

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #17N – Tsultrim Sangpo
April 11, 2015

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #17N
2. Interviewee: Tsultrim Sangpo
3. Age: 62
4. Date of Birth: 1953
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Jang Yae
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1973
9. Date of Interview: April 11, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Swayambhu Old Age Home, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 18 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Palden Tsering
14. Videographer: Henry Tenenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tsultrim Sangmo was born in Jang Yae in Utsang Province. His father was not married to his mother and his wife insisted she be sent away. Tsultrim Sangmo's father was the manager of Yae Shikha, a large estate owned by the Tibetan Government. Because of their wealthy status the family was isolated from the rest of the community after the Chinese occupation. Tsultrim Sangpo had a lonely life as a child bereft of friends and denied an education.

Tsultrim Sangpo talks about the Chinese' implementation of democratic reforms at which time almost everything his family owned was confiscated and they were forced out of the large estate into a small house. The commune system of agriculture was established. He also talks about the incident of revolt started by a nun and how it led to famine in the region after people stopped taking care of and irrigating the commune lands because they believed they would be able to expel the Chinese.

Tsultrim Sangpo witnessed the Chinese taking away his father in chains to prison, where he remained for six years. He was released early due to the villagers' petition seeking his release on account of old age. Although happy that the family was reunited, life remained difficult under the Chinese occupation. Tsultrim Sangpo decided to flee to Nepal alone and he describes the arduous journey through a difficult mountain pass without companions at the age of 19.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, life under Chinese rule, commune system, oppression under Chinese, escape experiences.

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Interview #17N

Interviewee: Tsultrim Sangpo

Age: 62, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 11, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:09

Interviewee #17N: My name is Tsultrim Sangpo.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#17N: Yes, it can be used. Thank you for doing this work for this cause.

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

#17N: Okay.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#17N: Okay.

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

#17N: I will not face any problems. There will be no problems.

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

#17N: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' can you please tell me where you were born?

00:02:22

#17N: I was born in the place called Jang Yae.

Q: What province is that?

#17N: It is in Utsang Province.

Q: Was there a temple nearby, a well-known temple?

#17N: There is the monastery of Duthop [hermit with special powers] Thangthong Gyalpo; a monastery of Duthop Thangthong and a stupa called Tashi Gomang, Tashi Gomang of Riwoche. It is located around half a day's journey from my village. That is the holiest pilgrim site close by.

Q: Stupa Tashi Gomang?

#17N: It is the pilgrim site of Duthop Thangthong called Tsechen.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do, *pa-la*?

#17N: My father was the estate [manager] of an estate called Yae Shikha long ago. Mother was the wife of the estate [manager]. That was it.

Q: ...of the Tibetan Government?

#17N: Yes, [the estate belonged to] the Tibetan Government.

Q: *Pa-la*, how many...when you were a little boy, how many siblings were there in your family?

00:04:25

#17N: I am the only child of my father. Mother had other children from the junior husband, around three children. I am the only one of my father.

Q: Did all of you live together with those three other children?

#17N: No, [we] are not together. Two are in the United States and one lives with my mother. I live separately.

Q: Long ago in Tibet?

#17N: While in Tibet...this story is complicated. When I was in Tibet Mother had already left. The Chinese had appeared and it was difficult. From my father...[I] will recount the story nicely. Long ago Father's wife did not have any children and so my mother was brought home. Then my mother gave birth to me. The real wife scolded and mistreated mother and [she] left for the south. Mother left for the south. So we did not live together. I lived with my father and the stepmother, Father's wife. That was how [I] lived.

Q: You know, your father was a government official. Would that make you a kind of a middle class family or upper class? What kind of level?

00:06:55

#17N: The economic condition was like this. Yae Shikha is a Tibetan Government property. In Tibet there were two kinds...the Tibetan Government and the *ladang* ‘high lama’s residence.’ [The estate] belonged to the government. Though we had the property it belonged to the government and we were taking care of the estate that belonged to someone else. Before the estate could be handed over, the Chinese appeared and Father was put in jail. We did not own any particular property though in the olden days in Tibet [Father] was a leader and considered among the well off. That was the thing. [We] did not own any particular property as such.

Q: What were your father’s duties, *pa-la*?

#17N: I was small and had no knowledge, but according to what people said the duties were managing the government land, looking after the poor people, settling disputes among the people and such kinds of duties. [Father] managed the sowing and harvesting of the land, assigned work to the people and gave the harvest to the government.

Q: When there were disputes...?

#17N: Settling disputes among the people.

Q: When you were a little boy, did you go to school at all?

00:09:14

#17N: When I was small in Tibet, [I] was too small to attend school and when I reached school-going age, father was put in prison. The Chinese did not give education to those that had earlier been in the leadership and wealthy classes. Except for the poor, children of the wealthy and leaders were not given education. So I have not been to school even for a day.

Q: Before school age, what are some of your earliest memories of living in your area? What was it like in Jang Yae?

#17N: In those days the leadership and wealthy classes were segregated and we could not interact with the other people. You had to live by yourself and lead your life. The rest of the people worked together while we worked by ourselves. But for living alone there was no mingling with the community at that time. [I] have to say this correctly. It was like that.

Q: Was there any punishment or consequences if you wanted to just talk to anybody in the neighborhood?

#19N: Yes, not allowed.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: So what was the question?

Q: Were there any punishment or consequences?

00:11:59

#17N: Then the Chinese would punish. We would be punished. We were called *dochomo* or the leadership class.

Q: Did that mean that you could only play with other boys and girls that were not government officials or were wealthy? You couldn't be with ordinary kids in the neighborhood?

#17N: There was not any opportunity to play. As a little one and the child of a leader, [I] used to play about being watched over by a person or two. Apart from that once the Chinese appeared, [I] did not get the chance to play. There were not many in the wealthy and leadership classes in our region, just around two and we were the only one in the leadership class. In the beginning [the wealthy family] was not called wealthy but later was labeled so. There was no playing but being by yourself. So there would be no contact [with other people]. Much later this was changed. Restrictions on the leadership and wealthy classes were relaxed and [we] could form contacts. Later, [we] could mingle with the others and such after the Chinese changed the policy. It was not so earlier.

Q: What kind of a little boy were you? Were you quiet or mischievous or playful? What kind of a boy?

00:14:15

#17N: [I] was not playful. I was not in any way mischievous because since the Chinese ill-treated us, everybody bullied [us]. However, [I] was not allowed to put up any challenge when bullied but had to endure it. Even if someone younger beat you, you were not to react. So [I] could not be mischievous but became tolerant. I am describing this correctly after being asked and this is the truth. [To interpreter] Please tell her so.

Q: Was your father very concerned about the family not getting in trouble?

#17N: Of course, Father was worried. When Chinese troops arrived from one place to the other, my father was sent to return the horses. The Chinese did not have roads for vehicles to ply. So [they] moved from one place to another on horseback. My father used to be sent to return horses from our place to another place. I was too young to go to return horses. My father used to be sent everywhere to return horses. Father used to be sent.

Q: To get horses for officials coming or for what reason?

00:16:57

#17N: Yes, for the officials to move from here to there. The officials had to move from one place to the other. For instance, if one had to go from here to Boudha, it was on horseback. There was no motor road. [Father] was sent to return such horses. A person from another region would bring [a horse] to a certain place. [The official] rode another horse from that place and [Father] went to bring back the horse. After some years Father was put in prison.

Q: When you look back on your childhood, would you say that you grew up feeling very worried or nervous that something bad would happen because of the Chinese in your town, village and your city?

#17N: Yes, it has been so 100 percent. It has been so since the time [I] can recall.

Q: Did you have, like when you were a child—did you have bad dreams that something was going to happen to you or to the family because of the Chinese? They were right there with...and I'm sure they had guns and everything. So did you worry about your safety and the safety of your family?

00:18:51

#17N: It was like this for us. Whatever possessions we had in the house, all these were seized by the Chinese and confiscated. The Chinese took away the assets of the estate and distributed among the people. It was sad when we had nothing in the house and it is obvious to have sad dreams. It was possible and it happened.

Q: Were you old enough, *pa-la*, to actually see things taken away like, you know, the goods in your home or animals or anything that you owned? Were you old enough?

#17N: Of course, [I] saw that. All things were taken away even when the people [owners] were present. Some were distributed among the people and the rest taken by the government. It was not just us. It happened to all the wealthy. The Chinese launched democratic reforms. This is called Democratic Reforms. Democratic Reforms. The name is Democratic Reforms. This was done to everyone when democratic reforms were launched.

Q: *Pa-la*, what kind of things did they take away from your family?

00:21:23

#17N: Whatever gold [we] possessed, even those worn on the neck were broken and taken away. We had no freedom then. If one wore a *dzi* 'special beads made of agate stone' on the neck it was taken away. They left the clothes, blankets and kitchen equipment but the rest of the belongings were taken away. I am not lying. It was not just us but the democratic reforms was launched everywhere in Tibet.

Q: *Pa-la*, it's important to hear what it was like through the eyes of one family because then you can understand how upsetting and frightening it was.

#17N: What I speak is the truth without any lies.

Q: Yes, *pa-la*, I understand this is very hard and I wanted to understand when you said they left nothing but blankets. Was your house stripped bare of things and did you have to move into smaller quarters or did you still have your own house?

00:23:33

#17N: At Yae Shikha was a large house of the government. [We] were removed from there to a two-room house near a temple. [We] were removed from the estate into it.

Q: Inside of a temple? Was it very small?

#17N: It was not inside a temple. We had built the temple and close to it was a house with two rooms. We had constructed a house with two rooms near the temple where we moved. [We] moved from the Yae estate to the two-room house we had constructed near the temple. [We] were removed from the Yae estate.

Q: Did your mother, *pa-la*, or your father tell you to be careful what you said or what you did around the Chinese?

00:25:44

#17N: [My parents] would say, “The Chinese will beat [you]. Keep quiet. If you do not remain still, the Chinese will come and beat you.” Children were told like that.

Q: Your parents did warn you about things. Did... You’ve mentioned couple of times that your father was arrested. How old were you when that happened?

#17N: I might have been 8 or 9 years old. [Father] was imprisoned for six years. Perhaps [I] was 8. The Chinese imprisoned [him] for six years. [I] am not exactly sure.

Q: ...maybe around 8 years old, the Chinese took him away. Do you remember that day when that happened?

#17N: [I] do remember.

Q: Could you tell us about that or would that be too hard?

#17N: It is okay to talk about it.

Q: Please tell us what happened?

00:27:29

#17N: At that time the Chinese took [Father] away from home in chains.

Q: Did they give a reason of any kind when they came? Did they come to your house? Did they give a reason?

#17N: No reason was given, only that [Father] had to go. It was known that he managed the estate. [He] was taken away on the pretext of being given advice or re-educated.

Q: Did they say for how long he would be away?

#17N: That was not mentioned.

Q: *Pa-la*, even when your father was home, was the family still receiving money from the Tibetan Government to eat? What income did you live on before your father was arrested when the Chinese were there?

00:29:08

#17N: The income was that the government...the government in Tibet earned revenue by giving sheep [to the people] to be looked after, around 500 sheep...500 male and 300 female. You gave a certain percentage of it to the government and the balance was your income. It seems to be that way. You gave back what the government gave you and the growth in number, if you made a good increase that seems to be your income.

Q: Which government are we talking about, the Chinese or the Tibetan?

#17N: The Tibetan Government.

Q: That was before the Chinese came?

#17N: The Chinese had not arrived then. This was what father told me.

Q: Yes, that was the tradition. Exactly. Now when the Chinese came and they took your father away, what did you have for money for food?

00:30:47

#17N: At home were my father's real wife that I spoke about earlier and I. We cooked and remained there. What the Chinese did with the sheep and such was that...There was the uprising that took place in Lhasa. Those that did not participate in the uprising, the Chinese gave little compensation money every year for the sheep and *dzo* 'animal bred between a yak and cow' used for plowing that they had taken away.

Q: When the uprising took place in Lhasa...

#17N: There was the uprising in Lhasa where [people] rebelled against the Chinese. The wealth of those that took part in it was confiscated and those that did not participate in it were given small sums of money for the wealth, about a quarter of the cost of a sheep.

Q: When was that? After '59?

#17N: Yes, yes.

Q: Then what happened?

00:32:25

#17N: Then the Chinese formed the *rukhak* 'group of people' or commune. To cultivate the fields...we had been segregated and therefore, did our work alone while they [ordinary people] did theirs [together]. That is how [we] lived. For our income—all [our] sheep were distributed—we were left with three sheep while the Chinese took the rest away. [We] were left with only three sheep while the Chinese took the rest away. We had owned eight *dzo* for plowing that the Chinese took away. We were left with none. With no [*dzo*] we bought two small yaks for plowing. My stepmother and I lived in that manner.

Q: What does *rukhak* mean?

#17N: *Rukhak* means all the people cultivating the fields together. Everyone was together while we were segregated. *Rukhak* means, take the Settlement of Solukhumbu [Nepal] for instance, there was common revenue for all the people of the settlement, the harvest was collected together and people worked together in the fields. The Chinese formed [the commune] for everyone but the leadership and wealthy classes were segregated.

Q: Continue, *pa-la*.

00:34:22

#17N: After that when I was around...To put it in brief...after Father was released from prison I was sent to a school in a place called Dhingri.

Q: After father...

#17N: After Father got out of prison I was sent to school in a place called Dhingri, to a relative.

Q: That's a little too short. *Pa-la*, I want to know, your father was in prison for six years. While your father was in prison, was it far away? Could you go visit him or see him at all?

#17N: [We] could not meet. [Father] was imprisoned somewhere near Lhasa and Mother went to visit once a year.

Q: Did your mom ever tell you how your father was or what was going on with him?

#17N: Because Father was well behaved, the Chinese later appointed [him] to cook for the prisoners. As a cook [Father] got better food to eat and being pleasant, the Chinese treated him well. That was how it was in prison.

Q: Did Mother say that?

#17N: Yes, Mother told me so.

Q: *Pa-la*, what kind of thoughts did you have about your father? You loved your father and he was in prison. So how did you think about him? Did you worry about him or cry? What were you feeling?

00:37:01

#17N: Except for feeling sad that I did not have a father, as a little child [I] did not know anything else. Later [I] realized my father went to prison on account of his working for the government and there was not any particular reason to feel sad. [I] realized it much later. Earlier [I] felt sad that Father was not there.

Q: There must've been...were there other children whose parents were in prison and did you ever have any conversations with, maybe people who were wealthy or some other government official? Did you ever talk or was that not permitted?

#17N: In our region of Yae and...[not discernible] we were the only one from the ruling class. So there were no conversations between children. As I said earlier, you just endured. There never took place any particular conversations.

Q: You were very isolated.

#17N: Yes, isolated.

Q: Were you shunned by the community, like nobody would talk to you?

00:39:14

#17N: That is correct. If our relatives talked to us, the Chinese would punish them. So it was like we had nobody. Father was in prison and there were just stepmother and I and nobody else. If people wanted to visit, [they] came during the night.

Q: *Pa-la*, with so little...with just a little bit of farmland and two animals, were you starving at anytime when there was actually no food, enough food for you?

#17N: Yes, scarcity of food initially happened like this. In the county of Ngapring Shen, which is like a large district of Nepal people suffered famine. How the famine came about was like this. Nyenmo Tinley Choedon revolted against the Chinese. Nyenmo Tinley Choedon or Ani Tinley Choedon is famous. When she revolted, what everyone believed was that Tibet would gain freedom and hence—[I] mentioned earlier about the commune lands—did not irrigate and left the fields unattended. So there was starvation in entire Ngapring County. Therefore, there was no food and everybody faced great hardship. [People] ate a lot of plants and could not excrete. The feces were like horse dung. There was great hardship. It was not just us but the entire region that faced hardship. It happened like that.

Q: The name of the county is Ngapring?

00:41:27

#17N: It is called Ngapring Shen.

Q: Nyenmo Tinley Choedon?

#17N: There was a nun called Nyenmo Tinley Choedon. She revolted against the Chinese along with many people. Because of the protest, people believed [Tibet would regain] freedom and did not take care or irrigate the fields, thinking “Let anything happen.” That was the cause.

Q: When was that?

#17N: That was around the time I...it is difficult to say the exact dates, as [I] am not prepared.

Q: Was it after '59?

#17N: It was after '59 and before I left...[I] left at the age of 20 and it happened 7-8 years before that. It was 7-8 years earlier. It was 7-8 years earlier. It was after the Chinese formed the commune when the fields [were cultivated] together. It happened after this.

Q: You were very...you were starving. How long did that period go on for, *pa-la*? Like one year, two years the starvation, the famine, how long?

00:43:56

#17N: If there is famine for a year...if one year's harvest is destroyed there will be hardship for around two years because in Tibet there is only one harvest a year. If a year's harvest is all gone, there is hardship in that year and in the following year.

Q: *Pa-la*, you were being protected by your stepmother. How was she treating you? You were not her child. How was she treating you?

#17N: [Stepmother] was kind-hearted but sharp-tongued—kind-hearted but sharp-tongued. Stepmother did not have children. [She] was kind-hearted but sharp-tongued.

Q: Where was your mother at this point, your own mother?

#17N: Mother was at southern Dhingri in a place called Kongtsa.

Q: Remind me why she was there?

00:46:08

#17N: The reason was that Father's real wife scolded Mother a lot. So my father left [my real mother] at Kongtsa at the home of a relative after my birth. The real wife took me away [from Mother] when I was two or three months old thinking the child may not call stepmother as mother. [She] scolded Mother a lot and so, Father left [Mother] at Kongtsa.

Q: She took you away from your real mother in the hopes that you would see...the stepmother would be seen as your real mother.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Okay. Was that hard for you?

#17N: That was not hard—was not hard. Earlier it was a little bit but...

Q: So *pa-la*, I know a while back you said your father was in prison a long time. Did you...When he got out where were you? Where were you? What happened? How did he get out?

00:48:00

#17N: Father did not get released from prison. In the past Father had treated the poor people well and the poor people had signed a petition saying, "Please release him from prison as he is old. We will counsel [him] in our region. Please release [him] from prison." A petition was forwarded to the Chinese leader Shu Thi Dang. [Father] was released after

the people forwarded the petition. [The people] remarked, “He is old. Someone should go to fetch him.” However, Father came the day before someone was to go to fetch [him]. By then I was much older.

Q: That took a lot of courage from the local poor people to stand up to the Chinese officials and say “Release this man.”

#17N: As a leader in the past Father had helped the poor people. It seems Father helped the poor when there was any oppression by the wealthy. Because of that help...when the Chinese arrived the poor became powerful. So the poor signed a petition and submitted it to the leader Shu Thi Dang and got Father freed. Otherwise, Father was to remain in prison for 13 years but was freed in six years.

Q: How old were you?

00:50:42

#17N: Perhaps around 15-16. [I] cannot say exactly. Perhaps 13-14.

Q: So his good deeds paid off.

#17N: [Nods]

Q: Tell...can you remember when he came home? Can you remember seeing him?

#17N: Father came wearing some sort of a monk’s robe then. [He] was sent [from prison] in some sort of a monk’s robe. I was removing weeds in the field. I was alone there. A man in monk’s robes was coming along the road. I saw that [the person] resembled my father but was in monk’s robes. Curious, as [I] went closer it was my father. Leaving aside the weeding, I returned home with Father. I met [Father] on the road.

Q: What feelings were in your heart when you saw your father?

#17N: Normally [Father] did not wear monk’s robes and was younger earlier. [He] had aged. [I] was happy to see [Father] but also sad that [he] had aged. [I] felt both.

Q: I imagine you felt sad to see him aged, but what was his reaction to see how you had grown up?

00:53:25

#17N: He was happy to see me grown.

Q: What happens next to the family? Your father gets released after all those year. How do you...is the famine over or are you still struggling? Tell me about your life after he gets out.

#17N: The famine was over and after Father arrived, [I] hoped that life would be better. Normally, there were just the two [in the family] and now another had come and now [we] could rely on and help each other. [I] thought things would be easier then.

Q: What happened with that hope? How did it develop?

#17N: The hope...though the Chinese were restrictive, yet our three family members were together. The whole family was at home together and naturally [we] were happy. [We] were home together while earlier it was not so. So [we] were happy when everyone was together.

Q: Can you tell us how does your life progress from there? Do you stay in Tibet? Do you decide to leave? What happens?

00:55:39

#17N: When I was around 19 years old...at around the age of 19, I was still segregated while doing farm work. We were still segregated as belonging to the leadership class. There were two children from poor families that were playing by tying the hands of one and the other being pulled like a dog. The older one was pulling the younger child. Seeing that, I went to untie the rope for which I was made to stand and accused during a public meeting that a child from the leadership class was tying the hands of a child from a poor family. Then I planned to escape to Khambu at that point of time.

Q: That's so sad because you were trying to help that child and then they blamed you. When you said you were publicly humiliated, what happened?

#17N: I was made to stand up during a public meeting and refuted, though not actually assaulted. People were called to a meeting and I was made to stand amidst them and refuted. During that time Mao Zedong's policy had changed from Struggle of Violence to Struggle of Peace. The policy of beatings that used to be carried out in the past had to be stopped and Mao Zedong's Policy of Peace adopted. Therefore, I remarked, "It is said that Mao Zedong has stopped the struggle through violence and opened the struggle through peace. Though I have not committed any wrong, I am being made to stand among the people and almost assaulted. So this is not correct." So I was called to the *shang*, which is a higher office located a little further away from our place. However, I did not go there. They did not come to arrest me because I had not done anything wrong.

Q: You said that Mao Zedong shifted his policy from the violent method to the peaceful method. You remarked that...

00:59:46

#17N: I told the people about that. Then [I] was called to the higher office but [I] did not go.

Q: That took a lot of courage to speak up to the people about the new government style of not punishing you physically.

#17N: I got the courage because [I] had not done any wrong and was desperate.

Q: They wanted you to go see another official. Was that in town or somewhere else?

#17N: He was two hours away from our hometown. It was like we have a head of committee here and another higher official. The office was located two hours away.

Q: Tibetan or Chinese?

#17N: These were all Chinese. There were Tibetan officials too. The director was a Chinese but the subordinate workers were Tibetans. All the workers were Tibetans.

Q: So that was the motivation to not have to go and present himself to another official.

01:02:30

#17N: That was the reason. The children's parents beat me. Though not assaulted in the public meeting, yet the children's parents beat me. In view of this [I] decided to leave. My father and the others said— in those days we did not call it as Nepal but a foreign country—"If you reach a foreign country there will be offices of the Tibetan Government. Inform them about what happened in the past and about the influential people that have died and even fish in the water that are declining, the wild animals on the mountains that are declining and that if Tibet does not regain freedom, it is not going to be good. Give this information wherever possible. It is good for you to leave." Father and the others said so. I escaped a few months later. I requested leave of absence for six days to make a living. Within six days I had reached Khumbu. I was a little over 19 then.

Q: So you left, actually with your father and mother's encouragement that it was a better thing to do because they were worried you could get in trouble?

#17N: Yes, [the parents] gave support.

Q: *Pa-la*, was the journey from your home to Nepal, was it very arduous, very hard or easy? What happened?

01:05:21

#17N: It was very difficult on the Khumbu Gangla pass. I came at a time when around 13 yaks and yak herders died and people could neither go back nor move forward. I had never seen a lama before except one called Kari Kyabje Rinpoche. "Kyabje Rinpoche, care for me on Khumbu Gangla," [I prayed]. One could pass through it if the sky remained blue. [I] prayed for success, asking the route from people along the way. [I] met yak herders that gave directions. The gods helped [me] over Khumbu Gangla. I was alone with just the directions from people. Later it was said that I was dead, but I had reached Khumbu in six days.

Q: Through the Nangpala pass?

#17N: Yes.

Q: They said you were dead?

#17N: [They] thought I was dead. Then I returned to Tibet after three years in Nepal. After three years in Nepal I went back to see my father travelling during the night and sleeping during the day. Everybody had remarked that I was dead. When I reached home in the night, [my parents exclaimed], “What happened? This is like a dream. What is this?” I returned home to Tibet once after three years in Nepal travelling during the night and sleeping during the day.

Q: Your parents actually thought you were dead?

01:08:43

#17N: Yes.

Q: Why did they think you were dead? Did they think you died going over the mountain or that you were killed?

#17N: The reason was that there was not any information that came to our village about where and what had happened [to me]. Nobody from our region had traveled to the south. I met a few people along the way that gave the directions over the snow-covered mountains, but they and my father did not have any connection. So [my parents] knew nothing about where [I] had gone and what had happened; knew nothing. Therefore, it was assumed that [I] had died. [They] did not know that [I] had reached Khumbu since I had never been on that route before.

Q: Six days. It was six days to get from your village to Nepal.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Were you by yourself going over the mountains or did you actually go with people who were going as well?

#17N: I was alone. I am not lying. I was alone chanting *mani* ‘mantra of Avalokiteshvara’ or singing when [I] found the way and crying when losing the way. I came alone over the Khumbu Gangla, which is very dangerous. I reached the place called Khumbu Dotsam alone; there was not anyone else.

Q: What a very daring escape that was! I’m sure you felt very blessed that you were able to make it.

01:11:11

#17N: There are [stories of] many people losing hands and legs [due to frostbite] on the Khumbu Gangla. At that time I did not have glasses and managed to come without losing legs. It must have been because of one’s destiny and taking refuge in the gods. Otherwise, one dare not look at the Gangla because it was covered with snow.

From Dotsam I reached Khumbu. At Khumbu Tulshi Rinpoche was staying at Tengboche. I asked Tulshi Rinpoche at Tengboche, “Tulshi Rinpoche, you have to aspire for Tibet’s freedom. Otherwise, Tibet’s fish in the waters, the wild animals on the mountains and the

influential people of the past are in decline.” I informed Tulshi Rinpoche. “Poor thing, how old are you?” “I am 20,” [I] replied. There is no need for you to talk about the suffering caused by the Chinese. You look like a white monkey,” said Tulshi Rinpoche. [He] gave [me] 15 Nepali rupees then. At that time 15 rupees was considered a lot of money. Then at Solukhumbu was someone called Gen Kalsang and with his help I came to the Settlement of Solukhumbu.

Q: *Pa-la*, I know our time is coming to an end because the sun is going down, and your story... we’re so happy to hear that you arrive safely in Nepal. And I guess I want to just say, is there anything that you want to add before we end this interview today?

01:14:23

#17N: Unless you have a question [I] do not have anything in particular to say. After I arrived in the settlement, there was a Member of Parliament called Jigme Tulku Alak, a Member of Parliament that came from Dharamsala. I informed him like I did Tulshi Rinpoche. I was photographed and written about in newspapers that reached wherever there were Tibetans. “This man has come so far bringing information in regard to Tibet’s freedom. [He] has come alone,” such was written about me in the newspapers.

Q: The Member of Parliament was...

#17N: The Member of Parliament was Jigme Tulku Alak. I reported to him just as I had informed Tulshi Rinpoche that it was important to regain Tibet’s freedom else Tibet’s wild animals and so and so; I informed him just as I had informed Tulshi Rinpoche.

Q: *Pa-la*, did you get an answer from the lama about what’s going to happen to Tibet?

01:16:37

#17N: They did not give me any particular answer as such. I was called to the office and interviewed. “Your [story] will be reported in the newspapers.” “If it is to be in the newspapers, please mention that [I] am from Jang Yae, so that people of my hometown, however distant they may be, will feel inspired and happy that someone from their hometown has been able to relay this information.” However, I was told, “Someone from Jang Yae is a nonentity. Nobody can come from Jang Yae. You must say that you are from Kongtsa [the place] where Mother lived.” So this was mentioned in the newspapers.

Q: I see. Your story became very important and we will try to share the story you told us today with many, many people. And I’m going to conclude the interview by asking just one more time, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#17N: I will have no problems whatsoever. Unless [all Tibetans] get to return to Tibet, I do not have any wish to go to Tibet. I do not think there will be any problems.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us, *pa-la*.

END OF INTERVIEW