother used the same pretext. She said she's going to go and call because she said "I'm only a woman. I have two children to feed and I need my older son to help me. Since they are young, they can't stay here in the village and look after themselves. So I have to take them with me. We are all going to go to Nepal and bring back my older son to help me with work in the village." The Chinese authorities actually believed her. So they let her go. They even gave us a little transit note that we can show on our way to the Nepalese border. So we didn't have to hide by day and travel by night.

But what we had to do was, we had to leave everything we owned behind to show the Chinese that we are coming back. In Tibet it's not money, it's in things that you have, like ornaments, like your household utensils. We don't have a bank balance. Bank balance is a lady's ornaments, the things you have in the house, things you have on your altar—that's your bank balance. We had to leave all those for the Chinese to make them believe that we were going to come back. We left everything except shirts on our back, enough food maybe for a week. My mother carried most of the things. My sister who was four years older to me, she carried the same load as my mother did and I had the least to carry because I was just a kid, I don't know maybe 10 years old or 11 years old, something like that. And so off we went.

Q: Can you tell me about what you remember about the journey?

#93: It was a very, very traumatic, torturous kind of a journey. In Tibet traveling is very, very difficult, especially if you are not equipped for traveling, animals to carry your tents and things like that. During the day, in the summer day it can be hot like any other desert at any place. And during the night because of the altitude and there's no cloud cover, it freezes, even in summer.

So first we had to bear the weather because we had no tent, nothing. If we carry the tent, we can't carry anything else. We didn't even have a tent. So weather was the first thing that we had to face. Then the road, there were no paved roads. We just had to kind of guess the direction, look at the sun and the stars, hope for the best and try to walk the mountain passes. With no proper shoes, no proper clothing, and with no knowing whether there is a family or a village or a house when we are going to stop for the night. We were hungry. We were cold.

Many times we had to go through some sheer cliffs where you look up, you see a narrow sky because there is valley, steep, an almost 90 degree valley rising on either sides. Then you look down and there's the river; one blue thing up there and next blue thing down there. One little slip and you fall hundreds and hundreds of feet into the river and into nothingness. Sometimes there is just one plank, maybe about six inches wide and tied at both ends with a rope; one little rope here and one little rope there, it was kind of straw ropes. You have to walk on this six inch plank. Even to this day, in fact even last April when I went to India to meet my brother and he tells me, "Even now you are screaming in your dreams." Because I always get this…falling off those planks and into the river. Then the rain and the weather, it was a torturous and traumatic journey.

Q: Your mother, you and your sister?

#93: Yeah, three of us. Sometimes we met other people who were escaping. Other times we had nobody but ourselves. And then of course, very soon after a week of traveling, we ran out of rations. There's nothing, now you have to beg! You begged your way, all the way up to Kathmandu. And in Kathmandu of course, you have to beg more. There's no money. Tibetan money is no longer good, even if you have it. So there's nothing you can buy. You just have to look out for the hand out and take care of yourself.

Q: Did people help you along the way when you begged?

#93: Yeah, people normally know that. If you see people like that, these are not usual beggars. Even if they are usual beggars, Tibet is a country where everybody helps everybody. They don't turn away somebody who comes to your door. As we came through, we crossed the Tibetan border into Nepal, the Nepalese they have been kind too. They helped us all the way. There are some people who wouldn't help, who would chase us away with dogs or something like that, but most of them, 99 percent of the time, people helped you.

Q: Your mother must have been a very strong woman?

#93: Yes, I think so. Yeah, to imagine for a single lady to have to bring up two children and you go through all those problems, she must be very, very strong.

Q: Tell me a little bit about what happened when you got to Kathmandu? What happens next in your story?

#93: Kathmandu, the first time, it's like being on another planet. You see cars, you see Europeans, Americans and very strange people with blond hair and blue eyes; people you have never seen in your life before. But people have been very friendly. They were generous and friendly. Then of course, the Nepalese themselves were very kind, very nice people, in general.

We start selling things; my mom has some earrings and I was fortunate to bring a little necklace that I used to wear for the New Year. My mom and my sister had to keep everything back, but I somehow managed to bring it with me. We start selling those beads and those were good, genuine beads. They kept us going for a while. And then there was a person, a representative sent by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Kathmandu to collect the Tibetan refugees and bring them to India. So that's how we were picked up by the agent there and sent to India.

Q: Where were you in Kathmandu when you were picked up?

#93: Boudha, that's where the big *stupa* is.

Q: Right at the border?

#93: No, no. Boudha, at the big *stupa*.

Q: Where did they take you?

#93: To the Indian border where we were kept for two months at the border between India and Nepal because they want to register us, they want to… The Indian government took its time to sort out things. They helped us with some rations. We didn't have to beg then. The

Indian Government helped us with food. It wasn't so much, but we made do with things. Then one day they told us you can go to Dharamsala, where the Dalai Lama was residing. That's how we came to Dharamsala and met His Holiness the Dalai Lama for the first time in our lives.

Q: What was that like?

#93: Oh my goodness, everyone was crying. It was like a family reunion type. I think people have so much emotion, so much anger, so much suffering, so much trauma, tragedy and it was [breaks down]. I think it was time for us to share and pour out our grief. And that's what we did.

Q: So let go?

#93: Yeah. His Holiness was in his 20's, he was young. We didn't get his hand blessing. It was kind of a *gyangcha* we call it, seeing from a distance, but that was the most emotional meeting I ever had in my life. Everybody was there to unload all the problems and suffering that they had.

Q: What was it that made it so, made you so able to kind of unload? What was it, the presence of His Holiness? What was it?

#93: I think it was his presence. It was like meeting your parent, meeting your leader, meeting the person that you believed in and it was also time to open up and share all the suffering that we went through. Yeah, I think every single person who met him at that time, not only that day but in those days, did exactly the same thing that we went through, they all cried. It was a time to just let go, thanks.

Q: Did you actually share out loud with people or how?

#93: No, we all just cried silently. There were sobs and people couldn't control it, you can hear it, but there were no kind of hysteria and crying something like that. It was a very controlled, emotional, breakdown.

Q: So people were telling other people their stories?

#93: No, no, no. We didn't need to speak. We all understood why we are crying, why we were there and the reason for that moment of openness, breakdown. Everybody understood. We didn't have to say anything. Everybody understood exactly how the other person is feeling.

Q: Did His Holiness give a talk or anything that you remember?

#93: Not at that moment. I think he may have said a few words but not really, no lectures, nothing. Maybe we were too busy crying that we didn't hear; I didn't hear him. I don't

really recall him saying anything on that day. Maybe we were too busy crying ourselves. Everybody broke down. I am quite sure he may have said something.

Q: Does His Holiness want people to return to Tibet or does he want you to stay here?

#93: His Holiness definitely wants people to return to Tibet. Yes, that's the reason why we all are out in the first place, so that we can preserve the best of our culture, tradition, spiritual being and take it back to the land where it came from. Definitely. Yes.

Q: I want to go back to one thing you mentioned. When you were a child and you had to make that very treacherous journey from your home to Nepal and then India and you said you've had recurring nightmares ever since. Can you talk about those nightmares? Do you remember what they are about?

#93: About the nightmares that I had of my journey from Tibet to Nepal, it's normally falling off those cliffs, the sheer cliffs that we had to walk with a valley. A very steep valley, which looks more like a cliff than a valley. I had a nightmare of falling down those cliffs into the river. And also all kinds of animals that you get to see that you don't see in Tibet.

In Tibet, it's a vast country and you see things miles away. You can see a wild horse maybe two, three miles away. It's an open country. It's like being in Montana [northern state in the USA]. You can see miles and miles of it. You are kind of forewarned about what's there. Once you come to these valleys, there are slithering snakes and darting little Himalayan bear or something. You are haunted by these animals; you are never at ease.

Everything is damp, it must have been summertime, wet, and I didn't like sitting on wet ground. So I always sat on a piece of stone. I had to have a piece of stone to sit on. All those little things kind of kept bothering. And then people in the valley, some of the Nepalese as we come towards Kathmandu, they were known to have poisoned the travelers to benefit from their belongings. I have a fear of this, too—those kind of things. In the night, in the forest everything seems to be moving because there is a breeze in the forest. Everything is moving and it looks very unnerving in pitch dark.

Q: And you are only a little boy.

#93: I was used to open countryside and used to seeing things before they can actually harm you. But there it can be right next to you and still not know. In Tibet, if a wolf is seen coming to a sheep pen or something like that, at night you can see them almost half a mile because of their eyes. It's like cats and dogs eyes in the night. It glows so you know how far the danger is and you can do something about it. But in the forest, anything can just surprise you at any moment.

Q: What about after you get to see His Holiness? Can you give me a description of what happens to you next, apparently you go to school and you must leave India? Can you give me a little story about the synopsis of your life?

#93: After meeting His Holiness that's where all Tibetans for grownups and children, everything starts anew. Then if they had to go to settlement—in those days there wasn't much of a settlement but there were road construction camps. Because the Tibetans are the round pegs in the square holes in India. Your skills are no longer used here, so you have to do what's the best and the things that the Indian people couldn't do. Pave roads in the mountains, in the high altitude, in the cold and bitterness where the Indian people cannot work. So the Tibetans were given that work to make roads. The road construction camps were there for many, many years. The grownups went to the road construction camps and the children normally went to school. His Holiness now has got a transit camp set in Dharamsala where children were collected and then sent to other parts of India where there are clusters of Tibetan schools in Mussoorie, Darjeeling and Dalhousie.

Q: And what happened to you after you left His Holiness? Where did you go?

#93: I always wanted to go to school. So I said I want to go to school and that's where my brother sent me, to the Transit School in Dharamsala; first time ever being in a school.

Q: How old?

#93: I don't know. Thirteen years old maybe; 12, 12 and half, or 13—something like that.

Q: And what happened?

#93: I started from there. Transit School is only a Transit School and we don't have much of teaching. You wait to be sent to other parts. So we waited. It was a tough time. There was food, but not really enough, hardly any clothing. You have to make do with whatever you have with you when you went to the Transit School. There were some handouts from Europe and America, but they were either too big or too small. A boy got a girl's shirt and a girl got a boy's shirt. We didn't bother as long as there was something to wear. So we wore them. There wasn't enough food—hard time. Then I was selected to go to Mussoorie. Mussoorie was the best of the Tibetan schools then. I was lucky to be selected to go to Mussoorie. I ended up being in home number 17 with foster parents. For every 25 children, there was a mother and a father, who are real couples and who took care of us.

Q: Tibetans?

#93: Tibetans. So that's how I ended up in home number 17 in Mussoorie.

Q: Where was your mother?

#93: My mother, sister and brother, they went to the road construction camp. Otherwise, there is no other job.

Q: Did you ever see them again?

#93: Yes. My mother—one time after I was admitted to the Transit School. My mother and my sister came to meet me. They bought me slippers and left me with 50 *paisa*, which is like 50 cents here, only the value is of course, way, way down. And that's her whole day's wage. She got 50 *paisa* and my sister got 25 *paisa* for the day, working for construction of the road. My brother got a *rupee*. It's like a dollar for the day. That's his wage.

After being to Mussoorie Homes Foundation home number 17, maybe a year or two years after that, my mother expired. She died maybe of tuberculosis or some exhaustion, somewhere in the mountain passes in Lahul-Spiti area. It's a chain of Himalayan Mountains. My brother came to see me when I was in the Homes Foundation in Mussoorie one time. It takes a lot of money, a lot of time for somebody and then Tibetans don't speak Hindi. It's a huge problem for somebody to go and meet somebody. I met my brother once or maybe twice. That's about it.

Q: Your sister?

#93: Then that's another story. Then I got out of the Tibetan Homes Foundation and was admitted to a school that was organized by a non-profit group in England called Orkhand (?) Adventure. So Orkhand (?) Adventure selected me as one of the few students that they picked and so I got a chance to learn English and things like that. And then moved out from Mussoorie to south India where they tried to set up their school, but that school did not work, so we were back. Then they did not sent me back to Mussoorie, they sent me to Dehradun which is next to Mussoorie. There's a nice Anglo-Indian school.

Q: What's the name, please?

#93: It's called Cambrian Hall. It's an Anglo-Indian School where English is the medium.

Q: In what city?

#93: In Dehradun. There's a long way in and out. That's where I completed my schooling.

Q: And then what did you do?

#93: I did my teacher's training.

Q: Where?

#93: In Darjeeling I did my teacher's training. Now I know my years. In 1996 I finished my teacher's training. Then I started working as a teacher in the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala. For the next 20 years I was a teacher.

Q: What did you teach?

#93: At the primary level the teacher has to teach everything because we are trained in the Western line and the things that you are familiar with in Europe or America. It's more like

European system of education. So we teach everything; English, geography, history, math, science from Class One to Class Five. If you are a teacher there, a primary school teacher you teach everything. Then as years gone by, they put me in the administrative position. I was a headmaster for a while and then principal for a while. As principal and headmaster, I mainly taught geography and history. As principal I mainly taught history to the secondary class, that's Grade 11 and 12.

Q: Did you choose to be a teacher?

#93: When we were doing our schooling, our sponsors, who were from Switzerland would ask us what we want to do in our lives. So I said I want to be a teacher. That's how I chose to be trained as a teacher.

Q: Why did you want to be a teacher?

#93: I think probably because those are the non-professions. It's something that you've seen and you long. You've been taught by teachers, so I think that's what you want to be. No really other big reasons, I just wanted to be a teacher.

Q: I'm just going to go back and correct something. I think it was in 1986, not 1996 that you began teaching. It was 20 years, from 1986 and then that would take us to 2006.

#93: No, I taught from 1996. I start teaching from 1996 to…no, not 1996, sorry. I start teaching in 1976.

Q: You started teaching in 1976 and you taught for 20 years in India?

#93: In India.

Q: What was it like teaching these children who'd come from the mountains and escaped with their families? What was that experience like?

#93: Teaching Tibetan children, it's pleasant. It's nice. Tibetan children are mostly well behaved. Asian societies normally have a lot of respect for teachers. So, it's easy. Though children have passed through all kinds of…most of those were actually orphans or semi-orphans, things like that. If you are to read a psychology book on children who grew up as orphans and semi-orphans, you would imagine horrors. No, luckily none of that happened. I give our culture that credit. It helped me. It actually plays a big role.

Q: In what way?

#93: It doesn't give you the anger, the frustration that somebody did wrong to me and, therefore, I am the way I am, nothing of that kind. If you suffer, you suffer because you earned it in your karma. Now if somebody kicks you and you kick yourself, you would be taking it totally differently. If somebody kicks you, you have a reason to be angry, but if you kick yourself, it's too bad. It's painful, but well, so it's like that. It's your karma; it's

something that you earned yourself. You are not as upset with yourself as you would be if someone else did it to you. So that belief, it is as simple as it may sound, but that belief kept us strong. That belief kept us kind of not really losing our senses, being angry at somebody who caused this problem to you and, therefore, you feel the right to be angry at the world.

That kind of attitude wasn't there in most of the Tibetans. So kids, even though they were orphans, even though they went through horrendous experiences, they really didn't blame anybody, in the sense that one would have in another culture, in another belief.

Q: Because they believed it was part of their karma that this happed to them?

#93: Yeah.

Q: Because in another lifetime, they may have done something and this was the return experience based on what they had done in another lifetime?

#93: Right.

Q: Did the children express any anger towards the Chinese?

#93: Oh, yes, they did, but it didn't overwhelm them. Even now there are many, many people, both grownups and children who are still angry, but it did not overtake them. Because they know that there is always a different way of looking at the problems. It could be their karma, something that they have earned. If you take everything like that, you cannot be yourself. Whatever feelings that you have are going to overtake you.

I think there are a lot of things, but basically because I am a trained teacher myself, I read all those experiences that the orphans went through, poor people from broken homes went through. Somehow in other societies, in other culture, there's an, in between the lines; they were made to feel right the way they felt. If they feel angry because they've been mistreated as a child, everybody says "Okay, we understand it because he went through this."

Our society wouldn't forgive that easily. It's something that you earned too. So you deflate that built up balloon a little bit and then you become more balanced, I suppose. I have no concrete scientific proof to say why the Tibetan children—who were at one time 95 percent all orphans and semi-orphans.

In my 20 years of teaching in TCV, there was only one boy who attacked another boy with a sharp object in 20 years. We have kids who are just few months old to people who are well in their 20's still in school because they had no schooling. Even in their 20's they had to go to school in Grade 6, 7, 8. I tried to answer that question myself many times—why the Tibetans are so special? And they were, we were, actually. At least in that case where the tragedy and the trauma did not really upset their mental balance the way it does in some other culture. So I credit our culture for that.

Q: Maybe we could just conclude by your telling me…

#93: My leaving India and coming to the United States? I got one of the lotteries to settle in the United States. The U.S. government has given us, 1,000 Tibetan families, residence in the United States. Just the visa—that's it—period. From the airport we are on our own. We had nothing, no other support and no help. We are not treated like a refugee who is given sustenance and shelter here. No, we were on our own at the airport, but here many, many American people had a home for us. At least for the next three months and many times, even longer. They found a fictitious job or a real job for us, so most of us were okay, even as we landed at the airport. I was assigned to a fictitious job here in one of the cosmetic companies, but I didn't have to work there. Because my wife was here before me and she had the home set for us.

Q: You were married in India?

#93: Yes, we were married in India.

Q: Your wife came and then you followed?

#93: Right. I came as a part of the family reunification.

Q: Was your child born here?

#93: He was born in India.

Q: I want to thank you so much for this wonderful time that you spent with us and the very important messages that you gave to us. Thank you.

#93: Not at all. My pleasure. Thank you.

Q: *Tashi delek.*

#93: *Tashi delek*. I want to thank you for taking so much interest and time for us.

Q: You are welcome. I wish I had a lot more time. I would rather do this than work!

END OF INTERVIEW