INTRODUCTION

In December of 2004, I contacted James Fogerty, Head of Documentary Programs at the Minnesota Historical Society. He was interested in my thoughts on instituting a project with the Tibetan-American community in Minnesota. While the Society had worked with many immigrant and cultural groups within the state, a project or partnership between the Society and the Tibetan-American community had not been attempted. Having collected oral narratives from Tibetans both in this country and abroad, mainly India, Nepal, and Tibet, I had much experience to bring to this project. After several discussions, we agreed on a plan to implement a project which would not only collect meaningful interviews for the museum, but would also prove useful to the community. I approached the leadership of the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota (TAFM) seeking their approval and to establish a partnership for this project. The guidance and cooperation we have received from the TAFM Administrative staff and Board of Directors has been invaluable.

As a community project, it was important to have the interviewers come from within that community. By recruiting young college age interviewers, we not only accomplished this task, but also gained the unique perspective of young adults, eager to not only catalogue their history but to discover something new as well. I reviewed college directories and youth-based Tibetan organizations looking for potential interviewers. TAFM graciously posted advertisements for the interviewer positions on their web site. Gradually emails and phone calls led to personal meetings and finally we had chosen our four interviewers.

Training the interviewers was a task I took very seriously. The skills required to conduct a complete and compelling interview can only be acquired through practice. Because each interview takes on a life of its own, one needs to be attuned to the unique ebb and flow of the information being given. This makes interviewing much more of an art than a science. Because of the time constraints of the project, we did not have the luxury of conducting a multitude of practice interviews. But, over several weeks, the interviewers and I held a series of discussions on topics important to the project. Some afternoons we would discuss important topics to consider, how to prepare questions, and traps and pitfalls to be aware of. Unbeknownst to our interviewers, I would often deliberately allow the group discussion to wander off topic while I controlled the subject the group discussed. Later we would reflect on these conversations and use them as examples of the skills we had previously discussed. By doing this, the interviewers became familiar with both sides of the interview process and were able to see first hand how to put their new skills to use.

Working directly with individuals within the community provided us an exceptional opportunity when it came to the selection of interviewees. Many days where spent debating whom should be interviewed, and which interviewer should conduct each interview. We were able to interview people of diverse background, age, and experience. While aware that we would not be able to interview every social category or individual

discussed, this project provides an excellent variety of perspectives and a firm base upon which to build in the future.

I would like to thanks James Fogerty for his constant guidance over the last year, as well as Marilyn Olson and Lori Williamson of the Minnesota Historical Society for their technical support. I am also grateful to Karma Wangchuk, Executive Director of the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota, for his support and cooperation. And of course our four interviewers, Tenzin Yangdon, Dorjee Norbu, Tenzin Khando, and Tsewang Sangmo Lama.

actec and fall or sight, and fur communities. This oral history interview in this volume is one of twenty-two conducted with the Tibetan-American community in Minnesota during the summer and fall of 2005. I hope that each of these interviews provides readers with a unique insight, and fuels their own