

Wangyal T. Ritzekura
Narrator

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Minnesota Historical Society
Interviewers

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Wangyal T. Ritzekura - WR
Charles Lenz - CL

TK: This is Tenzin Khando interviewing Wangyal Ritzekura at the Tibetan Cultural Center on the 19th of August. The people present are Wangyal Ritzekura, myself, and Charles Lenz.

Could you please state your name?

WR: My name is Wangyal T. Ritzekura.

TK: Would you spell it please?

WR: W-a-n-g-y-a-l. Last name R-i-t-z-e-k-u-r-a.

TK: And your age?

WR: Age. Born in 1953 and so calculate. I think it comes to someday fifty-two.

TK: Thank you. All right. Starting off with your childhood. Where were you born?

WR: I was born in a small town called Dzonga which is to the Southwest of Tibet and which is quite close to Nepal and India.

TK: Since you were born in Tibet, when did you migrate to India?

WR: I think I was about seven, eight years old when invasion¹ started and in the hope of getting the situation better my parents with five children stayed in the border for about

¹ China entered Tibet in 1959.

two years. Seeing no improvement taking place in Tibet my parents decided to escape to India.

TK: And was there a specific place where you migrated to in the beginning?

WR: Well, all of the Tibetans first came to Himachal Pradesh, the state where we had Dharamsala, the headquarter of His Holiness² and as we came I think we had to spend some time on the way because of the transportation problems and I remember the place where we reached first. Patankot, which has a railway station. Interestingly, it was at Patankot where children were separated from the parents. Separation was one reason why we escaped to India. But then the separation in Tibet would have been separation of children who'd be taken to China whereas separation at Patankot was for the reasons of children going to school and the parents going to road construction sites.

TK: So that means you did attend school in Himachal Pradesh.

WR: Right. I remember the place where I first went to school. [Unclear], which is close to Lower TCV³ these days. I think I was there for three, four months after which I was sent to Simla Tibetan School.

TK: And you stayed there throughout your education?

WR: At Simla I don't remember how many years I stayed, but during those days, Central Tibetan Schools Administration, an organization which runs the Tibetan schools, started a program to help those children who were little aged and who were hard working and who were also quite intelligent. So under that program a child could pass two years, I mean two classes in one year. They called it Junior One, Junior Two, Senior One, Senior Two. And I came in the group that started with Junior One and then we had Senior One, Senior Two. In short, we completed six grades in three years and so that really helped us a lot because by the time I came to ninth grade, Simla School was faced with the problem of not having eighth grade and seventh grade because they had only sixth grade. We made those double jumps.

So we were sent to Mussoorie where I joined some of my friends who were reading in much higher classes. But when we reach over there we were in the same classes. Of course, they were a little better but in Tibetan we were in no way worse than them because we had a very good Tibetan teacher who really helped us learn Tibetan language. Especially we don't go for winter vacation, which is two months. Your Tibetan handwriting and your Tibetan skills are bound to be very, very improved. So Simla was the second school and then I came to Mussoorie.

TK: Was there any secondary education?

² His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

³ Tibetan Children's Village.

WR: Well, Mussoorie School . . . Mussoorie . . . at Mussoorie I completed grades nine to eleven. At that time they didn't have what they have today which is ninth to twelfth grade, four years. At that time we had only high secondary school, which means from grade nine to eleven. By the time we complete eleven we are sent to go to colleges. So I don't know the reason why it was made twelve. But then again later, we faced a little problem because when I sent my papers for evaluation they found that I was short of one year because I didn't study up to twelfth grade. Instead of twelfth we stopped at eleventh. But then that was the practice at that time.

TK: I understand that you were a teacher . . . back in India.

WR: Right.

TK: Was there any specific reason how that came about?

WR: Well, the reason is that I was able to go to the leading university with a scholarship. And we had that feeling of being indebted to His Holiness⁴ and the Tibetan Exile Government.⁵ We had that feeling very strong. To the extent that we never planned anything for ourselves. We just followed the directions that they give us. They told us to go to college. We went. Studied for four years. Three years. Only three years. And by the time I was about to complete my college education I received a letter saying that you have to go for teacher's training program in order to become a teacher. And as a very loyal servant I said yes sir.

So I went to South India, Bangalore, for my teacher's training course. One year I couldn't go because there was a big discrimination against children or students coming from other states. My education, college education, was from Delhi and Bangalore University would not treat us on equal level with the local students so we miss one year and then the second year with great difficulty I was able to get in for a one year intensive teacher's training course. After one year training, you know, I got what they call Bachelors Degree in education and with that straightaway I started my teaching in 1976 at Bylakuppe, Tibetan settlement.

TK: And you were a teacher ever since?

WR: Oh, ever since. Very much. From 1977-76 'til 1992 when it was time . . . when I came to the United States. Over fifteen plus years I've been working as a teacher. I worked three years at Bylakuppe. Out of those three years I worked two years as head teacher of a small elementary school and the last year I worked at the main school, which has grades up to eleven and I taught history and English. Then it was 1980. I remember that my dad passed away and there was the need for me to be near my mom. I requested for transfer, which I got very quickly, and so moved to Hunsur in the settlement where I worked for eight years.

⁴ His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

⁵ Central Tibetan Administration (CTA).

Then on administrative ground I was transferred. So I was transferred. Administrative transfers are not regarded good and I didn't know it because I was a very hard working teacher. Besides being a teacher I was involved in Youth Congress.⁶ I was involved in regional freedom movement committees where I was completely absorbed in community activities and programs. And at times when you do too much work, you know, you are bound to create people who doesn't . . . who do not like you very much. For such reasons I was transferred. But then the good thing is I was transferred to the place where a lot of teachers wanted to go. That's Mussoorie. In the school where I attended as a student. So that was good.

CL: Why did a lot of teachers want to go to Mussoorie?

WR: Mussoorie is the first Tibetan school started and it is on a small hill which is called the Hill of . . . I mean it's on a very beautiful small hill. Queen of Hills. It's beautiful. In fact Mussoorie is the place where His Holiness stayed and spent some days first time when he came into exile. And after Mussoorie he moved to Dharamsala which became the headquarter. So it is a very sought after place by teachers.

TK: So you stayed in Mussoorie until you moved here?

WR: Until 1992.

TK: Until 1992. And was that when you decided to immigrate to the United States?

WR: I didn't want . . . You know, it was not that I wanted to come to the United States that these things happened that way. I was helping local Tibetans to fill out the papers for this immigration. You know, the visa, thousand visas.⁷ Story came up and everybody wanted to go and I was helping the Tibetans. And it was my wife who just casually said, "Why don't you fill out a form?" And I said to myself, "Why should I not do it?" And I did it. There were some papers that I couldn't produce but then I said, Let the papers go as it is and if I'm disqualified I'm okay with that, too." Because I wasn't very eager to go to the United States. But once the story came out that I was one of the people going I decided not to look back. I thought this must be something that he wanted me to do.

CL: Why did you not want to—or what was your lack of interest in coming to the U.S. initially?

WR: Well, because number one, you know, I really wanted to serve the Tibetan community. I wanted to serve the Tibetan children. I wanted to educate them because education is very important for our nation, for our people and I can very easily boast that I did a wonderful job as a teacher. Then, number two, going to American wasn't very attractive to me because my job was Central Government job. You know we were paid

⁶ Tibetan Youth Congress.

⁷ 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.

by the Central Government, the Indian Central Government. So . . . the pay was good. The benefits were good. So I didn't want to go very much to the United States.

But then again, I said to myself, because teaching was very tough and I wasn't very satisfied with the situation in Mussoorie because there was a big difference between the school that I was in and the school that I was teaching now. Mussoorie School is a big institution and one, two people cannot make a big difference over there when you have an establishment already set up over there. To make a major change you need to have more people involved and I think . . . I knew I was not going to get it. And so in fact it was quite depressing. That you wanted . . . you know, the school was so important and it had gone down so much and you really want to work and at the same time you understand that . . . you . . . how much work you try to put in, you know, it's not going to result very much because there are some people who had been there for long time and they are still there and so they are the people who really hold everything. Changing was . . . changing their school was very difficult.

TK: So when you found out that you were going to immigrate to Minnesota, what was the reaction from your colleagues?

WR: I was really very excited. To the extent that—because, you know, the story first came when I was having a break time. Somebody came from Tibetan Homes Office with the news that Wangyal is one of the selected persons. So Wangyal . . . my name at that time was T. Wangyal. Now the person who came with the name also came with the number, the Green Book⁸ number. That person showed me the Green Book number and number looked a little familiar. I don't remember things very clearly, but I took the number and went to my quarter, my room, and looked at my Green Book and it was the number. And I was really very excited to the extent that I didn't remember what I taught in the next class, which was a ninth grade English or history. And I'm sure I had . . . I'm sure I had taught something. [Chuckles]

You know, to that extent, I was really thrilled and, you know, my friend was in the first batch and now I knew that I was also going. We had another friend who was not going and we sat down under a tree and discussed about what it means to be going to the United States. And some of those discussions came true. I continued saying that you can still serve Tibetan community, you can still serve Tibetan children even if you go to the United States, which is exactly what I'm doing here. Right from the beginning I have been just working and working and working.

CL: So you were in the—you were in the first wave of people, in the first group of people that came?

WR: A thousand Tibetans came in a year's time and every month there was a batch going to the United States and I came in the fifth batch, which was in September. Very close. This is August, right? You know, we stepped on the soil of this country on 29

⁸ The CTA has a volunteer tax system. People who make payments have these payments recorded their 'Green Book.'

August, which is, you know, ten days away. And the first batch arrived here in 1992 September. So by 1993, May-June, the whole program, you know, the project was completed in terms of reaching—getting those people here, with the exception of some people who had health reasons, you know, whose health was not good.

CL: Did you come right from India to Minnesota or did you stop somewhere else in the U.S. first?

WR: Well, we stopped at Boston, which was just only the stop, and from Boston we came to Minnesota. My reason of coming to this place seems to be that some of my friends had already gone here. They were here and they requested the people concerned to get me in the list of people coming to the United States. I didn't have any preference about which place I was going to out of those twenty-two class decides. So when I came here . . . just soon after that, you know, the project coordinator, Thupten Dadak,⁹ asked me and Tsultrim to take over the leadership role until a new team of leaders was elected. So we did it. In 1993, July, on the birthday of His Holiness we had the first election of the office peers of the board members and well, I was elected and I became the first elected president of the Tibetan community. And then we worked on the bylaws.

CL: What was that like when you finally arrived in Minnesota and you were getting off the plane? Can you talk a little bit about the emotions of it as it was there?

WR: Well, when we landed at the airport, you know, there was a group of Tibetans welcoming us with tea and snacks and they even sang a song for us. And I, assuming the leadership of the group, you know, who came together, also thanked them for all that they have done to us. Then we all separated to our host families and my host family was in Stillwater. Well, it was very tough. It was very tough. From South India to North India how many times I had gone there for meetings, for conferences, for two weeks or sometimes twenty days.

But then coming from India to the United States was totally different. And it was all because of the thinking. I really felt for the first time that I was away from my family and I really missed them so much. I still remember the time when Khedup wrote me his first letter and I read the letter and it just wept myself. It was just terrible. It was . . . well, we all went every year to India. India for vacation. Every year. During winter. We went to India. So it was very tough. Very challenging.

But then the people over here were very supportive and another thing is that we all after three months stayed with the host families. We made the condition that we'd come out. Because we wanted to stand on our own feet and when we moved out then you chose your roommates. You know, you're [Tibetan] in Tibetan who live together and we lived together. So we were four friends. We just chose ourselves. So I was with three other friends and it was good. Although your family is far away. You are with a group of people with whom you share a lot of common things.

⁹ Thupten Dadak, a Tibetan who arrived in Minnesota several years prior to the Resettlement Project.

CL: So you moved to Stillwater when you first got here.

WR: Right.

CL: Were you able to find a job, to find work right away?

WR: My job? We all had a job ready. Without a job we would not be allowed to come to the United States. Now we were treated totally different compared to other refugees. We were not treated as refugees. We came as immigrants. I don't know whether you are taking care of this point or not. So when you come as immigrants you have to have a sponsor and then you have to have a job ready. When we have the interviews at the American Embassy we were asked about the job, the host family and they tested our proficiency in English. Those who were not very proficient in English should have a job where language is not very much needed. You know with those things we were just tested when we came over here.

And when I came over here my job was . . . I was to work at a bakery. And you know, when we had the job package we just opened it and we just looked at it, the wage, the salary, or the pay. My pay was good. It was six dollars twenty-five cents. It was almost the best. We had friends whose pay was four dollars something. Not here in Minnesota but it was at other places. So I was with a job and I was laid off from the job after one week and my sponsor was very worried and I said to her, "Don't worry. I see in the newspaper many jobs so I will just apply." And I applied at Woolrich, Inc. on highway—or highway 36. I don't think it's there anymore.

So I worked over there and then I worked at another place, Lowell Inn. I don't say that word correctly. L-o-w-e-l-l I-n-n. Very expensive. Very fancy restaurant in Stillwater. Very expensive. Two people pay about eighty dollars for a dinner. It's very expensive. And I worked there as a cook making escargots. Experience-wise I had gone through so many things in my life. It's amazing.

CL: So when did your family then follow you to the U.S.?

WR: They came in 1996. May. We were told that it would take about two year and a half but it took more than three years when we filed for family reunification. So my family came in 1996, May. It was almost . . . close to four years.

CL: And they all came at one time?

WR: They all came together. They all came together.

CL: How was that? Did they go through a similar adjustment period like you or—?

WR: They had much better time in case of my family. I had already bought a house. I was the first person to buy a property. I bought a house because I knew that I have four

sons and they would need a lot of space and they would be quite naughty. I would face problem that put up in apartment.

They didn't have much problem except that, you know, the boys had a little problem with the situation concerning school environment which I didn't realize until it was too late. So my poor first boy couldn't do very good. But then the others didn't have any problem. Khando, you didn't have any problem in adjusting, right? My third son who graduated this year had no problem. My fourth son had no problem. My wife didn't have any problems. They had much better time compared to the times that we faced when we came as alone.

CL: What were some of the problems that the children had that you didn't realize were going to be issues?

WR: Well, number one, the school in India is very structured, very disciplined whereas school in America is very open, very loose and then the teachers approach to students is totally different, and Tibetan children are very smart. They understand a teacher very well. If they think the teacher is strict, serious, accordingly they do it. If they think the teacher is not very serious, very strict, they take advantage of that to the extent they can play with the teachers. Although they are the losers but they are smart at that time. I have seen that a lot.

We have Tibetan students in high school who could play with the counselors yet . . . now I was aware of that and the parents are aware of that but then what could we do when the counselor or the teacher is not very effective in mending the behavior of Tibetan children? They're very smart and so that's why, you know, we have some children who face this sort of problem. Especially for 2000 when we had five children who didn't make high school graduation. And after that it was okay. So things have improved. Things have become much better. Like this year it is hundred percent. Now everybody graduated who was enrolled.

CL: How old was your—or what grade was your oldest son when he came?

WR: Yes. He was . . . he was . . . he was in ninth grade. The perfect time to get into trouble. You know? My only regret with my oldest son was that he requested me to change his school. I know some places where high school but that wasn't a very good school for some of our children. I just ignored that thinking. This is better than many of the schools in South Minneapolis. That was my only regret. Well, he's a good boy. He's a good man right now. But the only problem is that he didn't—he wasted a lot of time.

CL: So you've had a very active role in education here and you've been involved with the Minneapolis school district.

WR: Right.

CL: Can you talk a little bit about your role like when it started and your role now with it with the school district?

WR: Well, I was hired in 1998 when district knew that we had pretty good size Tibetan children waiting in the school district and they also knew that there were many parents whose English was not very good. So they needed a person to act as a bridge, a link. So they hired me in the position of Tibetan Homeschool Liaison and I was the first person to be hired in such a position in the school district. And my job description is pretty limited but I, you know, I evolved my job to the extent that I included a lot of things which were not there.

District realized that this position is really very useful for those communities who did not have a large number of children in school district. Hmong, Somali, no problem because they could have somebody in a school district, in a building. They have a good size of children. But there are others like Vietnamese, Tibetan . . . I don't remember right now. Children are very scattered in the school districts and they need somebody to help the school district to communicate with the parents and sometimes to help children in the school. So in that position I was hired and I'm still working in that position on a part time basis. And I enjoy doing this job because it helps me know Tibetan children.

Like I know Khando very well. Khando knows me very well because she doesn't need any help but then again I just keep an eye on Tibetan children and inform the parents. So that's the job that I did and it was very rewarding. Minnesota is the only Tibetan community where high school graduates are recognized on a community basis, on a community level. And there are a lot of other things like college workshop is something that I started and which is really very useful.

TK: Do you feel like there were any—well, since you've been in that position for so long where you've been working with the Tibetan community and the Minneapolis school board, do you feel like there were particular challenges that were faced by the Tibetan students in this new environment which you said is so different from the Indian school structural basis?

WR: Now the difficult days are gone. The difficult days are gone. But then there is another challenge coming up. The transition from the school system in India to the United States is no longer a problem here now. Now here the problem is that those children who are born here might grow up to be Tibetans with very . . . might be grow up to be Tibetans who are not very strong in their own language. Now in kindergarten and first grade, I don't know whether you have seen that or not. I have seen many Tibetan children who are not speaking very good Tibetan. They speak English much better than Tibetan. And now that is the cause of concern.

Last year I was . . . I came on board and I became the education chair and I have made major changes to our Saturday Tibetan program and I am trying to focus on those students who are age five, six, seven, eight because this is a very difficult, very tender age and looking back in the past nine, ten months and I think we are doing a wonderful job.

But that is the new challenge that we are facing and I feel that Head Start, you know, that every child goes through, Head Start is something that Tibetan parents need to postpone because Head Start is a very tender stage in a child's life and when you are exposed to English word and languages more than your own language that might . . . that might shift the balance. That might play a negative role in terms of these children growing up with their own language. That I see as a major challenge.

TK: So since the challenge has changed now from having a lack of assimilation into American culture now it's like too much assimilation into the American culture?

WR: Right.

TK: So it seems essentially that you are trying find a balance between the two. What are ways or what are ways in which you can kind of prevent that from happening? What are ways in which you can help the children?

WR: The most important thing is that Tibetan parents should admit their young children in the Tibetan Culture School. That's very important. Last year we stopped enrollment after a certain period of time and there are many children who wanted to be in but they could not get in. So they are having that feeling very strong in their mind. So we have a waiting list of eight, nine and there will be many more Tibetan children getting enrolled this year.

Community has to . . . Tibetan community has to make sure that this program really stays very strong with people who are really committed in this program because this Tibetan Saturday program has gone through different stages. At times it was really good and then it started going down a little and then it started going up a little. That sort of thing will not be very good.

So my answer to your question is that if these children are very important for our future tomorrow they must grow up with their language and with their cultural values like I really appreciate things in you. Otherwise, what happens is that they might really get distracted. They might grow up to be Tibetans with not that strong Tibetan feeling.

That can be a big problem because we are a people who came to the United States with a different goal, with a different purpose and for that we have to make sure that these children who grow up really grow up as a real Tibetan, with that Tibetan feeling. And language is very, very important. Preservation of your language is a political statement you are making.

TK: So what would be other ways to facilitate this preservation of language aside from the Saturday Tibetan School? Let's say through your job, through your work in the Minneapolis schools.

WR: Now my work in Minneapolis actually has become very much reduced. In fact we do not have many Tibetan children in Minneapolis. I'm just happy that I have a going

job over there. But I don't enjoy it very much because we do not have many Tibetan children.

Tibetans are very smart. They have moved out to the suburbs. So we don't have a lot. If I were to have the same number of children as we had earlier one thing that I could do and I did actually—I could organize after school programs during which time I could help them with homework and also I would help them with Tibetan language, Tibetan culture. In fact Tibetan Culture School for the first time became a site where summer school program was held this year and I am in the process of making an application to have after school program for Tibetan children with the mind, with this thing in my mind, that we could incorporate the Saturday program as a part of that program in which case those children who had Tibetan language class or Saturday program would also bring some money to pay for the program for the teachers.

So that might . . . you know, that does two things together. After school program and also we have this Tibetan . . . teaching of Tibetan is very much encouraged by the district too because they understand that a child who is strong in language, their native language, will also do very good in English, in learning English. So they encourage this under what they call enrichment program. And then can write . . . you know I don't get so much time.

The other thing that I really like doing is to organize youth forums, bringing high school children and college going students like yourself once a month or once two months and talk on a topic which is so relevant in your life in the present situation. That has been something which . . . that's something which has gaining my mind but then I can't . . . you need a lot of time and especially time because you have to contact all these kids. For the present Tibetan Culture School is one that will take care of this.

TK: During your experience as the liaison officer when there were more Tibetans, more Tibetan children, in the Minneapolis school district, were there any problems that were faced by the children, by the students, that you felt could be prevented through some kind of—?

WR: Tibetan children actually did very well. Tibetan children were very much liked by the teachers. The only time that I really had little difficulty was the year 2000 when we had a batch of boys who could not stay very focused and who were not making the credits required for graduation. That was the only year that really made me feel little disappointed. But then I have no regrets because I did everything that was in my power and parents did everything. You know, you can take a horse to the river but you cannot make the horse drink. So those boys wouldn't do that are now realizing. But then still it's not too late. If they want to they can do it. Because those boys could be somewhere. Now twenty-two, twenty-three and twenty-two, twenty-three is nothing. You know you can just start all over again. No problem. That was the only time. Otherwise our children did very good. They—behavior-wise everything went very smoothly.

TK: Do you feel that's the only case with the younger generation—?

WR: Well, now these days, children are being very good. They are doing very good with the exception of very few. In fact those children who came to attend summer program this year are not in the category of those people who really needed to do that because their math skills and English skills are good. But then, you know, district has been very kind because they didn't look into those matters. Summer school is supposed to be those children who are little low in math and English. And our children are good. But when we conducted the program and get to get the money, reimbursement money, I'm yet to get it but then they have okay it. All those Tibetan children whose names were there. They were not even in ESL classes, too. You know that, right? There are many Tibetans who are not in ESL classes. But district has been very kind and they also understand the fact the program that we do is to help children learn their language and also to learn more about Tibetans, Tibetan story.

CL: You talked a lot about your interaction with the students and the school district and schools and whatnot. Can you talk a little bit about your experiences dealing with the parents when there were issues or when you thought you had advice or whatnot? What were some of the parents' reactions to this new school system or to how their children were doing in the school?

WR: There are many parents who have the same attitude as they had in India thinking that school would do their best and my child will do very good. There are many parents who do that, who think that way and there were parents who had really issues with their children not doing good at school and I have been in touch with these parents and we have been working together. We have been meeting and we have been talking about these things very much. I didn't come across a single parent who was little disappointed with regard to the work that I was doing. We did our best. But then some of those who could not do very good, they think that they are grown up and they can take care of themselves. So when they have this attitude what could we do now? Except waiting to see the day when they will realize their mistake. They are failing.

TK: So do you feel that the present success of the younger Tibetan children is attributed through the parental involvement? That they understand that the American school system doesn't work the same way as the Indian school system based on the failures of earlier Tibetans?

WR: Now . . . now is the thirteenth year we have been here in the United States and many of the parents are very different from those parents. Those parents included people like myself but now these days we have parents who are much younger and who have been here for a longer time and they understand the importance of spending time with children.

Look at this Saturday program, Saturday language program. Previously we collected only ten dollar a child per month and we continued. Then later I had to expose the financial problem of the program and parents were so supportive. They said they would

increase the fees. We increased it to twenty. If needed they would even increase to twenty-five.

So from the conversation from these, from the opinion coming from the parents, one thing is very clear that the parents are much more supportive. They understand that they need to spend more time with their children. But then this could be about sixty percent. Another forty would be different.

TK: So essentially you do see that the parents are younger so therefore they have a better understanding of their child and the needs of their children's . . .

WR: Right. Very much.

TK: How do you explain this change in attitude towards their children's education? Is it just because the parents are younger or because—?

WR: Parents are younger. Younger parents understand the differences in school system. Younger parents are more aware of the parent responsibilities in the school system in the United States. They really understand that they need to spend more time with children. If there were to be a field trip they understand that is very important for the child to go for the field trip. If there is some program or activity in the school they understand that they need to be present in the school to tell other parents and other children that they are also present there.

So those awakenings which are happening in the minds of younger parents were not there in the beginning when many parents did not have much education. So the situation is totally different now. The parents are doing much better. But then again, again I said, parents are really . . . parents need to understand this, that they must speak Tibetan at home right from the age they start talking.

Otherwise if they are sent to school they would learn communication skills very fast from the mainstream teachers and if they do not have the same sort or similar opportunity from the parents' side then we will have a child who will speak English very good and when they speak Tibetan they will use many, many English words. So even that is okay, but I did see children whose Tibetan spoken skills are very low and that is really frightening.

CL: Do you see any—I know I traveled over Northern India and Nepal and different areas in Tibet and whatnot and the regional dialects can sometimes be so different and sometimes it's not even a dialect. Sometimes the difference is just in . . . a slight difference in accent.

WR: Right.

CL: Do you—are there any—do you see at all any children that are struggling with the language, struggling with Tibetan because they have a new or different dialect they're

used to or a different . . . I suppose you could call it tonal structure? Just growing up and being so influenced by English?

WR: Right. Right. Right. I don't think that's any issue at this time because most parents who are here have lived in India for a long time. So in India they have been living together so much that they almost have a same common dialect. Kham, Amdo dialect . . . you need to use it. It becomes very intelligible when they use it. It's easy to understand. Now those Tibetans who came directly from Tibet, there are many, but not a big number, they really come with a dialect which is very difficult for us to understand. I sometimes go to hospitals to interpret. I have come across situations where I have to take the help of one of the family relatives to translate so it becomes from that dialect to the relative to me to the doctor or the nurse. One Tibetan patient told me that the interpreter who came to interpret could not understand anything that I said and I could understand the situation. I have been much more exposed to different dialects. Unless it's really typical dialect I would make out but then they younger ones would not be able to do that. So that problem you know is a very problem, but in a very issue, but I don't think we will face that problem because now Tibetans have been living together as a community so much that we almost have one dialect. Right?

CL: Do you think that that's a—do you see that as a positive thing?

WR: It is a positive thing.

CL: Or is part of the language disappearing then? If there isn't distinct regional dialects.

WR: Well, it is a positive thing and it could be something that you have to think of, too. You're right that, you know, Tibetan dialect . . . we have distinct different Tibetan dialects. We do not to lost those things. Yet at the same time for the unification, for the integration purpose, it's so important to have one dialect that everybody understands. So from that point of view we have a dialect which everybody could understand that will help integration of three provinces or people from different parts of Tibet. Yet at the same time you do not want to lost those dialects and I'm sure they are being practiced in Tibet.

CL: I know they are. In Kham . . . spoke, a totally different language than what we learned.

WR: Oh, Amdo dialect is very difficult. Very challenging. Very tough. It's very tough. I have a friend from Amdo whose dad speaks both Amdo dialect to the extent that I could not make out anything. So he had to translate that to me. It's very interesting.

CL: Have you had an opportunity to teach at all outside of the Saturday program here?

WR: Well, I took a teaching job in a Charter School . . . September last year and it's very close by here, MIT.¹⁰ I taught fourth grade students. But then I must say that this is

¹⁰ William E. McGee Institute of Technology.

a Charter School with ninety-nine percent African-American students. Children are very challenging. Very challenging. I knew that it was very challenging for me, too, but then I did everything that was in my power, in my expertise to help those children.

But then I was not enjoying. I wasn't enjoying teaching those kids. Simply because I believe in planning. You know. Teacher has to plan lessons. So you plan next day's lesson the previous evening and I do that. You go with the best planning and there's no guarantee that lesson is going to be a success tomorrow. And then you really get depressed because how much time you spent on planning and now is not working. So I was very discouraged, disappointed.

And I spoke with the executive director, a very nice African-American gentleman, tall, who was a teacher at St. Paul Charter School. A very good man. I had been working with him very closely with regard to my job because I want to make sure that I really do the service for which I am paid. And he was always coming with positive things about what I was doing and he even said one time in the midst of chaos learning takes place. Which I wasn't very aware of. But then all the chapter review tests that I gave revealed that they were learning a lot. It looks like my expectations were way too high.

I really wanted children to talk when they have to talk. When I teach for a short time, you know, fifteen, twenty minutes, I want them to listen to me, which they were not ready because they are not used to. So I requested him to relieve me from this job because it was very stressful. I said it's not the money that I work for. I need to have satisfaction and I'm not getting it. But then again he really insisted me many times, carry on for some more time. Which I did.

But then it was the third day of Tibetan New Year that I was able to get relief from that job and I quit it. And then I just told him to give me a small note saying that I had left the job because I need to show that to insurance people. My regrets was to just a small two, three line. He gave me one full page of letter of recommendation where he just states so many good things about me. I couldn't believe it. I just . . . now I was . . . I knew that it was not very useful to me anymore because I'm not going to take a full time teaching job.

But I showed it to my supervisor in Minneapolis public school and she just said, "Give me a copy of that." That was the best recommendation letter I have ever received in my life and that was from that teacher, from that principal, that executive director. It was so sad, you know. I couldn't stay there. Even I told the principal, the executive director, "Mr. Owen, I'm not going to see these children." But then he said, "These children will feel totally different. Please meet them before you leave this school."

I called them all together and spoke to them and it's a small size class, fifteen children. And all those girls just wept like anything. What is this? And I say, "It's too late now. I have to leave." And I left it for their benefit too because they were running . . . facing little problem with money. So after my exit from the school my fifteen children would be divided between the other two sections. So he will save some money, too. I saw that

point, too. That was my experience teaching over there. And I taught at Somali Education Center, too.

CL: Do you think you'd like to—you said you're not interesting in teaching full time. Do you think you'd be interested in teaching on a part time basis somewhere?

WR: Part time, yes. I do. I do substitute teaching, which is very easy. Sometimes stressful but then again that stressful is very temporary. You go into the lesson . . . I mean you go into the class. There's a lesson plan. Execute the lesson plan and then when the day is done you are done with everything. You just leave everything over there. You come out stress free. [Chuckles] And then I have the other job, which is very flexible, the Tibetan home school liaison or the cultural liaison which is very flexible.

CL: You talked about—when you were talking about your job with the Minneapolis school district you said that a lot of Tibetans . . . there aren't many Tibetans left in the school district because people have moved out.

WR: Right.

CL: Do you see possibly in the future or are you interested in maybe a program that might stretch across districts to help Tibetans in the same way you were but maybe make it a multi-district project instead of just the one district?

WR: No. No. I don't think I can think of such things. It would be so good to have such a thing but I don't think I can think of such things. No.

CL: You've also talked about that school for Tibetans now is much easier than it was. Do you think that in a positive light you've almost worked your way out of the necessity that there was for you in your position in the beginning because students are adapting and have adapted to school so much better now?

WR: In a way you are right that there's less need for my service than it was before. But then I just extend my job . . . I evolve my job in different positions, in different spheres. Many times I would just go to a school and give a presentation of Tibetan culture, Tibetan history under the name of staff development and which they like very much. I did that many times in the beginning of my job. Marcy Open school principals like that so much that he wanted me to give a presentation on Tibetan culture and Tibetan history to all the principals and I said, "Okay, I'll give it." But unfortunately, you know, for some reason, I couldn't give it and I had to send a friend to do that. So when it comes to talking about Tibetan culture, Tibetan story, I do it very good. I just go and I just do it.

CL: You've also done—you mentioned that you were on the board here at the Tibetan American Foundation.¹¹

WR: Right.

¹¹ Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota (TAFM).

CL: And that you're the education chair, right?

WR: Right.

CL: Can you talk a little bit about what you have with the programs and what not—do you see any—do you have a grand plan or where do you see the Tibetan American Foundation moving forward as far as education is concerned?

WR: In fact, I was on chair, I was the chair of education for one year. This is my second year and I have different things in my mind. One thing is that I am thinking of retiring from the board so that I can spend more time with Tibetan children and I can spend more time with the Tibetan children and I can really devote on that. Because right now the law requires that all the hours I spend for Tibetan children have to be free, volunteer, which I cannot do.

At our last meeting I just recommended . . . now we have a new executive director part time. I recommended that we create a position of somebody taking over the responsibilities of education and pay that person and I said this will not continue for this community here because I cannot spend so much time working for free while my other friends are getting paid. I spend maximum number of hours compared to the other board members. So I said, "If you are not going to create this position, this position," I said, "is very important to sustain this program . . . if you are not going to create this position I am going back to become a teacher and when I go back to become a teacher I will teacher only my crew. I cannot interfere with others. If you create that position and I am the most qualified person because many of these programs cannot be run without a teacher licensed. Summer program a teacher has to be there. After school program a teacher has to be there. A licensed teacher." So my job, my license, is getting used and I said I want to be paid.

So now the decision is that when we meet next time, I think very soon, that issue and that this topic will come up more. So if they do not . . . if our vote does not agree to create that position . . . then I'll go back to become a teacher because we need one more teacher effective from September, next month, with more children getting registered. If they create a new position then I would . . . you know it doesn't . . . you know, it's just Saturday, five hours plus some extra hours to work on the programs. So that's what I have in my mind. Thereby, you know, I'm getting paid and I'm just . . . I'm using my expertise and my skills. But you know, I could . . . I could have taken over the presidency of this Tibetan American Foundation but then again if I go, if I become a president, then who will take care of this education which is my area of responsibility? So I just refused that position in order to be in this area.

CL: You talked about your level of education and you talked about how you've done programs where you taught principals or other educators about specific Tibetan things and Minnesota is a very unique community because, as you know, being an immigrant yourself, we're made up of many, many different immigrant groups. Have you ever considered possibly teaching teachers in some kind of program that would educate

teachers to help them deal or help them better involve themselves or better teach other immigrant groups?

WR: I have thought of that way but then sometimes you know, teachers, the people who organize teachers programs invite people from different cultures and I have given talks to a couple of those classes talking about Tibetan culture and Tibetan history. Besides that the way we teach, you know the philosophy behind teaching, those things are very different compared to what is being held over here.

But then when we talk about those things it seems like they are not getting very much accepted. In India we strongly believe that the purpose of education is to make our children good human beings, you know, that moral values are so much emphasized and when we talk of course there is a component of this moral education in the education system of every country. But then the emphasis on moral education is not so much in countries like United States as compared to those that we have in India. So you're talking about my helping other teachers about teaching skills and teaching profession is something that I need to get from other people.

When I was doing such teacher teaching a couple of times I happened to go to classes where we have children with behavior problems. Huge behavior problems and I was so happy to have experiences of meeting these children and talking to them about what it means to be a human being, about the importance of going inside. Because many times these children get angry and they get so angry that anger has enslaved them.

I have seen a girl doing that, and I let the girl get really angry, angry enough and after some time she just subsided down and I sat down with her and told her I know you are a very good human being. In the past five minutes you were enslaved by anger, which is an emotion that was running so high in you and people are looking at you in a different perspective. People label you. But then again you have all the qualities of becoming a good human being. Why don't you try to cultivate those things? When anger comes in your mind why don't you give a thought to whether you should really give room to your anger feeling or try to counteract that?

So these sort of things, now these are Buddhist . . . our belief and Buddhist way of thinking. That is sort of thing I did a couple of times and they were really rewarding. They were good. I shared this with my supervisor and she starts saying that why don't you just have a meeting with the special ed teachers about behavior and all those things? When I was at MIT, you know, I used to think that I am a strong-minded person. I am a person. I really believe in controlling the behavior of children. But then I really failed like anything and I compared myself with other teachers who were women and they told me Wangyal, you're too mild. And I know I'm not that mild. I know it myself. But then again compared to those people I was really mild. So it's very relative.

CL: You talked about the Tibetans that graduate from school here and how they're recognized by the community. How do you personally feel that strengthens the

community or strengthens the individuals at school? Could you talk a little bit about why that is so important to recognize them from the community?

WR: Well, that was started the year I took over this position as home school liaison and I started that because in India we didn't have this practice of high school graduation celebration. She may be very small. You know, school gives a graduate outgoing party for the children. Even in Tibetan settlements we never had high school graduation celebration. No. Is over here we came across this and I liked it very much. It has good reasons for doing that. Now many parents would not know the importance of high school graduation, a huge accomplishment by a child which the family has to celebrate. Because many parents did not know or would not know or will not be able to do it because they were living in apartments, I thought I must do this on a community basis, on a community level and we did it the first time. Since then we have been doing it.

Of course, the turn out of the parents is not very encouraging but then all the parents of seniors who are out graduating and many of the parents of high school going . . . high school going parents, they would show up and everybody just believes very strongly that this is the right thing to do.

This year we had a couple of people come in from other communities like New York and other places and they said this is the right thing to do. At one time we had an important Tibetan official as the chief guest and he just praised it like anything. And we . . . and personally I strongly believe that we gave them a recognition. Like we gave recognition to Khando. We told her we are very happy that you have graduated, you have made such a huge accomplishment. Now *please* try to understand the responsibilities too as a Tibetan that you have your country, you have your culture, you have your people who really need your service.

So that responsibility reminding happens on that day and then of course, too, Tibetan high school graduates also would speak on behalf of the outgoing students and they would also at least say that we are grateful. We are aware of the care that you are taking about us. So this really very positive. Very good. And it will continue.

CL: Do you try and get those students that have graduated to come back and help within the community again?

WR: I have thought of this. I have thought of this, actually. I requested for a grant and I thought of really . . . I thought of having a gathering of all the hundred fifteen or twenty high school graduates now. So far we have this number and I even thought of getting a story from each of the graduates. Some of them have even completed their college education and put them in a small booklet. I thought of that but then the grant was refused and then again, my past one year, my focus, my emphasis was on Tibetan Culture School. Beyond that I couldn't do a lot. So maybe I will think of that. That would be so nice. Is it not? To have everybody coming and then to . . . they're in different positions, at different levels. Some of them have lots of accomplishments to hear and there are some like those few you know who haven't made much progress and they would

probably . . . they might also have a second thinking and then start going to school. Yes. I do have that idea in my mind.

CL: You talked—you said that you were the first elected president of the Tibetan American Foundation.

WR: Right.

CL: It was called . . . it had a different name back then.

WR: Tibetan Association of Minnesota.

CL: That's right.

WR: Right.

CL: How has the organization changed from those early days in the early 1990s 'til now?

WR: Well, Tibetan American Foundation was a non-profit organization which worked on the resettlement project and it had many . . . most of the board members were Americans except for Thupten Dadak and his wife at that time. We knew that we need to have a separate community, separate organization for the Tibetans to work directly with the government in India. So we elected . . . we elected our board of directors or members and elected officials. So for some time we had two organizations, the Tibetan American Foundation and Tibetan Association of Minnesota. But the goal of both these organizations are the same. Tibetan American Foundation had phase number one, phase number two and phase number three. So I was one at that time, you know, saying that you succeeded in phase number one to get thousand Tibetans and their families. Phase number two, education, housing, job development, all those things. Now where are you? What are you doing? I was trying to say that at that time. We were having little bit of differences on such grounds yet at the same time we were working together. There were places where, you know, open rifts broke open with these two organizations.

But then that thing never happened over here. I think we worked very smoothly, very gradually and slowly and slowly Tibetan American Foundation started having more Tibetans on the board than the Americans. And American friends also always said that one day you have to take over the responsibilities and I think it was three or four years back that we ultimately decided that we need to have only one organization, not two. So now we have Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota, which is a registered name, and Tibetan Association of Minnesota was dissolved and right now all the board members are Tibetans. We don't have any Americans. Now today . . . at that time, you know, we thought that Tibetan American . . . American means Americans. But now today we are also Tibetan Americans.

CL: How do you—that's a phrase that's actually come up a lot in various studies that I've read about Tibetans in America and the point of contention in a lot of these papers that I've read was that with the Tibetan struggle so many Tibetans wish to return to Tibet and at the point when the struggle is completed and Tibetans again return to Tibetans . . . so the point that's been brought up many times is there's Tibetans and Tibetan Americans. So by instilling yourself as a Tibetan American does that solidify you one place or in one home?

WR: No. No. Tibetan . . . our becoming Tibetan American is out of convenience, out of necessity. Our position is not changed and our attitude is not changed. When we were in India we refused to take the citizenship of India. In fact the citizenship issue never came up. Never came up. So it wasn't an issue at that time. And now there were some Tibetans who were very smart and who took up citizenship of India and started purchasing properties.

But when we came to the United States we came under the program approved by the Tibetan government. Once we landed on this soil we knew and Tibetan government also knew that it is imperative for us to become U.S. citizens because by becoming U.S. citizens you can do a lot that you cannot do otherwise. And number one is right to vote. So voting is there. Now in my mind I do have a feeling of being an American and which becomes a force which helps me because now I look at Americans as equals. I don't treat them as . . . I don't treat myself as lower to those people. We are equals. At the same time my loyalty to my country is strong as before and if you ask me whether I would go back to Tibet or not my answer is yes.

And now the question is what about your children? What about these people? Probably we might like them to stay here in this country and then contribute to our country, to our people. If there is a solution or a settlement between the Tibetan government and the Chinese government. So in no way has our feeling of being a Tibetan lessened by taking up the citizenship.

I feel so proud now because I'm a U.S. citizen and I could think of going to Tibet as a U.S. citizen. Before that how could I go? Until there is a . . . until there is a Tibet, as a Tibetan American citizen backed by the U.S. embassy in China, U.S. embassy has a responsibility to guarantee the safety of this person because we pay taxes. So that . . . there are a lot of things to get by not losing anything when it comes to the question of Tibet or issue of Tibet.

CL: Do you think that being an American and—do you think that is something that will help in the . . . in getting an agreement between China and the Tibetan government in exile? Do you think that—? I'm not articulating this well . . .

WR: I can understand your question. Now we were sent to the United States with a reason and the reason was there could be many reasons. The most important reason was to speak to the American public about the story of Tibet, the real truth that a Tibet, a sovereign independent country for centuries was attacked and occupied. This thing did

not go out very far and wide. Even Minnesota people . . . people did . . . Minnesotans didn't know a lot about Tibet until we came over here. So that was the responsibility given to us and we did that job very good. Very good.

I remember the meeting with Paul Wellstone. We, a small delegation of people, went to see him. Time given was forty-five minutes and we had our own, you know, little bit of . . . who are the ones going to speak and we had one Tibetan woman who was to narrate her experiences under the Chinese government and she was given only eight minutes and I was the interpreter and as she was exceeding eight minutes I just hinted to stop and Paul Wellstone sitting right over here said [in a whisper], "No, no, no, no, no. Let her continue."

You know, he gave so much time for us and we . . . the story went right into the heart of that person and at the end of the story he simply said Dela, that I'm very moved. So that's the job that we were supposed to be doing. We were sent to do. And we did it very good in Minnesota. Paul Wellstone, Martin Sabo. We met all these people and talked about the issue of Tibet.

That when you go down there in Washington, D.C., whenever you get an opportunity to speak about Tibet, Tibetans, you must do that because . . . you know China did something . . . you know China was . . . they did something very smart. When they knew that the world was ignorant about the status of Tibet they told that big lie and India refused to open its mouth and U.S. government waited for India and U.S. government did what Jawaharlal Nehru¹² did and so that's the result that Tibet was a part of China. Jawaharlal Nehru, that decision was the biggest mistake made by Jawaharlal Nehru himself and now there are many Tibetan . . . I mean Indian statesmen, leaders, who go back and say that there was a huge mistake . . . had he not done that we would not be where we are today. The Indian government will not have to spend so much money on the border security purposes.

Yes. So we, you know, we did our responsibility. We did our share now. Now today in our area most of the Americans would know that Tibet was independent and invaded and occupied. Look at our culture! Look at everything! We are very distinct from the Chinese.

You know, when I give my presentation I take out Fridley High School social studies textbook and show it to them. I have my presentation on PowerPoint. Look. They claim Tibet on this ground. Look. Look at the map. That we were under the Manchus not under Chinese. We were under the Mongols, not under Chinese. Look. B.C. area. We were a small state. We were a good state. Look at China. Where are they?

And that doing . . . my boys were going through that paper. I saw it and I just got those copies. It's just a . . . India's just open but . . . U.S. government . . . in the eyes of the U.S. government Tibet is a part of China but then a resolution was passed in U.S. Congress to the effect that Tibet is an occupied land.

¹² Prime Minister of India, 1947-64.

So there's the, you know, the world stand. U.S. government and Congress represents . . . that represents the people. But then how much will this change as a result of this we have to wait and see because today whenever U.S. government says yes, China must respect human rights, must give freedom for the Tibetans in Tibet to practice their culture, their religion . . .

CL: You said that you were sent to the U.S. to educate the Westerners or inform them of the Tibetan situation.

WR: Right.

CL: And you said that you felt that that was accomplished because the information is so widely known now.

WR: Right. Right.

CL: So do you see yourself or the Tibetan population here having a new goal or a new task?

WR: Not really new goal but then again to reinforce on that. Now you have to act because now you know that story, right? And if every American who knows the story takes . . . take up the story and speak to the legislatures, the congressmen and senators, this is what happened in history and why don't we take up this issue whenever you have a meeting with the Chinese leadership? But then again our government is not bold enough to do that. Now we have reached to that stage now. Yes. We have reached to that stage and now U.S. government finds . . . U.S. government finds it a little difficult to change their position because they have already made some commitment. But now ours is nothing.

Now look at Taiwan now. A country that they really supported so much. They sacrificed some years back and now today very soon, you know . . . they're very much with the Chinese rather than with the Taiwan. So ours is much smaller when you compare with that. Because U.S. government openly supported, created and then supported and now . . . and then said this is China. When the other China came up and slowly when the U.S. government knew that this China is more important than this China they just went to this China and now this China is marginalized. But not to the extent that is completely ignored. It's still there within the interest and now here is a country, the solid truth . . . the weapon of truth is here but then again how many countries or governments will support such a thing at the cost of many, many national interest?

CL: Do you think that this level of educating non-Tibetans has been as successful in other parts of the country where there are other Tibetan groups?

WR: I'm sure we all did the same thing. We all did the same thing. Once a year we also have a meeting of all the presidents and secretaries of Tibetan Associations in the United States. So during such times they definitely talk about what are the ways and means to

spread the story of Tibet among the larger community. They surely do that. Then there are some occasions like March 10th, July 6th, September 2nd,¹³ and December 10th when His Holiness was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. We use also an occasion for celebration at the same time it happened on the old Human Rights Day. So we talk about human rights.

CL: You just mentioned all those holidays. March 10th, Tibetan Uprising Day, and July 6th, His Holiness' birthday and whatnot. Do you think the significance of those holidays or the meaning for Tibetans has changed at all being in the United States?

WR: No. It hasn't changed. It hasn't changed. The importance and the scale on which these occasions are celebrated or observed has actually become much bigger than before. This year was totally different. You know, we had a weeklong celebration of the birthday of His Holiness. It was different. But then again I think these things will not go down. Just continue increasing.

CL: How do you feel about the—and I would agree with you that experiencing things, something like Losar¹⁴ in Dharamsala and Uprising Day in Nepal and then experiencing both here as well in Minnesota . . . they're very, very strong here in this community. How do you—do you have personal feelings about the adaptations that have happened with—and some of them just being physical things about space . . . where is the community going to meet for an event the size of Losar and of course the weather here in Minnesota. Many events are held outside or at the monasteries in Dharamsala. Because it's often February or March and very, very cold here that simply can't happen here in Minnesota. So how do you feel about that, you know, these events that typically took place on rooftops or in monasteries or you know, in large spaces are now moved into gymnasiums or things like that? Do you think that changes the event at all or is it simply just new location?

WR: I didn't have feeling about that. What is very important is the participation of the community members. Meet on a hilltop or on a plain or in a big gymnasium. With a couple of these events. July 6th, every year it happen . . . July 6th, happened to be a rain free, very good day so is a day long program and then December 10th, is wintertime and we have always having it indoor and March 10th, no matter. We don't just care about the weather. We just make sure that we come out in the street and do our routine, which may be routine but then I just strongly feel that we have done what we are supposed to be doing. That is to express our solidarity with the sufferings of Tibetans in Tibet and let the world know that we have not forgotten our issue here. We are committed and dedicated to our cause. And luckily, you know, the March 10th gathering, you know, it has been very encouraging. It has been very encouraging. You know, there's very few . . . otherwise Tibetans really make sure that they are always out on March 10th, and July 6th, and of course the Tibetan New Year Day, too.

¹³ Democracy Day. Celebrating the day His Holiness the Dalai Lama announced a democratic government would be established for the Tibetans living in exile.

¹⁴ Tibetan New Year.

CL: Do you think that it's important to have Western participation in these events?

WR: Oh, it's very important. It's very important. That's one area where we need to work a little more because initially, in the beginning we had many American friends coming but then again, you know, they really helped us and they have . . . we have reached to a stage where we can need much of their support in terms of making a living and doing our job. But then again the other part which is the Tibetan support. Support for the Tibetan cause. That has to continue. So this is one area where we need to improve. To work hard. To have more Americans.

CL: Do you or does the board have any plans or—?

WR: I don't know. I don't know. At a couple of meetings we talked about those things but then we haven't worked, we haven't got a plan.

CL: Any other questions at all?

TK: Last question, I guess. Obviously you stated earlier on that your main goal to work in the Tibetan community was for the improvement of the Tibetan community and to further establish a Tibetan identity among the Tibetan children.

WR: Right.

TK: Considering your past experiences in many different jobs and job areas, do you feel that you have initially made a difference? Have you succeeded in your goal? Do you feel that—?

WR: I feel . . . I feel very proud of what I have done to the community. A lot of things that we have today have actually started some years back when we were the leaders. Even today Minnesota Tibetan community is really very unique. You know that we are very connected, very cohesive, especially on days like July 6th, New Year, and now very soon we will have a Tibetan Democracy Day. I see that a lot of Tibetans are showing up. Now again coming to your question about how much have I done or are you satisfied. I'm really satisfied with whatever I have done to the Tibetan community and I will continue working on that.

My main focus is on education. As I said earlier I think I could do much better by being on that position. Be it as a teacher or program director than on the board. I can definitely . . . we can keep our inputs to the board members. I'm thinking of making a suggestion to the extent that when there is a board meeting, you know, people could also come and share. But when it comes to making a decision, it is only the board members who do that. Thereby we will have more experienced people also coming.

You know we have been taking up the responsibility, leadership responsibility, for some time and we realize that it's important for the younger generation people to take up the responsibilities and we saw that. We saw one president, very young. He just did so

good. We saw two of them and now the present president, you know, Phuntsok Wangdu, he's a younger generation Tibetan and it is good to see these people taking responsibility and we still will be behind it then help when they ask a question whenever they need. So those are the things that I . . . those are the things in response to your question. Not very much to the point, right? [Chuckles]

CL: Anything else?

TK: No. That's it.

CL: I want to thank you for your help on the project here. Thank you very much for your help here.

WR: Oh, yes. Sure. And thank you very much.

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
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