

Gyatsho Tssering
Narrator

Tenzin Khando and Charles Lenz
Minnesota Historical Society
Interviewers

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Gyatsho Tssering Residence
Northeast Minneapolis, Minnesota

Tenzin Khando - TK
Gyatsho Tssering - GT
Charles Lenz - CL

TK: This is Tenzin Khando. I'll be interviewing Gyatsho Tssering on the 29th of July, 2005 at his home in Northeast Minneapolis. Second interviewer is Charles Lenz.

And . . . start out by asking your name, stating your name.

GT: Gyatsho Tssering.

TK: Could you spell it please?

GT: G-y-a-t-s-h-o T-s-s-e-r-i-n-g.

TK: Double s's.

GT: Yes, because, you know, Gyatsho Tssering means that it exact in Tibetan pronunciation. In exact phonetic pronunciation and translation and that will be G-y-a-t-s-h . . . t-s-h, you know. And then sometimes—but sometimes you people write Gyatso only. Yes. So mostly from people coming from Dharamsala or these things. They write Gyatso. But people who come from Darjeeling, Kalingpong, they always, G-y-a-t-s-h-o. That's the difference.

TK: All right. We'll start out by asking you a little bit about your childhood. For example, where you were born?

GT: I was born in Sikkim and then I got educated in India itself and then went to colleges and universities. And finally landed up in Calcutta, doing Calcutta University. And then I graduated there and then I was—I've been doing Tibetan studies at the same

time because of—I thought that it was important field to be covered, to be studied, to be explored. So back in Sikkim, I went back, and then I was supposed to work in the Namgyal Institute of—Research Institute of Tibetology¹ in Gangtok.

But somehow in my destiny it was . . . I was to go to Tibet because in Tibet I wanted to pursue higher studies in Tibetan history and especially Tibetan religion and the Tibetan way of life and culture. That was very, very important. After that, at the same time because I was born in Sikkim, you know, that I had what you call—I was in diplomatic services, Indian Foreign Services. I worked there. Then I got this posting. I got a job in Lhasa in Tibet. That was good opportunity for me because then I could pursue my studies. At the same time work and then support myself at that time. And so that was job for like from 1962 . . . no, no, right from, I think—it's a long time back, 1956 or 1954 . . . 1954.

CL: Can I ask what year you were born?

GT: Sikkim, Sikkim in a place called Dhemi.

CL: No. What year? Do you know what year you were born?

GT: Oh, I was—1935. 1935. Old man now.

TK: So that would make you exactly about—?

GT: Seventy-nine.

TK: Seventy . . . wow! Okay. And you said that you were raised in Sikkim also? Or was it just born in Sikkim?

GT: Born in Sikkim and then, yes, Darjeeling and then all these places.

TK: And you went to schools. Those schools were private schools or Tibetan—?

GT: No. No. Not Tibetan. There is no Tibetan school in there. All of these are run by the missionaries, you know. I started in the school was run by the Scottish people. Scottish. So we know more about Scotland and their festivals and so on. I had that in. So that was that.

TK: Were you the only Tibetan at those schools or were there others?

GT: Tibetan, yes. Tibetans there are all the time. Tibetan environment. Tibetan—the Geshe,² where they are Tibetan lama, because our whole family was all the time attending Tibetan monastery because we have to do our own what you call . . . whatever,

¹ Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

² A title given in the Gyuto school of Tibetan Buddhism when one has achieved a level of skill similar to that of a Western Ph. D.

you know, there is something connected with the monastery. But as you know in Tibetans, you know, Tibetan society is very much dually connected with the monastery. So monk. But there you are. I mean there is work in the family or there is sickness or there is a death or marriage ceremony or whatever. Secular or with religion it has to be connected to all the monastery you know. Not like here in America.

Several time you now. Before you would like, for instance, you go, you get your sustenance, you get your strength from the spiritual center from monastery. Here it is not so. There, you know, the high lamas, and then we have the gurus and the teachers. Then we go to them. Whenever there is a crisis or whenever if you are not able to decide anything then we go to our lama, to god. And then our life is more or less guided by the spiritual energy coming from the spiritual center. That is good thing. Really culture is very rich and so we could judge between rational and irrational things and what is blind faith or a pure scientific spiritual practices and so on. And that's a good thing. So that was a long time.

TK: And were you there in Sikkim with your entire family or—?

GT: Oh, yes. All my. Yes.

TK: All your family was there. You were able to—?

GT: Father—I mean my parents were there, my brothers and sister. All of them were there. They were born there.

CL: Your parents were born in Sikkim as well?

GT: My parents were from Sikkim and then my father may have come—I do not know the history. I have never—some say that he came from Tibet and then my mother, you know, I mean it's not much distance can be made between Sikkimese and then Tibetans. No. Then the Sikkimese they always speak a form of dialect you know. Then just like with this Tibetan who live in the Southern Tibet or like in the Chumbi Valley in the Yatung area. They speak this, what's called dhumo dialect, you know. Same as Sikkimese. So that was—there was no difference between.

TK: So you stated earlier that you started working with—that your calling was to work with the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives and be a part of that?

GT: Yes, because, you know, then I was in the Foreign Service and then this. I was working in New Delhi. Then this, what you call right about 1962. 1962, yes. And all in this the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government,³ you know, they made their headquarters in Dharamsala. They seek this from another place called Mussoorie, you know. And then there then the Government was start and then this was there. I thought that—I mean His Holiness' sister was there. Died a long time ago. His Holiness' little sister. Then she asked me, you know, whenever she was in Delhi she used to call me.

³ Central Tibetan Authority (CTA). The Tibetan Government in Exile.

She used to call me. And she said we need people. We don't have people who were in Dharamsala to call.

TK: This was His Holiness' sister?

GT: Little sister. Yes. And then . . .

TK: Which sister is that?

GT: She died a long time. Her name was . . . I can give you later⁴. I just can't remember. She started and founded that famous Tibetan Children's Village, you know. Because so many Tibetans orphans were there and then so many of their families because their parents had died while they were fleeing from Tibet. Then most children were orphans. Then there were very, very poor Tibetan children so they had to be taken care of. So His Holiness' sister started this school in small way. The Tibetan. But then it was such a—it has grown so big. She cared for thousands and thousands of children coming from this. Orphans.

TK: So was she the one who asked you?

GT: Yes. Whenever she was in Delhi she used to ask me to—she said, “We need people like you. Why don't you come over here and help?” So I gave—I thought over it for many times and because I had a very good job and then I have nothing to worry about. But then I thought that since my—I have a Tibetan descent and then since we are—when we are Sikkimese we . . . regard the Dalai Lama as our own and know the manifestation of Chenrezig, Avalokiteshvara, Bodhisattva, Buddha of Compassion.⁵ His Holiness. And then, so . . . is it that—is nothing better than to . . . serves in this lifetime. Because if we were taught by our parents that this life is nothing. That next life is more important than this life. So this life you just prepare for a better and more comfortable life in the future and eventually work your way to enlightenment.

Anyway, [unclear] in the very common level, you know, we were taught that this life is—that you work for the welfare of many, for the good of all the people and try to—I mean try to be of use to other people, of benefit to other people, as much as possible. Then never, I never, I mean never work to create negative energies. Always positive energies. And then work to what you call—not only human beings but even right from the center. They were taught like that. So that concept or that kind of a cultural background was there. So we grew up in that place and so I was taught that. Is nothing but than to serve the Dalai Lama, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government when they needed most, you know.

When you are in difficulty, when people are in difficulty or there is difficulty . . . nobody wants to come and help. Mostly. I'm speaking from a [unclear] point of view. But when

⁴ Jetsun Pema.

⁵ Chenrezig (Tibetan) or Avalokiteshvara (Sanskrit), is one of the eight major Bodhisattvas. Also known as, the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is believed to be the living manifestation.

you in the family, then if you are well off and comfortable and so on, then you'll have many friends, many relatives and so on and so on. But if you are down, if you don't have anything and so on. You are just in dire poverty. Nobody will come. Even your own relative you generally see . . . he is not related to me.

Anyway, so I thought that was a very good opportunity to serve the Dalai Lama. And then I decided I'd resign from the government service and then okay to serve His Holiness the Dalai Lama . . . the Tibetan people all my lifetime no matter what happens to me. Then I went Dharamsala and started serving the Tibetan Government and His Holiness.

CL: Can I ask what you were doing in Lhasa for the Indian government?

GT: I was doing this what you call the translation. Translation, mostly.

CL: For like a dialogue between India and China at that point then?

GT: Dialogue between India and China and also parts of—you know we have many, many of these paper that has to be translated in general. So that was the thing the government needed, so we have to do that thing. Mostly. As you know consulate, political things.

TK: So you were working for the large part in Dharamsala.

GT: Dharamsala. Yes. Right from then. Right from there then I started, 1962-1963. From 1962 onward I was serving the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government. Then I worked in various capacities there. Mostly right up to 1967. 1967, yes. 1967 . . . I was doing the interpretation and the translation for His Holiness Dalai Lama. Doing his trips to foreign countries and then also I'm doing this . . . what's it called? Translation in publications, because I was working with Dalai Lama. He was—His Holiness was . . . at that time he had already started writing publications on Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan thought. So we were working on that.

And also helping many of the offices, because there were very few people knowing English. There were only two or three people. So our services were needed everywhere, in all departments. Department of—don't know these things. They are responsible for starting the Tibetan—community rehabilitation of Tibetans down in the south. India and so on. And also then education rehabilitation. Schools starting and so on. There's a main school where we have an office, the Dalai Lama, that was called Council for Tibetan Education. Then there were also a department which was to do with foreign relations [unclear]. And then there was also Religion and Culture. These things. So I was working in all these departments, mostly.

But mostly I enter in the private office Dalai Lama. And after that then I was mostly I was working in the religion, culture religion offices there. And then at the same time help the other offices. So I was doing this right from there. Mostly I was doing research

because my main . . . what you call choice of subject was . . . preference was directory testing.

TK: Was this all during—was then when you were working in the Tibetan Archives⁶ or—?

GT: No, no, no. Tibetan Archive later we started that.

TK: Much later?

GT: Later, yes. Yes. Tibetan Archive much later, then I was working in Delhi at the Tibet house there. Six month or three month. I have been in the preparation of the museum, Tibetan Museum, Art Museum. We are preparing to catalog and so on. Making a catalog of thangkas⁷ and then objects and so on. And also then what . . . yes, then I was working in that museum, work with the Dalai Lama to manage department as I told you before these things. And also then translating for the Dalai Lama. So many things.

But then we are very, very hard life at that time. But then we are—we enjoy that kind of a . . . what's it called? Materially, very, very, very poor. Very hard. Your mother can tell you. Your father can tell you.⁸ Pala,⁹ Amala¹⁰ can. Yes. They know that. Especially your mother also knows that. She was working in the Delhi, Office of the Dalai Lama.

So we had a very, very hard time at that time. Used to what you call in a very small room and that was supposed to be a cow's shed before. Then when it rained, it from the roof, it blew leak and all. So we had to keep cup here, here, there, there and so forth. And when it was windy outside, any strong wind this from the wall, tick, and then a block of this mud used to—I open our shed. Then money. No, it almost there was nothing. Because what he had today and tomorrow—tomorrow we won't have money, but we can leave for tomorrow. You know, that kind of life. So it was a hard life. But then the hardship and these things got . . . bitterly. That was hard, but then internally and mentally we're so rich, you know, so happy. Serving for our common cause, and the cause was that we knew that we were everywhere, everyone knew that it is for our own cause, for our own benefit and that is for our own people, for our future. It's all one.

So that was very good experience and we don't have any kind of . . . material comfort. But still we are mentally very rich. Very, I mean, we're very happy all the time. Especially when we know that there is only Dalai Lama here all the time to encourage. And when the Dalai Lama used to live on a small, small kind of a . . . small hut you know, kind of hut. Then he also used to live at such a way, difficult every situation. Like

⁶ Library of Tibetan Works and Archive.

⁷ A type of Tibetan painting.

⁸ He is referring to interviewer Tenzin Khando's parents.

⁹ Tibetan for father.

¹⁰ Tibetan for mother.

I told you. Leaking roof and then there was nothing to these things. But seriously, in the summer our people will said, “His Holiness, now you must let us now address this roof problem. It is leaking.” And so on and so on. His Holiness said, “No, no, no. My people are all the time, they are having a worse people. I am very happy here.” Everywhere you could find routine statistics.

TK: So how long did you stay in Dharamsala with the leaking roofs and everything?

GT: Right up—no. And then from there in 1967, then His Holiness asked me to—because up to 1967 we were mostly concerned with the community rehabilitation, education rehabilitation, plus looking after this what you call . . . you know the children? Like the Tibetan Children Village and so on. Education, rehabilitation and so on. And then everything was done there.

But then you know, 1967, you know, we thought that because we didn't have any kind of what you call . . . a culture preservation program. So we started that thing because in Tibet it's suffering at the time. 1967 was in the midst of Cultural Revolution. So in Tibet, it's suffering, you know. There was the wholesale large exit of older, our precious text and then all the precious objects. Precious thangkas and all those. Kind of objects which make up the national heritage of Tibet.

So His Holiness asked me to, you know. I mean we must do something to save this text and so on, before it's too late. So then we start. I mean he asked if I'd start a small library. So he give me the responsibility then. So I more or less from 1967 and then I worked single-handedly. There was nobody to help me. That's the most satisfying work that I did. And when you're working alone—very difficult. We had nothing there. And then no funds. And then nobody to help us. But then still, I mean I started these things, you know, because I was so determined and so convinced of the fact that His Holiness' blessing is there. So when His Holiness' blessing is there then everything will be all right. And so we started this small library and then we tried collecting all the text and so on. Even from Tibet we tried to get the Tibetan text and so on. Tibetans fleeing from Tibet. They had brought, in a sense—bringing their own and valuables and so on. All these things. Each family brought, you know, each person brought one text or one bronze statue or one thangka painting and so on like this. And so in this way, you know, and they all—all of this then they offered it to Dalai Lama and to His Holiness, and then with the prayer that this always remain with him. Then first we were assistants, our idea was to introduce that properly. We were to start small library.

But then it became so—every day the work increased and then I had to work for—first I have to have some building to house all these things. Then we started. I worked on that project and so on. Just by asking people. Going down to Delhi or going down to Bombay or going to—any of these things and also making some foreign trip, because I was accompanying the personal physician of Dalai Lama, because we are invited for the Tibetan art and systems of medicines. I was supposed to translate for these Tibetan doctors and so on. So we went. At that time we had good opportunity to get funds for the library, the archive. But then people they were not so much encouraging at that time,

you know, because they say that if you are starting some kind of, it must be a monastery and so on. Not for monastery and all that thing. They say, “We don’t give donations; we don’t give funds,” and so on. “But if you are starting a school or hospital or clinic and so on we will consider, you know.” So it was very, very difficult. Now they thought that library and archive, was just and it was just a collection of the scripture, you know. So that was very hard time.

Anyway, I started these things and then our own people came forward. And then even in our own Tibetan people, poor people, and who are working in the road construction camps and just nothing, earning nothing, just three rupees, Indian rupees, three rupees a day. But still, you know, they would contribute this one rupee for the construction of the building. And when they were there we noticed they were free and they used to come and then contribute their labor in building the library. Such a moving experience. Then I was so much moved by these things. I never experienced my own difficulty. My heart, when I look at, I never thought of my own difficulties and so on.

So that way, then we started this thing. And then gradually, you know, it began to build up and so on. Then I began I think a trip to—I got the opportunity to trip to—because I had written some books, some articles and so on. I was supposed to lecture talk on the Tibetan culture and so on. So I utilized that opportunity also to get funds for these things. Then, you know, the first organization who gave this, the funds for our project they are a foreign people. This is the Catholic, World Council of Catholics. They were the people who gave this thing, these things.

And so we started this thing and how it was like built up. Then we had to build a whole set of these things. We have to build a museum, also, because there are so many art objects and then bronze statues and so on. Then library. Then we started thing. Then we also started the school of Buddhist philosophy where we taught Tibetan religion, Tibetan history. It was a kind—what you call . . . school. And so many people used to come from all over the world. Europe and so on, so on. Everyday used to have a hundred foreign students in our classes. Learning Tibetan culture, Tibetan philosophy. And also I started the thangka painting school because, you know, that is dying off and there were only a very few, one or two, master artists. Very old people. And I thought that if we don’t start that, some kind of a learning school, and to pass on their knowledges to younger people, then this art would just die out. So that was very good thing. Then the wood carving. There are only one or two people there. Now most of them are all gone. But then we were able to train and bring out the number, you know, of students who have passed qualified as craft workers, Tibetan thangka painters and so on. Then the whole system of culture of crafts and so on when we started the library. Then that was a very good thing.

Now in the West you can see so many of these. That we are already—we are the pioneers, in every kind of—free. Then you can see organizations of people in Nepal and in Western countries everywhere. The same thing. Doing the same thing. Even in China you know, they copied from us. What ever we were doing they were doing in China. So that was something very rewarding, satisfying job.

CL: So there is a—in Dharamsala now, there is a Library of Tibetan Works and Archives?

GT: Yes.

CL: But there's also a large school that teaches thangka painting and wood carving and whatnot. So is this, that school, were you one of the founders of that as well when it was—was it part of the library originally?

GT: Yes. I started all this. Yes. Because I felt the need about that. That was way back in 1970.

CL: What is the name of the school? I've been there and I don't remember what it's called now.

GT: School of Tibetan painting.

CL: Yes. Where they teach the thangka painting.

GT: Yes. There's another one. When did you go to Dharamsala?

CL: 2003.

GT: That is Norbulingka.¹¹

CL: Norbulingka. Yes.

GT: That was later. Later, later. Very, very late. They started later. But first we had that we started and then what you call... then there was Norbulingka, and then in Mussoorie and then in Nepal and some other few places. Then they started these things.

TK: So you started the first one, and then after that, there were a lot more that—?

GT: Yes. The first one. Yes. Yes. Because you know, then—at that time, you know, when I started that thing, nobody realized that importance of this. That is really the importance of the skills. Tibetan skill of it, the thangka painting, wood carving and so on. Even when we started the school up, you know, we have to—I call the department up. Artistic director recommendation. And there's all sorts of Tibetan architecture. That is a very big department that they have. So it was a big project.

TK: When you were living in Dharamsala and working in this field and following your heart and serving His Holiness and the Tibetan people?

GT: Yes. Oh. Yes. Yes. Oh. Right up to the time when I retired.

¹¹ Norbulingka Institute.

TK: When was that? What year?

GT: I retired in 1999.

TK: 1999. Okay. Was that when you decided to move to the United States or—?

GT: Yes. Because my second wife. My first wife died. She was already in the States.

TK: Which state?

GT: One thousand Tibetans.¹²

TK: Which state did she—?

GT: She was in Utah.

TK: She was in Utah?

GT: Yes.

TK: So you decided to move to the United States.

GT: Yes. Because she was alone. Then . . . yes, that was that.

TK: Did you decided to retire because you thought it was time you moved on to other things or was it solely to move to your family?

GT: No. Mostly yes. I mean mostly for the family. But then also I'd already spend some time and age, you know. I have to, you know, because I can't go on, you know, continue forever. And the younger people have to take over these things. So if I am there, there are other times, you know. It's not good because then the younger people won't be able to come up and take up the responsibility. I mean they are there. Then they say, "Oh, he is there," and then nothing, nobody and so on. They will continue. So that kind of a thing is not good. Because at certain age and so on and that's the limit. So at that limit and you begin to train the younger people to take over that and continue these things. So that's what necessitated it.

TK: So you decided to immigrate in 1999?

GT: 1999. Yes.

TK: It seems so far, from what you've said, you obviously held a very prominent position in that field. What was the reaction when you, for example, told your

¹² U.S. Tibetan Resettlement Project, a program that became effective under the 1990 Immigration Act passed by Congress. 1,000 Tibetans were granted Visas to come to the United States. Names of applicants were selected in lottery.

coworkers, the people who worked with you, people who you knew that you were deciding to leave and move to another country? Certain reactions I'm sure must have taken place.

GT: Really, they were very disappointed, you know. They thought that I must have—that I must continue. Also at that time I was—my health was not so good at the time. I was not in good health. I thought that—I did not know you have to—when your health is not good then you begin to think of many things now. So that was that. But then many of them asked me . . . very, very . . . disappointed. I had friends all over the world. All the time look to me, “Why, I mean, at this stage and you are still young.” And I told them that, “I’m—you are just making stories. I am not young.” At least also I need some time for myself. There are many things that I wanted to do during those years I was working, because I couldn’t find time to do that.

Then, now I have time to put—much time. To doing my own practices and my own studies and doing my own writings and so on. But that is something satisfying. I wanted to do something before. I wanted to write. Especially because, I told you, my interest in literacy things. So that I couldn’t do. So also the practices, the practical things. Like spiritual practices and so on. So I’m what you call a very, very deep believer. I’m a profound believer in the efficacy and in the functionality and in the working of the spiritual practices. Because I got so much from my own spiritual practices, from my own teachers and so on. And you learn some things from the Dalai Lama. All the people. I learned so much and then it’s—you need to adapt it, make it a part of my life all the time. Twenty-four hours a day. Attending or doing anything that makes part of your life. That is very satisfying. Simple things.

And I tell you once. Just example. Angry. Because not to feel anger. So . . . not to feel anger and how do you feel? How do you practice [unclear], how do you practice passions and so on. How do you discipline your mind? It is more effective to know that. Anger is an emotion. Nobody can resist being angry. If somebody says something bad, you know, then you get always angry. Something good at you, somebody spreads good things that you—you get very happy and so on. But that is not correct. So I was telling to always be like watch. Whether you abuse it or whether you praise it, the watch will go on, tick, tick, tick, tick. [Laughs]

TK: Back to immigration. You decided to move to Utah.

GT: No. No. Not Utah. I was—from Utah, then my wife has moved to Washington, D.C.

TK: So she was moving from state to state?

GT: From Utah she moved to D.C. Because at D.C., there lived our sister. Her sister, Buchung’s wife. Buchung was working, now, International Campaign of Tibet.¹³ Buchung. She’s just [unclear]. His wife is my wife’s sister. But she was . . .

¹³ International Campaign for Tibet.

TK: So when exactly did you move to Minnesota?

GT: Minnesota was . . . when was it? 2001.

TK: 2001?

GT: 2001. I think.

TK: That was quite recently.

GT: Yes. 2001.

CL: Why did you decide to move from Washington, D.C. to Minnesota?

GT: Minnesota. Because, you know, I thought that there were—the second largest population, Tibetan population in America is in Minnesota. And then New York and then in Minnesota. I thought that I would—this is large. I mean [the] concentration of Tibetan people were here and then maybe we can do something over there to help in the community. And then because the culture and then the kind of things that we need to—like the language and so on. The importance of our own Tibetan language. The importance of culture and so on. So those things need to be practiced. When there are—more efficient, more convenient, more adaptable when there is a huge, large concentration of your own people in the community. But then in a place like D.C. and so on, it is scattered and so on and then very few Tibetans. So not much can be—so that was one of the reasons. The second is, which was more like, not like city. Not like New York and so on. Because my own personal liking is that it be more in a suburban surroundings. So you can do your practice calmly and so on without disturbance. So that's what I was thinking.

TK: You said that one of the reasons why you moved to Minnesota was because of the large concentration of Tibetans, And you feel that it's easier to preserve language and culture in large concentrations of the people?

GT: Sure. Yes. Yes. That's why I just wanted or needed. Still, I am working, not so much anymore, but . . . we live in the community who were here. My role as experienced and as older person. An older person, you know. I will listen and talk to them, encourage them. The importance of preservation, preserving our own culture, especially our language and so on, and how our families should be. So you—these things, you just can't impose but then these things, what you call . . . done gradually. And then maybe because in the surroundings where you just can't blame our own people, because they have been uprooted from one soil and then again they have to take root in another foreign soil. And in the foreign soil to take roots not easy. There are many, especially for the older people, there are so many, I mean, cultural and complexes. That thing and then the other thing is that the conflict between the younger and the older generations. Older in the cities is all right. Because it was continued.

And other thing is that we are here not for ourselves. We are here for our people who are back in Tibet. And we are here just to . . . just . . . we make this country as our own second home. But at the same time you don't forget our duties and responsibilities to our own people and to our own government back in India. So we have to think of contributing and what way we can make ourselves useful. As an American citizen and then also a Tibetan.

So that is the—that kind of concept that you have to ingrain among the younger generations, and it's not easy. Because now they are brought up in a different atmosphere, different background and they have a—the feedback is quite different from what their parents used to have. So these conflict with generations. So that's kind of a conflict. Sometimes, you know, it's manifested in the form of a . . . what you call confusion among our own people. So those needs to be addressed.

And then the Tibetan community did a very good thing that we starting this Cultural Community Center. That was very much needed. Now it's a good thing. That people can come and then get together in one place. That's very, very, very important. That kind of a—and then to forge ahead, you know, that's kind of—atmosphere, when you have an opportunity to get together in one place then you get to know each other and also then you feel the need for, importance for continuing one's own languages. Especially, you know, when you—continuation of the languages and so on. So long as the language is there, the culture will be safe. There is nothing to be afraid of, to be worried about. But once the language gets distorted then there is the danger. The whole damage of Tibetan culture facing the threat of extinction.

So that is pretty much—we must be very, very careful and we must be aware of that and especially like the conflict between the younger people, younger generations and then the older people. Now in many of the families you have harder—everybody knows that there's a problem with their own young kids and so on, the younger generation. So why it's happening and so on. Then it was something we are very curious to know and what were the causes that lead to a conflict between the older generation and the younger generation. And the parents and then their children and offspring and so on. Then in some families it all boiled down to the fact that—my reading, it all boils down to the fact that it depends upon truly in the family. The family, how the parents think about their children, education of the children, of course they are. But then you know how—for instance, like if the parents, one thing is that if the family is very aware of this problem of their children and aware of the situation and they are aware and very careful and also very conscious in their duties to bring up their children in the right way, give them very gradually and then very, you know, in very subtle way. Injection . . . stimulating their mind into something to think for themselves about their own culture and so on, where they come from, where the parents came from, what were their roots and how they were brought up and so on. Then they're working. Look at that. Not to go far.

In the families like her family.¹⁴ Her family give her very, very . . . very careful, very, very aware and very, very attentive in bringing up their children in what way had to be

¹⁴ He is referring to interviewer Tenzin Khando's family.

brought up. So they brought you up so nicely. Then you find that they have inculcated both the best of the both the worlds.

So I'm thinking there are few families who will stay Tibetan families. Very few. I'm not—not very few—several families in Tibetan families. Like their families. When you look at them it always comes to their parents, how they are brought up. So in this thing when you are in Tibetan people and in this you include some of the families who are brought up in that thing.

And then this other thing. I'll tell you what the main problem was. Most of these families, they are not to be plagued with because they have . . . what's it called? They are more concerned about—they have bought houses and then they have bought cars and so on. So they need yet to pay off the mortgages and so on and so on. The bills to pay. One of the parents, single, working alone won't do that thing. So it was difficult for them to meet expenses alone. So both the parents started working and both started working. That was the main reason. Then their children got neglected. Then nobody to look after things. But this would have done like—in many of these circumstances we find that the parents were all the time not there. Disconnected. Not so much in touch with their children. And they say that we hardly meet our own children. We are one hour with them. Because they come late from the work and so on. But then you know if there was one parent, if the father was there all the time, or if the mother was there all the time or alternatively, you know, if the father was in the daytime, the mother was away and working. You like this in where—that will also happen to help solve it. Because, you know, from the parents, the influence of the parents is all the time there.

It makes such a—the genetic transference, of the culture . . . I mean tainting . . . and then the spiritual kind of a tainting. The concept of being a whole, the Tibetan concept of being a Tibetan personality. That is a subtle, subtle transformation among the children. It's not conscious. But then, you know, if I am the father, then if I am with the children and so on. Even my own parents, even if I don't do something, I mean that would—even if you don't do anything. But remain calm in their practice. The genetic, you know. That's what you got. And they see all the time working. So that's because—you know. That's what we're told.

Because I believe in like mother bring you up your own babies and so on and sucking of the mother's own milk by the children. And it—many of the milk . . . the baby . . . the milk from the mothers . . . but then at the same time mentally and so much energy being brought into that. The same kind of energy to work. And that I'm a believer of that thing. So that's very, very important.

Then if in the family, if the father is there, if the mother is there all the time, eventually, I mean the children, you know, when they go to school and so on, they learn many things from their—college, from their friends and in the schools and so on. Although sometimes they might get influenced by their classmates and so on, the family and so on. At the same time, you know, but that kind of influences sometime is very hard for the children to dissociate themselves. But then if the parents were all the time there just

giving them very, you know, in a loving way, telling them, warning them or telling them the perils, doing the bad things or that thing and so on. Not their children, but there are children—but some examples. That would have been good help.

So ultimately boils down to the parents. If the parents are very cautious and very careful and conscious about their—paying more attention to their children and how they are brought up and so. Pass on their energies and pass on their knowledges and backgrounds and so on. Then we will like—I'm encouraging like the parents, the families. You always, whether your children like to hear it or not, you tell them how difficult life was in India or in Tibet. How then your parents worked so hard, such a good life, such a very, very hard life. Difficult life. Then you bring them up. And to make them realize it. Eventually they will—one day they will come to there. They will be aware of those things and they will begin to question. What was my father's background this time, that's true, an important thing. And that's a good thing. And even looking after their things.

And the other thing was, you know, this is a good thing, you know. For the Western people to, you know, right now there are in Minnesota there must be people interested. Especially in the Western side, from the West Coast and so on. Westerners, American people, they are so much interested in Tibetan people. Tibetan culture, Tibetan religion. And because of the great kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. So then when they see any Tibetan they are always asking, "Oh, you are Tibetan?" Then they will ask him, "What is your Tibetan culture, what is your history," and so on.

So if the younger people, if they are not able to answer those things, then they feel very bad. I'm a Tibetan and then this American they know more about our own culture, our own country, our history and so on and, "They are asking because I am a Tibetan, too. They are asking me some things, some questions that they do not know, but I am unable to answer. So I feel ashamed." So they begin to realize the importance of learning. And where they get it? They ask their parents. So the parents always must be ready at the time. They will come and ask, "Oh the Dalai Lama? Oh the Panchen Lama?" Or, "What was in Tibet? What was the thing in Tibet?" This kind of thing. So rather a good thing that the interest among Americans about Tibetans, Tibetan culture, about Dalai Lama and so on. Our own younger people are now getting interested.

And the other thing is like the rest of the whole world, you know, whatever America does, the rest of the world tries to copy them. So that's a good thing. Even the Tibetans are. They always are interested in what the West does. They want to do it. So that's a good thing.

CL: So you talked a lot about your position in Dharamsala with the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. You talked a lot about what you feel the interaction between parents and children should be and whatnot. Now being in Minnesota with such a large Tibetan community, you stated before that that was important to be with a large group of Tibetans. How have you taken the work that you did for so many years in Dharamsala

with His Holiness and the CTA and whatnot? How have you taken all that knowledge and all that work and used it here in the community in Minnesota?

GT: That I have not been able to do much about it. Because coming to Minnesota, because as I told you before that I was doing my own things and . . . doing my own things because I rather increase my knowledges about the Tibetan projects and Tibetan subjects and practices and so on. Now I didn't have much by way of using my own—whatever I had gained, what ever I had learned back in Dharamsala, back in India over here. But then that I will try to do, attempt to do gradually. But first in to do that, first I must understand the local situation, the local problems and particular nature of the situation, environment over here and even relating to the Tibetan community or relating to the American environment over here. Like even for—like when you are talking to your American friends and so on. Sometimes it's fine, you know. Like language-wise also. Sometimes I find it difficult. Not difficult but some presenting you've got—because we were taught in a different way and then we come here, America, we must adapt ourself to the American system.

So those . . . of course, I'm not able to use—except that whenever like in the monastery.¹⁵ So whenever they ask, they need interpreter or translator I do willingly for them. Then also, then I try to. You know, especially for the benefit of the—I mean our own American friends over here and it has so much interest.

There are many people who are interested in Tibetan culture, Tibetan Buddhism and His Holiness. So I try to do that much because I give—I give visiting in groups of people. Always ask me to come and then speak to them about, so I give them. But even in the universities and then occasionally I come. Then also then I do give my time to this Minneapolis Institute of Art. Because there's a good collection of Tibetan art. Then that was a very good thing because you can meet so many of the people who were here and then come into—and who are interested in Tibetan things. And then now gradually then I might be able to use my—as I get more acquainted with the local situation, local environment and local . . . what you call . . . nuances, local psychological kind of atmosphere here. Then I think I will be able to.

But first I must prepare myself. Because if you want to do something then you must know. If I am in India, if I can't behave in and then I can't do as I was in India. It is quite different. And it is quite different. So first I must try to acquaint myself with the surroundings, with the landscape better. And also, the mindset of all the local people, Americans and Tibetans. Then even the Tibetan community itself, you know. Because the Tibetan community, you know, in a large way the Tibetan community won't be difficult. Because we just can't work it and then transport it, bring it and then just pass it on and then maybe in a new vehicle, in a new form. Not the essence. Not in that. Just the outside. Adapt itself to the American environment. Our own part of Tibetan community. So that's—I'm working trying to do it. But first I must prepare myself. Because I do a lot of footwork. I mean homework before I do something. And that's always a good thing. So that's that.

¹⁵ Gyuto Wheel of Dharma Monastery.

CL: Since you've been here in Minnesota and you've seen the Tibetan community in Washington, even though it's much smaller, how do you think, so far in your opinion, the Minnesota community is doing to preserve themselves or advance themselves or . . . in any aspect, really?

GT: They are very good encouraging that way. Before that we had a Community Center that we started that was very much needed. Then after that could you find every Saturday and so on. The language classes, Tibetan classes for children and even the song and dances and these things. At that point was at was the beginning. That interest is continuing. In fact is greater. That's a very good encouraging part of it. People just don't fall by the road. They are just going ahead very much. And now all the families now that encouraged to you. They think that if they bring their—send their children in for once in a week. To come to the Community Center, to learn about languages and then the project here that you call culture upbringing. So that's a good thing.

Now you can find so many dedicated Tibetan people, older people. These are people there all the time. Concerned about this thing and they are doing really good things. The response from the Tibetan community itself is quite good. All that when we find—I find that after the setting of establishment of this Tibetan community center. And they have to get together. So more and more exclusive gatherings. More and more of it, you know, of the educational gatherings. So that's a very good way to preserve our own culture with languages and so on.

Now go to Tibetan Community Center. There everybody speaks Tibetan. Nobody speaks English. Even the young people like this. They don't—you won't find them talking that to English or American. They will only find Tibetan. But that's a very good thing. So that's an encouraging thing. And then if this place is kept up, if this place makes progress, all the time you sustain, then we have every hope and every—positive things to expire for. So that's a good thing. Yes.

CL: Do you worry about the community as it gets older and older? Or not necessarily older, but the community is becoming more established here in Minnesota? Do you worry about, even with all these acts of preservation, do you worry about the community getting too Americanized or—?

GT: Yes. Sure. That's the thing. Yes. That kind of a danger we have to arrest. We try to—not arrest, but then, yes. But then if you can minimize it. Minimize that. The main thing eventually, because you know, the younger generation, very younger generation in the very . . . this would be what . . . third generation? Second generation. Yours would be what generation?

TK: Second.

GT: Second, third, fourth and so on is very, very . . . what you call? Careful. We have to be very careful. They are the third and fourth generations. These are the, in the people, if you don't pay attention to, then every danger is there. But then the kind of . . .

I mean the kind of encouragement that you are trying to give to younger people these days, at the present, then that's a good thing. That will continue.

But what I am saying is that maybe the third, fourth generation, they might lose their culture. They lose their languages and so on. If they go on, if the parents are not attentive, how they bring up children? And so . . . that kind of danger is very much there. That thing and then the other thing is—but so long His Holiness the Dalai Lama is there and I don't think you can presume the real danger is there. Because his presence is so pervasive, so powerful, and that energy is all the time. So long.

I am a firm believer in that thing. Because so long as the Dalai Lama is there, even if the younger generation, if there are some wayward younger generation even then they will come into the right way in the community. So if we can—it all depends upon our present community. How we do it, how we react it, how we bring up young children, how we brought up this thing.

But then if you are there only concerned about material things and then trying to be only like in—I'm sorry to see that in the society that we have here in Minnesota, you are all the time encouraged to be only thinking money, money, money, money. That's the trapping. Money is of course important for life but then that's not the final thing. Money can't be the thing. What's important is the things which belongs to our mental realizations, mental culture. That's value. Those values must be kept anyway, always. So that is the most important thing.

CL: Your wife lived in Utah for a while. You both lived in Washington, D.C., and now Minnesota. So between the two of you, you have quite a bit of experience in different communities, different Tibetan communities in the U.S. How do you feel about the smaller communities like in Washington, D.C or Utah? They may not have the vast resources that Minnesota, that the community in Minnesota has, simply because of numbers. How do you feel they will exist in the future or carry on the traditions? Do you think that Tibetans need to depend on the larger communities or should there be more integration or more work between the communities in the U.S.?

GT: No. Like in Utah and the Tibetan community in D.C., you know. Also that, Lexington . . . Long before we went in this, Tibetan resettlement was being considered by the United States government. At that time, you know, we had advocated. I had and others but then I had advocated. At that time Tibetan must live in cluster colonies. Not keep them—I mean spread out and then scattered all over the places. Must be. They must stay in a colony, concentrated in a particular place. So now we're finding in D.C., the years you know, that Tibetans like the—there's a small community. A small community but then about two hundred or three hundred people. But still they live in a very cluster like sort of thing. They always have a neighbor. There is anything like festivals or any kind of opportunities. Then they get together and that they try to—when they started this kind of school, language school and then some in teaching them the culture about dances and songs and dresses and so on. So that's because they are not scattered, living scattered there. So that's the same thing as—I find the same thing as

we're living in Minnesota. The same kind of a thing. Here only that the number is much more than in Utah, D.C. Then all this here in D.C. or in Utah introduce—the older people always they are told, the people are always to guide them to the—in the community and so on. So that's a good influence, I think.

CL: How do you feel about the Minnesota community then, that there is a Community Center now, and that people do congregate and come together on those special events? But the community itself, like this neighborhood that you live in, this area in Northeast Minneapolis, has quite a few Tibetan families. But the Tibetan families are moving farther and farther and farther out in the Metropolitan area. And they are getting farther apart from each other. And at times it is more difficult for people because they are so far out to now come in for those special events. So what do you think can be done or do you see anything that needs to be done to help? Maybe smaller community centers? More of them?

GT: I would personally like to encourage Tibetans to live as close as possible. That again, we do—we can persuade. Persuasion. Use persuasion, you know. And then ask them that this is the importance of living in a closer, close-knit family-like community rather than going apart. Then also, even now, that Tibetan themselves, families themselves feel this need. Because if the Tibetan—if there are no Tibetan families, only one single family and so on, you know, when they have some kind of a crisis, some kind of a difficulty in the family, and if there they don't any Tibetan family neighbor or two who live nearby, they always find it very, very difficult. But then if there is a Tibetan family just nearby living by, there is always a great, great help. To support them. Moral support. And will support them. In so many ways. So always there's a community this thing and recruiting. Or when you cross on the car and so on, they will say, "Oh, there is Tibetan family. They live there. This is their city." That's when—that shows they're interested. That the children are living in a community. So I would all the time work in a very subtle manner, in a very unconsciously, give them this idea that the importance of living in a close community rather than moving away from this thing.

Of course there will be one or two people who like doing. But then at one time or some time they will feel the need for community. They will realize the need for living in a community. Of course one or two family living apart is strange and that you can't prevent. But most of the major have to stay. Now you find many of the Tibetan families living very closer by. Mostly you find like why they are already like in Northeast, mostly concentrated. Why did they do it before that day? Would they say that you not just having Tibetans? No. So that's a good thing, you know. The people want to buy houses in the center. Never. They buy houses in St. Paul and south. They say no, no, no. Not in St. Paul. Northeast. And also the monastery's very near to them. So monastery always plays a very, very important part. Monastery and then—so we *must* keep alive this monastery and the form of our community center. These two things are very, very important. These two are the most important for the Tibetan community over here. Once you pay attention to this monastery and to our own—this community center, these two. Then everything, all other things will be taken care of.

CL: So how do you feel—I know that originally when they were looking for a place for the Community Center, that Northeast Minneapolis was a large—was the focus of where they wanted it and a compromise was drawn. Now the Community Center is in St. Paul. How do you feel about that community center being...?

[Tape interruption]

CL: So I was asking before that originally the Tibetan community wanted the Cultural Center in Northeast Minneapolis where the largest majority of Tibetans live. But a compromise was drawn and the property that was bought is now in St. Paul. Which is not—it's not far away but it's not in a central area for many Tibetans. And since you stated that the monastery and the Cultural Center are such focal points for the community and need to be such, the focal points—how do you feel about that compromise being drawn for the property to be farther away from the population?

GT: That was the sensible—that the Community Center being there. That was more out of consideration for funds, because we didn't have much funds. That was the only house that was most affordable and so on. But eventually you know we're trying to—the community, what the community is trying is, that we are looking for, but then we don't get it. But then eventually . . . we keep trying, you know. And then maybe in the Northeast area, around here, is really our plan, The Community Center. Sell off that thing and then we can always come and buy that thing. So that I guess there for the time. The only thing is that to find a place, a suitable place. So that's very much there.

We've been talking about these things now. So. And especially the people in the community, I mean the people who are working there. They must be aware of these things. They must pay attention and they must be all the time be paying attention to it. Like the importance of the monastery and the Community Center. And the Community Center, if it is right in there if possible, if you can find a place, more place. Yes. That's the thing. That's the idea. The idea is still there. I don't think the community interest on the whole . . . they have given up that idea. That will be good thing. Because St. Paul for some people is quite far out. But then since you don't have anything just now so is better to have one over here.

CL: Any other questions at all? Well, I wanted to thank you very much for participating in our program here.

GT: Okay, thank you.

CL: Thank you very much.