**Dorjee Norbu**
**Narrator**

**Charles Lenz**
**Minnesota Historical Society**
**Interviewer**

**Interviewed for the**
**Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project**

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**Carleton College**
**Northfield, Minnesota**

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**CL:** Today is September 30, 2005. My name is Charles Lenz. I'm interviewing Dorjee Norbu in Northfield, Minnesota at Carleton College.

Can you please state your name?

**DN:** My name is Dorjee Norbu.

**CL:** Can you spell that?

**DN:** It's D-o-r-j-e-e and the last name is N-o-r-b-u.

**CL:** And how old are you?

**DN:** I am eighteen years old right now.

**CL:** Where were you born?

**DN:** I was born in Jaipur, Rajasthan, which is in the western part of India. It's like the farthest west and then after that we moved to Northern India.

**CL:** What part of Northern India did you move to?

**DN:** It's a small town called Mussoorie. And it's about . . . I think about half an hour north of Dehra Dun which is like the big city. That's the closest, biggest city from Mussoorie. I moved there and I think—I don't remember the years and stuff but I lived there for maybe like two years. And then after that we moved south from Mussoorie. Like about another twenty minutes south to a smaller town called Rajpur and that's where I spent mostly kind of the rest of my life in India until I became—I mean I was ten and then I came here.

**CL:** So you did go—you went to like a—the beginnings of elementary school and primary and things like that in India?

**DN:** Yes. I went to—I did like pre-school kind of thing. It was like there was kindergarten A and B, I think. It's kind of hard for me to remember right now because it's such a long time ago. But like, there's like I think two levels of kindergarten and I did like a little bit of one in the Tibetan home school. I remember doing that. I might have done that for a year. And then I think my parents wanted me to learn English. So then I transferred to Mussoorie public school. And that's where I did almost another year of kindergarten then after that.

**CL:** So you weren't in a private school at all then.

**DN:** No.

**CL:** You were in a regular Indian school.

**DN:** Yes. But I think the Mussoorie public school might have—I think you had to pay tuition. I'm not sure though. But I don't think it was like—it was like completely public.

**CL:** So were you taught all in English then?

**DN:** I remember like learning the ABCs when I was young and then we did—like when we moved to Rajpur, I attended a school called Deep Children's Academy. That was an elementary school and we did—like it was supposed to be an English medium but English was almost like a subject that was taught. Like you didn't really use it as a medium to communicate with other students and like with your teachers and stuff. It was just kind of taught as a subject and we mostly spoke Hindi because everyone else spoke Hindi. And the teachers would sometimes tell us to speak English but it was just kind of more . . . kind of comfortable for us to speak Hindi. So that's what we kind of stuck with.

**CL:** Do you remember at all, was that policy of speaking Hindi and not English, was that mostly with the younger kids or the whole school? Do you remember that at all?

**DN:** I think like they advertised the school as being like an English medium school and like the name was very kind of like, like kind of Western. Like Deep Children's Academy and stuff like that. But they weren't very kind of strict with kind of enforcing that kind of rules. They were pretty flexible. Like they didn't really crack down if you spoke Hindi or anything. But like a lot of—like you would do like—they teach you like songs in English and you would have English subjects like that and you also—I think we also did history in English. The only thing that was Hindi was like there was a Hindi class which we took. So they tried to keep it mostly English but it felt . . . it didn't feel like you were fluent. Like I didn't feel fluent at all when I was India in English. It was just like a subject that I was learning kind of.

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**CL:** So were these—did you live with your family the whole time or were these boarding schools?

**DN:** I lived with my family the whole time. Yes.

**CL:** So who was it that moved to the U.S. first then in your family?

**DN:** My mom moved in 1992 with like the first immigrants to Minnesota. Through that program.[1] And then we kind of joined her later. After four years. In 1996.

**CL:** Did the rest of your family all go at one time?

**DN:** Yes. It was me and my dad and my brother. We joined her after four years.

**CL:** Do you remember when you found out that you were going to go to America?

**DN:** Yes. It was . . . I think it was like a . . . it wasn't like a shock. It was more like you knew it was coming up.

**CL:** Yes.

**DN:** But like it didn't come—it didn't feel like it came up all of a sudden because people would come and visit us. Because my dad had lots of friends in Mussoorie and also in Rajpur. And they would come visit like a month before. Like a month before, our house would be like—there would be people in my house like every two days or every three days. There would be someone that would come and visit us. So it was pretty like . . . it was pretty like . . . it was pretty well known to me that we were going to the United States. Yes. But it wasn't like a shock or anything.

**CL:** Do you remember when your mom left?

**DN:** My mom? Yes. I actually remember that. We all went down to Delhi, because that's where the international airport is. I'm trying to think who was with us. I think my mom's mother's brother was there, and he was with us. We rode a taxi. I remember we rode a taxi all the way down to New Delhi from Mussoorie. I remember like stopping in the way to kind of visit some relatives before my mom went off. We stopped in like one or two places that laid between Mussoorie and Delhi. Yes. I remember . . . because like back then the airport was—like there would be like a metal bar and the people who were traveling, like they were on the other side of the bar and I remember being on the side where you couldn't—that you couldn't cross. So I remember that pretty well. Like my mom leaving. And like we were just watching from this bar.

**CL:** Yes. How was that suddenly having your mom gone?

[1] 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.

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**DN:** That . . . like I think I might have repressed that memory because it was maybe too painful.

**CL:** You were too small to comprehend everything.

**DN:** I was too small. My dad said that I would—because we usually sleep together as a family in like one bed because we were really young at that time. So my dad said that I would sleep really close to him all like every night. For a couple months. I was sleeping like next to him. And after that I think we kind of—like I just slept with my brother and my dad would just sleep on one bed. But like he said, for a long time I didn't let go of his feet. Like I'd always follow him around. Like anywhere we would go in Mussoorie. Like if he was to go outside to buy something I could always go with him. But like I remember that kind of, but it's kind of like . . . the memory is kind of fading.

**CL:** Yes. So what was it like then? Do you remember the experience of I'm sure going back to Delhi again when it was your turn to come to the U.S.?

**DN:** When it was my turn, I think it was a lot more lively, because you didn't—like you knew . . . I mean you knew that you were leaving people behind. But I think—like I was kind of young. I was ten or nine. So I didn't have like really strong connections with anyone. Like my parents. It might have been harder for my dad to leave people behind because like he had all these good friends, like all these relationships that he'd developed over such a long time.

But for me it was like I was more excited kind of to leave. Because I wanted to like ride an airplane and I wanted to see America. Like you hear all these stories, you know, like when you're in . . . like when you—because my dad was a headmaster, which is like a principal. So we kind of lived in a community that had like a school and everything in it and like there was all these kids. They would like make up stories about what America was like and stuff like that. Because they had sponsors from America that would come and it was just like . . . it was just like they would bring things. They would bring like a football and stuff like that. It was just like all these new things. So I was just kind of excited to come and see everything like that. And then also because . . . and also, yes, it was a lot more exciting, a lot more lively because we were going. And yes. Everything was kind of moving at a fast pace. It was kind of fun.

**CL:** Do you remember having any like expectations about what you might see here? What it might be like?

**DN:** Expectations. I don't know. I mean, I think a lot of my expectations, like being cleaner here and like having more candy, more toys, and stuff like that, that was kind of all fulfilled in like the first month that we got here because there were a lot of . . . because my mom's sponsors were already like . . . I mean my mom's sponsors were obviously here. Because they were helping her out. So they bought a lot of toys for us on like the first day that we came here. Like they bought us toys and they bought us like all these coloring books and stuff like that. So like for that first month it was just like . . . it was

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almost like . . . it was like a heaven. Like . . . I don't know. It was just really fun. Like everything was like new. Like . . . we had a car, which we didn't have before in India. Even though like right now if you think about it, it was like a really used junky car. It was like, almost about to break down and it made like a really loud noise. It sounded like a scooter in India, kind of. It reminded us of that sound. But like . . .

**CL:** The auto rickshaw?

**DN:** Yes. The auto rickshaw. That's the word I was looking for. It sounded like that. But just . . . just because we never had a car before. Like stuff like that was just kind of like . . . like for the first month it was just really amazing. It was like everything was fun. Everything was new. But then slowly it kind of . . . like you started missing India and stuff like that.

**CL:** Were there any surprises at all? Were there any things that when you got here just wasn't the way you expected it to be or something new that you didn't expect to see at all?

**DN:** I don't know. I have to think about that one.

**CL:** Was there—do you remember what time of year you came?

**DN:** I came in, I think, at the end of June. Like my mom wanted us to come before September because she wanted us to start the school at the right time. So we came around . . . at the end of June. So we had like a whole month to kind of prepare and we did a lot of like comprehensive reading and writing packets that she bought for us and we did all that. And then like you had to take a test before you kind of went into the school. You had to take like a St. Paul District test and we took that. So that gave us a good time to kind of get ready for the . . .

**CL:** Do you remember, like were you excited for school to start or—?

**DN:** It's really hard to remember.

**CL:** Do you remember, did you like visit the school before the school year started?

**DN:** No. I didn't visit but my parents, my mom, she visited a lot of schools. So like I don't remember . . . I don't remember. That was like the first time. When I went to the school that was like the first time I saw the school. And I think I was kind of excited. Like I've always kind of liked going to school. Like even when I was young I liked going to school. Because in India I used to get like really good grades. Like they would rank students. So it was kind of fun because I always ranked number one in my class. So it wasn't like a . . . kind of like you didn't feel . . . it wasn't like a burden to go to school for me. It was more like . . . I don't know. It was like a place where I was like—it was something that I was good at so I liked going to school. It was like the same here. Like

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when I went to elementary school. Like I really—like the first day I was really excited. I liked going.

And I remember like my first class. I think it was like all Caucasian students almost. And there was maybe like three or four that were like Asian or like half-Hispanic or something like that. It was really kind of like—for the first couple weeks it was really hard for me to like tell—they all looked alike. Like most of the Caucasian students. They looked alike and it was hard for me to tell who was who. Like it was really hard. And they'd be like, "How can you not tell the difference me and him?" You know? And I'd be like, "I just can't. Like it's really hard for me to tell the difference between you and him." That was like one thing that was kind of . . . that I struggled with.

**CL:** What did you think about the teaching itself? The teaching style or the curriculum and all. Was that challenging? Because I know that the way things were taught here in the U.S. are very different from the way things are taught in India. So was the relationship with the teacher different at all or the teaching style?

**DN:** The teacher that I had for fourth grade, she was really strict. And almost, in a way, it was kind of similar to Indian. Like the teaching style. Because in India, I mean, the teachers are really strict and there's like a big gap from students and teachers. Like you have to respect them and stuff. But like—and it was almost the same here. Because my fourth grade teacher, she was really strict. We had to call—obviously we had to call her Mrs.—like her name. So like I didn't notice that big of a difference.

But one difference that I did notice was like in the middle of the class we'd have to get up and we'd have to go to a different classroom for another class. For like history I think it was. And like in India, I think we sat in one classroom for most parts. I don't remember moving a lot. So I think that was one thing that was different. And it was a like a lot more . . . like we did a lot . . . it was a lot more kind of group work. In India like I don't remember doing anything in groups. Like it was mostly the teacher would teach something and she would write something on the board and then you would kind of record that and you would like just take that in. And then she would give you work. Like she'd tell you to do this, this and this and it was all kind of like guided. Like you didn't have that room for kind of like self-exploration and kind of creativity. But here, we did all these different projects. Like . . . what did we do? Like we made butter out of milk and some whipped cream or something like that. So there were all these things that were just like . . . it was even like more like, I don't know, it was almost overwhelming because there was so much new stuff that I was learning at the same time.

But the only thing that's kind of like . . . that I found kind of weak about the American education system was math. Like in India, like even in second grade, we had already done division and stuff like that and really high like in—we had worked with fractions already. So when I came here in second grade they were just starting with like multiplication. With like simple multiplication. Like double digits or things like that. And that was like really different. Like that was kind of different for me, because I mean in a sense it almost like brought me—like it almost kind of pulled me back because there

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was no like advanced math class in elementary school. You had to kind of go with the class and that kind of like almost pulled me back, I thought. That was one thing. Yes.

**CL:** Do you remember anything about the weather at all? It finally started to get colder. I know okay, it's kind of cold where you're from in India but not nearly as extreme as it is here and certainly not for as long as it is here.

**DN:** Yes. I think . . . like people used to say that it snowed in Mussoorie. But I never—I don't remember at all. Like I don't remember . . . it must have snowed, but I don't know. I think I've forgotten. Because like in India you usually kind of stay in. Like you don't like really go out and play with the snow. Like you just stay. Because parents are worried that you will get sick. I was so young at that age. So I don't remember ever like kind of like having fun in the snow. But here it's like a different outlook. Like if it snows, like you're supposed to have fun. Like we would go outside. Like make snowmen and go sledding and stuff like that. So that when it starts snowing, like for the first time I thought it was really like . . . I found that also really fun. Like the school would take us on like field trips and stuff. And that was really fun. too.

And we did a lot of stuff like before it even snowed we did pumpkins. We went to pick pumpkins out of like an orchard, I think, or some farm. So that was all new. And like we'd never take—I don't ever remember taking field trips in India. Like our school doesn't have that money or the resource to do that. So we never did that. So that was something totally new. Like taking field trips.

And yes, snow. Like the first time, I don't remember like being kind of intimidated by it or anything at all like that. Like being worried that I might get sick or anything. I think I was just way too excited and I wanted to kind of explore and kind of go outside. So it was, yes, it was all kind of new.

**CL:** So when you started in elementary school you said that you were—everybody else was pretty much Caucasian.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** Just about, at least. And then, did that change at all as you got older? Through high school or were you always kind of like different from everybody else?

**DN:** Like I think elementary school was the time that I felt most like I fit in and then like when you start getting older you start noticing differences, like physical differences in people, like color and stuff like that. Like junior high was a time when people kind of developed like really like harsh stereotypes, I thought. And you kind of like . . . if someone's like nerdy or if someone's weird you kind of leave them out. You kind of outcast them. Like in elementary school I think it was a much—it was much more pleasant experience for me because everyone is kind of young and there's like that innocence still left and it's a much longer period that you're spending with the people, too, because you're always in the same class. Where in junior high you're split up and

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you go to your own classes that you have picked. It's almost like a mini-high school kind of junior high. And there was no recess and I think recess was like an essential time where we kind of bonded together. Like we played—like in our elementary school we played kickball and stuff like that. So in elementary school I didn't feel like that much kind of like—I didn't feel different. Like I never was aware of that. Like I always felt like I was fitting in pretty fine.

But then I think junior high and high school is like when I started—like when people started forming cliques. Like I didn't know which one to kind of go into. Like if I wanted to stick with my elementary clique or if I wanted to kind of form—and I remember like experimenting a lot. Like a couple months I would be in like the Asian kids group and then like I'd try to . . . and then like . . . like when I first started out I was with my elementary kids because we kind of all moved towards one junior high. Like a lot of us were in that group. And then slowly that group started kind of dispersing and they found their own interests and stuff like that.

So that was kind of hard because I think the friendship thing, like in the Tibetan community or even in India when you have like one friend,or like when you make . . . when you like build a friendship relationship with someone, if you're friends with someone, like it kind of continues throughout your whole life almost. Like all my friends that I have right now who are Tibetan, like most of them, I've known since like really young age, like since when I first moved here. Like when I was ten. And I'm still friends with them. And like some of them I've even known from India. So my definition of friendship is something that's like everlasting and is not something that like when your interests change you change. Like you learn to adapt with your friends. Even if they're different you kind of keep—like you kind of . . . like you are still friends with them.

But the hard thing for me was like when we went into junior high. The friends that I had in elementary school, which I thought were really close friends, like I felt like they were close friends to me, they kind of started dispersing and they kind of went into their own groups and they didn't really like kind of turn around and look back at all. And that was like . . . I think that was maybe like one of the strongest culture shocks, if you could call it that. That was one thing that kind of really threw me off. Like I was almost—like I was almost angry because of that. Because my friends from elementary school weren't able to stick together and I was really hoping for that kind of bond and that just wasn't there. So I don't know. I think it's like a cultural thing. Because like—I mean here they say if you lose touch with your friends it's just . . . you make new friends, you know? But my idea of a friendship is more something that's like kind of ongoing, everlasting. So that was—I think that was like the first culture shock that I felt.

**CL:** Do you—I know the area where your parents live now; there aren't very many Tibetans around there. So when you were in junior high and high school were there other Tibetans there, too, or were you kind of the only one?

**DN:** I think I was the only one for most of the parts. And then my brother would be there. But then he would switch. He was a year older than me. So like when I was

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seventh, he was in eighth grade. But then when I was in eighth grade then he wasn't there anymore. But in school, I think in junior high like it's . . . because there's like this class hierarchy almost. And it's weird to—like I felt like it was almost like weird to kind of share friends with my brother because like I had my own seventh grade friends. And then he had his own eighth grade friends.

But in the Tibetan community, like me and my brother, we both share friends and age doesn't really make a big difference. Because I think we share something that's kind of deeper. Like something that we have . . . that we all have in common. So like in my community I didn't—like I would share. Me and my brother, we almost had all the same friends.

But then when we got into school it was like a different dynamic. Like he had his own like group, close friends, and I had mine. So like even if he was at that school, even if he was in the same school, it didn't really matter that much. Because I would hardly see him and I would hardly spend any time with him. So that didn't really make a big difference and there was like . . . I think like there was like one year that there was like one other Tibetan student. But I didn't really . . . I don't remember spending much time with him either.

**CL:** I know that you just started college just a couple weeks ago. And even from a Western perspective, from somebody who was born and spent their almost entire life here, that when you're in junior high and when you're in high school, that that one-year difference, you know, people that are a year younger or a year older than you does make a difference. I think it's just kind of a high school, junior high thing. You know. But have you seen that changed at all? Are there—because I know, like once you graduate from high school, for me at least, you know, age really isn't much of a factor at all anymore. I've got friends from all ages, up and down and whatnot. So did you see that change at all or is it still kind of the same?

**DN:** I think like in high school because of that class hierarchy I found it really hard for me to really kind of make friends with kids who were like from a higher grade than me. Like who were juniors when I was like a freshman or something like that. Like it was almost like intimidating. Like anxiety kind of feeling that I got if I wanted to like build a relationship like a friendship kind of with them.

But here it's a lot different. Yes. In college. I really like the atmosphere here because there is no such class hierarchy at all and like in your classes, if you take some classes that are like—I mean right now I'm taking mostly classes with all freshmen but like still I've heard like if you—there's some classes where there's like a mix of all grades and I think that promotes kind of like a kind of cooperation within and it kind of gets rid of this class hierarchy, which I don't like at all.

And like here, like even on this floor that I live on right now, it has a mix of all different classes. So it has like some sophomores, some juniors, and some seniors and they're all—like I think we get along pretty well. Like I go talk to them from time to time just to

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kind of keep a close, like a good relationship, kind of a friendly . . . to kind of keep that friendly atmosphere here. So, yes. That's what I really like. That's one of the aspects that I really like about college.

**CL:** Have you talked to any of your Tibetan friends about this age hierarchy thing or age division thing? Do they have similar experiences to you?

**DN:** I haven't actually talked about it with them. But like . . . let's see. Yes. I haven't actually brought that up. I don't know if they feel the same way. Like I feel like in the Tibetan . . . like in the community, your friends, your age ranges, there's like from thirteen to like eighteen. So I think in my community it's really easy to build, like to become friends with other Tibetan kids. But I don't know how they do when once they're out in their school community or if they are making friends with kids from other grades.

**CL:** The area that your parents live in now, where their house is, have you always lived there or did you live somewhere else first in the cities?

**DN:** When we first came here we lived really close to downtown St. Paul in an apartment and then we moved. Yes. After that, we lived there until, I think, 2000. Maybe. Or 1999. I'm not sure. And then we moved to the house that we have right now which is really close, kind of closer to the Mississippi River than downtown.

**CL:** Were there Tibetans around you when you lived downtown?

**DN:** Downtown there was—like in our apartment there was about—there were two other rooms that were taken by Tibetans. One was a family and then one was just two guys that were kind of rooming together. Two Tibetan guys. They were rooming together. So, yes. So like we would . . . like we would . . . oh, no. There was actually one more on the top floor. So there was actually like, including us there was kind of like, if you can call it families, there was like four other families including us. So we would do things. We would try to do things together. Like we'd go to one's house for dinner, maybe. Once in a while. Like maybe . . . I don't know, every two weeks. Then we would invite people to come to our apartment room.

**CL:** Were there any kids at all in the building? Kids your age?

**DN:** Kids my age? No. There was one that was a lot younger than me. Like five or six years younger than me and then for a long time there wasn't. But then I think like two or three years later after we moved here, a family . . . like one other family kind of reunited who lived on the top floor. And he had a kid that was my brother's age and he also had one, he also had a son that was my age. So that was like . . . when they came it was kind of nice because we had like, actually we had Tibetan kids. Like we went across the park and we would just play around and stuff like that. So that was kind of nice. But then they didn't stay very long in the apartment. Or like—no. Like right after they came, like

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I think a couple months later, we moved. So it wasn't that—like it wasn't that deep of a relationship that we built.

**CL:** Did you find it—did you have trouble making friends with other Tibetans then? Because I know that there are areas that Tibetans seemed to kind of clump around. When the family reunification first started, you know, North Minneapolis and areas around there, there were lots of Tibetan families. And there still are but not nearly as many as there used to be. So because you were kind of always away from that epicenter of the Tibetan community, did you find it difficult to make Tibetan friends or was that always—were they always kind of like around and—?

**DN:** Yes. I think it's like Tibetan—I find Tibetan kids really friendly. And they're almost more friendly than kids in high school because—and I think it's also because we share a language and like we share a culture in common. So like when you have so many things in common, you just—like it's a lot easier to build friendships and like even if I was—even if I didn't live like where the dense, like where all the heavily populated Tibetan areas, even though I didn't live there, there was always like every month there would be some sort of gathering. Like a potluck. And we'd always like—because when we first came here the community was relatively small. Much smaller than what it is, like the size right now. So we would—there was a lot more activities that they planned. And there were some Americans that they planned, like they would plan trips to the circus and like ski trips and stuff like that. So that's when I met like—that's when I started meeting a lot of new other Tibetan kids that were my age. So I didn't—so like making friends, I didn't find that difficult at all within the Tibetan community. I didn't find that difficult.

**CL:** So you just started college a couple of weeks ago, about a month ago.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** And how is that going so far?

**DN:** It's—the transition has been kind of easy. I think it's also because like the first week everyone just kind of is super-friendly. Even the upper classmen. Because they know that we're freshmen and we're new here. So they are really nice to us and we also—like even ourselves, all the freshmen were really kind of friendly because we want to make a lot of friends when we're here. So like the first two weeks it was really smooth. Like I was meeting a lot of new people and there was a lot of like activities that they planned for us, for new students. We did that. Like we'd do discussions and like there was a play that we went to and stuff like that. So there was a lot of opportunity for us to interact with a lot of different students.

**CL:** Are there any other Tibetans here on campus?

**DN:** There is one girl. She's a junior. And she actually came to visit when I first moved in. That was kind of nice. She just came to say hi.

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**CL:** Did you know she was here already?

**DN:** I knew, yes. I knew there was a Tibetan girl here. But I didn't know like who she was. I just knew that there was one person here who was Tibetan.

**CL:** Do you think—is there kind of that bond that we were talking about that you seem to have with other Tibetans that wasn't as easy to establish with non-Tibetans? Did you find—have you guys hung out at all? Is there still that kind of like common language, common ideals that you talked about before with her, now being so far away from any other Tibetans but her?

**DN:** The thing is, I don't see her. Like I hardly see her at all and when I do see her it's like either we're getting ready for a class or stuff like that. So I just say like—I mean I speak Tibetan and I just say like hello or something like that and I just tell her that I'll see her later. But for me, it's much easier to go to friendships with guys so it's kind of uncomfortable for me to kind of start a friendship with her. Because like I mean she's a girl and I don't know, like I don't—like it's hard for me to kind of—I don't know why but it's just hard for me to—even if she's Tibetan. The fact that she's a girl is harder for me to make friends. I don't know.

**CL:** Have you found any difference in the teaching styles or the classes, the way classes are run or taught here, between high school and now college?

**DN:** The teaching style here. Well, the thing is, I did the IB Program and that's like—it's a lot of discussion in that class and in the IB Program, also.

**CL:** What is the IB Program?

**DN:** The IB Program? It's International Baccalaureate Program and it's like it's almost . . . it's an international program so there's a lot of schools around the world that follow this kind of course and it's kind of like an honors advanced class.

**CL:** Is that in high school?

**DN:** Yes. That was in high school. And it was like an advanced class and you had to take a test at the end of the senior year for each subject that you took for two years and like the IB Program kind of enforced a lot of discussions in class and it was a lot [more] discussion-based than like a regular high school class, which would just be kind of like a teacher just talking and then discussions, like really minimal discussion. And that's what I liked when I came here. Like I didn't find it that hard for me to adapt to the teaching style here. Because here it's also a lot of discussion and a lot of kind of learning from your classmates. Because like everyone is from—everyone has experienced so much and everyone has done something that's very different and they all come from like different paths of life or different experiences.

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So when you're in a class, especially like the class that I'm taking right now. Like one of the freshman seminars is called Growing Up Cross-Culturally. In a class like that we have kids from Japan. We have kids from China and we have one from Taiwan and stuff like that. So every time, like we touch all different topics. Like growing up in a different country. I mean we talk about adolescence, we talk about like kind of the early childhood stage and when we talk, when we bring stuff like that, like we always have really enriching discussions because you learn so much about other cultures through those kids who are from that culture.

**CL:** Are there like any kids that were raised all in the West, like raised in Minnesota or in the United States, in that class?

**DN:** Yes. There's like—I think it's half-half almost. Because I think the class, I think they wanted like a lot of American students to take it so that you would learn from the international student's experience. It's almost like a mix of international and American students. I think that was one of like the missions of the class. They wanted a class that was kind of fifty-fifty like that. So that you would learn from both sides. So, yes. We have about . . . like half of the class are kids who are from the States.

**CL:** So you've spent almost half your life now in the U.S. and you can almost think that those years, because you were older and kind of dealing with the world in a much more kind of a—I guess just that you were kind of dealing with the world more. As you get older we learn more and interact more. So interacting with the world more as you grow older. Is there anything in that class, whether it's someone who grew up somewhere else talking or someone who maybe grew up in Minnesota, even for you that has spent, like I said, almost half your life in Minnesota, is there anything that they ever say that surprises you?

**DN:** It's hard for me to think on the spot. Surprises. I think more than surprises like there's a lot more kind of like commonness that I discovered. Like I was able to kind of relate with kids here and then I was also able to relate with kids who are from another country because like the Chinese student would talk about how like her school was really strict and how before the classes started they had to kind of gather in an assembly and do the pledge and stuff like that and they were kind of enforced to do the pledge and stuff like that and that was like—I can draw similarities because that's how the schools were set up in India, also. But then the kids here would find that kind of like weird. I mean not weird but they found that almost as kind of like being forced to do something and like the kids here would bring up things about how you can like opt out from the pledge of allegiance and stuff like that. And then I could also relate to that because in high school you didn't have to stand up for the pledge of allegiance. So like nothing is surprising. Because I've experienced kind of like both sides of the coin or experienced both worlds. So like I can kind of relate to both and kind of add on to whatever they are bringing into the class. Like I can add on to their experience. I can also add on to my experience growing up in Minnesota. So it has been kind of a good balance, I think.

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**CL:** We talked earlier about your Western friends in high school and junior high and then your Tibetan friends and how you had just so much—you felt closer to them because you're just so much more in common from the get go.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** And you just mentioned a little bit ago that people here at Carleton that you've met are from all different walks of life and I think you mentioned, too, that everyone kind of starts off on a level playing field because of that.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** Are you finding it easier to make friends and build relationships because of that? I mean they may not be Tibetan. You may have grown up learning a different language. But because everybody kind of comes on, like you said, a level playing field, this is a new experience for everybody, does that make it easier at all?

**DN:** Yes. I think that makes it easier. And then also the fact that you don't have like a comfort zone anymore. Like when I was going to—like when I was in junior high and I was going through all the things that junior high kids go through, kind of like making friends and stuff like that and all that kind of chaos and like every time—like if I didn't kind of fit in, I would just—like I would always wait until the weekend because on the weekend I would meet with my dance group, you know.

And then I can finally be like, "Oh, well, I actually like fit in here." And there's always that kind of—like there's almost kind of that separation like junior high. Like that whole week it was just kind of like—I mean they were friends but they weren't that close. And then I didn't actually worry that much because then on the weekends I could actually kind of go to my real, like my true . . . like friends that I felt were kind of really kind of strong friendship bonds. And like here, you don't have that choice. You have to kind of build friendship here. Like you have to kind of meet a lot of new people and see what you have in common. Even though it's kind of harder for me because I find the process kind of—it's like a new process for me. I find it kind of—I don't know. I don't know how to describe it, but you just don't have that comfort zone that you can kind of fall back on.

**CL:** So you're kind of forced to take the plunge?

**DN:** Yes. So you're kind of, yes, you're kind of forced to make the initiative to meet people and stuff like that.

**CL:** I know your roommate is an international student. And that you—I remember you telling me that you specifically asked to be placed with an international student.

**DN:** Yes.

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**CL:** How's that going so far? Anything there? Any new experiences that you didn't expect at all?

**DN:** At first I was like—like the fact that I asked for an international student was because I would be able to—it would be easier for me to be able to kind of—it would be easier for me to build a friendship with him. Because I feel more like, I feel like I have an easier time building friends with people who are not from the States or like, I don't know. It's a weird thing. I think it's just how I kind of grew up and how I made friends with that process. And like the fact—like first I was kind of like I knew that, yes. Like for me I think it was a lot easier to make friends with my roommate. It was also probably because we spend a lot of time together.

**CL:** Yes.

**DN:** And I can understand where he is coming from. Like I know how he feels to be in a new country almost. And like I know all these new things. Like he brings up things that kind of shock him. He says he also has a hard time making friends with the Caucasian students because I mean they don't have anything in common as like in terms of culture and like music and stuff like that. But also because he has never interacted with people like Caucasian students. So like I can understand that and we talk about it like at night. And like I think that kind of helps our relationship kind of to—like makes it even stronger.

**CL:** How is living away from home?

**DN:** Living away from home . . .

**CL:** This is your first time, because I think you're one of the few that have been working on this project and I think of the four people you're the only one that didn't spend a significant amount of time in some kind of boarding school.

**DN:** Yes. That's true.

**CL:** This is kind of your first step away from your parents and everybody else.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** How's that going?

**DN:** I actually . . . I like it a lot, actually. Because like I feel like—I mean I feel like—I mean I feel a lot more independent. Like I mean even at home like I had—I mean my parents were pretty flexible. But you still like knew that if you didn't come home by such a time like such and such they'd be worried about you and like they'd leave the lights on and stuff like that. But here it's like you're like truly you're on your own. There's like no one to check up on you even if you don't go to classes. Like there's no one to really say anything. So you feel like, yes, you feel you're actually really kind of

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independent and I kind of like—I like that feeling and I think it's probably because two, three weeks I haven't really missed kind of the home like a lot because it's only three weeks into my college year. But I'll probably start missing it after a while. But I don't know.

Yes. And then like at home, I get distracted really easily. Because like there's something that I want to do and I just go downstairs and then like one thing would lead into something else, like talking with my mom and stuff. But here it's kind of hard for that to happen. Like if you're in your room then there's no one really to bother you. So I feel like I get a lot more done here. That's one thing. Yes.

**CL:** Have you been surprised at all by the breadth of classes? You're taking far different classes than they would ever teach in a high school now. Is that a good thing or bad thing at all?

**DN:** I think that's a good thing. Because like, because the kids that are in your class, like my Chinese like revolution class, those kids, they chose that class because they had some interest in it. So like you're all in there because you want to learn something about Chinese revolutions. So you're all trying really hard to kind of get the most out of the class. So I think that kind of helps kind of, like you learn a lot more, I think. Where in high school you have requirements that you have to do and like you didn't really—like there were kids in your class that didn't really even like want to learn the subject. That kind of distracted the teacher. That distracted other students.

But here, yes, it's a lot more—and then I like how the professors are kind of really like down to earth. In high school I had a hard time like building kind of relationships with teachers because I always saw them as being superior kind of. Because like the way I was brought up in India, like a teacher is almost—like there's a huge gap between a student's life and a teacher's life and you don't really ask a lot of questions about their life and stuff like that. So that kind of carried on here. Like I wasn't really able to build relationships in high school. Like maybe one or two teachers I was kind of close with.

But I feel like here in college, I find it, I don't know. I find it easier for me to just kind of go up to my professor and just talk. Because they're really open. Like they tell you what they like to do and like how many kids they have and stuff like that. And they tell you like what they did this summer and stuff like that. So that, I think that really kind of helps kind of, like it helps in building the relations between a student and a professor. And I like that about college.

**CL:** So I know back in St. Paul that you're part of a dance troop with the—out of the Cultural Center.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** Can you talk a little bit about that?

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**DN:** Dance troop. I think I'm probably one of the oldest members, but now I'm not official member or like I'm not a big part of it anymore because I'm here and it's hard to continue. Because they are practicing like every weekend and that's just not possible for me to travel up there every weekend. But even the teacher said that any time you want to come back, like I can just start learning from him. Like I don't have to feel like I'm not a part of it anymore. Like he said, it's always a continuing process. Like you'll always be learning new stuff.

So like that and like in the dance troop, I joined it in 1996, I believe, when I first got here. That was one way where I met a lot of other Tibetan kids. Through dance. And like I've always kind of stuck with it because I think it's like the first—like first of all, it feels good to be doing something that makes your parents proud. Because you feel like you have this, like you're doing something for your country kind of.

Like I didn't—back then, I didn't realize that. Like when I was really small. When I was like ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen. Maybe even fourteen. I didn't realize. For me it was just like a fun thing to do. Like I meet all these new—I meet all these Tibetan kids and I get to meet my friends every weekend. So it was a more selfish reason back then.

But then after I realized about kind of like cultural awareness and cultural identity and stuff like that, I kind of slowly learned how important it was to kind of pass on and preserve the culture. So then from then on it was kind of like a genuine interest, not because I just wanted to be with my friends. It was more like I want to learn this because this is what my culture is and I want to learn. I want to know the meaning of this dance or what it means when you're singing like this song and stuff like that.

So it changed from like this selfish kind of thing, like a selfish kind of desire to meet my friends and be with my friends to kind of like half and half. Like half wanting to . . . like wanting to see my friends from time to time but also because there was kind of this kind of genuine interest for my own culture and need to preserve it.

**CL:** Did you perform a lot when you were a more active member?

**DN:** Yes. We did like—even when I was young I remember performing for His Holiness' birthday and like in different—if he had—we'd hold potlucks for the New Year, the Tibetan New Year, for Losar. I remember performing like that. But those were just kind of like small performances. They were like one or two dances that I would do.

But then in the recent two years like we have been doing like whole shows where we have dances that are all done by like everyone in the group. So it's like a show that we put together. Like the first show that we put together was in August, I think, of 2003. Somewhere in mid-August and that was all songs that we kind of—like during that time we didn't even have a teacher. So those were all songs that we kind of learned by watching videos and stuff like that and getting help from other adults who kind of knew dances. And we did—like we also kind of mixed it up and we did some Indian dances which we also learned by watching videos. So that was like the first show that we put on.

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And then after that we did several shows. But then when we did those shows we had a teacher. We had a teacher who came here from Dharamsala.

So it was—I felt like kind of like a burden was kind of lifted off. Because being a senior, being like one of the oldest members, like it was always a burden. Like it was like my responsibility and then a few of the other senior members for us to kind of lead the practices and for us to kind of stick on the time schedule because we had a show that we were working for. So like once the teacher came, then it was kind of—I felt more like a participant in the dance, not a leader. I was more kind of a part . . . that was kind of a good change.

**CL:** I know that your current teacher now, the teacher that you've had for like the last year, that he studied at the Tibetan Institute for Performing Arts (TIPA) you mentioned before, in Dharamsala, which is a very respected music and dance academy. Teaches traditional Tibetan style and whatnot. How was it like when he came over? I mean besides not having to have such a leadership role anymore. But did things change at all as far as, you know, stylistically or what you were able to perform, what you were learning when he came?

**DN:** One thing that kind of sticks to my mind is kind of adapting to his teaching style. Like when you're like leading the group, kind of everyone follows what you want to do. And like the difference that I—the main difference that I found was that I like things to be kind of . . . like if I start something it has to be done before I start something else. So when we were going through practices which was led by me and some of the other senior members, we would learn a dance and we would learn it to the end. And then we would go and learn something else. Learn a different dance.

But how our present teacher, how he does it is that he kind of teaches like three or four different songs and then like you'll learn the beginning of these three different songs and then you learn the middle and then you learn the end. And it was just kind of like—it was kind of like entangled together. So I found that hard because that's just not what I'm used to. I like to do things and get it done and then do something else and get it done like that.

So I had kind of like a hard time adapting to his teaching style from that perspective. And like at times I wanted to tell him just to like—I just wanted to ask him if we could just like finish one dance and then do the next, but then I also felt . . . I didn't want to kind of pass my role as a student. Like I wanted—I didn't want to act like I was the teacher. Like I wanted him to kind of have his own role in the community. Like I didn't want to be kind of teaching him, because he is the teacher. And so I kind of let him like, I kind of let him kind of teach the way he wanted to teach and then I just adapted my learning style to his teaching style.

**CL:** Do you think he had a reason for teaching that way?

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**DN:** Now that I think about it, I think he did. Like because like some of the dances, there's a lot of similar moves. So like when you learn one move, if you learn like three dances that have that move you get really good at that move. Like if it's like a hand movement or a feet movement. Like they're really similar. Like in many dances. So if you learned that, then it's almost like practicing over and over again. So I think now that I think about it that was like a really effective way of learning. And then like the middle. And then you learned the middle later, which like a kind of like a different—like a change in movement. And that was also kind of similar to other, like the midsections of other dances.

So I think, yes, I think like—I mean it was good that I didn't like speak up and kind of protest his teaching style, because I think he knew what he was doing. Because he knows, like he has a lot of knowledge in the Tibetan dance and song. So it was good that I let him do what he wanted to do because I think at the end I kind of—like after kind of like the wide-angle view, after looking at it, I saw that it was probably—I mean it was kind of painful for me to go through the experience but it was probably more effective that way.

**CL:** Do you enjoy someone here now, a teacher that has so much formal experience and formal training? Does that enhance your enjoyment of it at all?

**DN:** Yes. I think that really helps, because like before, it was just you didn't really know what the future held for the music group. And now that you know that you have a teacher and you know that he knows so much about the culture, you know that there's—that we'll have something to learn like every weekend when we meet, so there's not a fear of like, what are we going to do next? Like you know that there is always something planned.

So it's good to have that kind of security. Kind of. Knowing that it's always going to—there's always going to be like a dance group for a long time. Because he's going to be here. I don't know how long, but he'll probably be here for a long time. So yes, that kind of helped. That kind of lifted another burden. A burden that's always kind of subconsciously in my mind.

**CL:** Why do you think it's important to keep doing things like the traditional dance and stuff like that?

**DN:** I think . . . like I think it's really important because we're not in Tibet. And in Tibet it's really hard to kind of follow your cultural—like your culture and kind of stick with your customs. Because they're always imposing things on you and like there's always a—there's always so much influence, like Chinese influence, and they kind of distort what Tibetan culture is. Like I've seen like videos from China like they had for the Tibetan New Year, where they had girls dancing in Tibetan chubas[2] but they were like doing like some weird movements. Like it was not even close to Tibetan cultural dances.

[2] An article of Tibetan clothing.

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And I think that's really harmful to what our authentic, true culture is. I think that's really harmful because it's changing culture. It's changing it like not for the better but for kind of for the worst. It's changing it so slowly it will disappear and it will kind of assimilate with kind of just like Chinese culture.

So I think because we are kind of outside Tibet and we have—like I almost feel, it's almost like a campaign against the Chinese, what they're doing to kind of get rid of our culture. So I feel like it's almost like our fight back. So that's why I kind of—I really like kind of preserving my culture and kind of showing—like raising awareness kind of, dancing everywhere. Like colleges and stuff. So they know what real Tibetan dance and what real Tibetan songs look like.

**CL:** Most of the Tibetans that don't live in Tibet are now in India. There are a lot of really experienced dancers there. And there are places like TIPA that have expert teachers teaching and training new experts. Why do you think it's important to be doing kind of the same thing here so far away from the majority of the other Tibetans?

**DN:** I think here you have another factor. In India like . . . in India the thing is, everyone is so close. Like you live—it's not like—it's a common thing to live within a community. Like they have camps, Tibetan camps, and you have everyone living . . . all the Tibetans coming up are concentrated in one area. So it's—you're always kind of exposed to the culture. You're always exposed to other Tibetan people and the language because everyone is Tibetan in that area.

But here it's like it's different because you have Tibetans kind of scattered around. Even though we're all kind of near the Metro area we're kind of all dispersed everywhere. And I think in order for us to kind of preserve our culture we have to try even harder than the people in India. So that's why we kind of almost have like a—we almost have to do like a double shift to kind of preserve because we're kind of scattered.

And like a lot of kids here, they're kind of—like a lot of the kids that were born here, a lot of the Tibetan kids that were born here, they really are almost—they're exposed to the Western culture right away as they enter pre-school and as they enter kindergarten and stuff. They're exposed to all these like songs that are nursery rhymes and stuff like that and like all these part of the American culture. And I'm not saying that it's bad, because you need to know that in order to fit into this society because you live in this society. But it's also kind of good to like remember where you came from and kind of remember what being a Tibetan means and like what a Tibetan . . . what Tibetan culture is. So that's why.

**CL:** You've been here now, like we've said before, almost ten years. Almost half your life. How have you seen the community grow in those eight, nine years?

**DN:** Let's see. In size it has grown a lot larger. I think because of that there is kind of distance between people. Like the people that you knew kind of like not when the community first started but when I first came here, those are the people that I kind have

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the strongest kind of bond with. Like a level of kind of like friends. Like those are the kids that I have kind of the strongest ties with because I've known them for such a long time. But now that the community is becoming larger and larger, like there's kids that I don't know and there's kids that I'm not kind of friends with. I don't choose not to be friends with them, but then they have their own friends kind of.

So like I think when it increases in size you get kind of a . . . kind of gaps between people. Like it's not as close-knit as it used to be. But I mean otherwise I think it's doing—I mean the community is doing really well. I mean because we have like our own Culture Center and we have—like we have been able to pool money for that and then we also have—like we have a lot of gatherings still. I mean the size of the community hasn't discouraged any of that. Yes. I think, well, like we're doing well.

**CL:** So as the community has grown, do you think there are any—talk a little bit about the positive things. The Cultural Center and whatnot. Have there been any like real negative things?

**DN:** The community growing in size. Negative things? I don't think so. I mean there has like—there is kind of like, when the community grows larger and larger, the people tend to kind of build smaller communities within the larger community. I think sometimes that could be negative. But then for most times, like for big gatherings, we're all together. So there's always a sense of this togetherness even though it's like a large community. But even at gatherings like His Holiness' birthday you have like little cliques kind of that form. But it's kind of like . . . it's like small wheels but they're all kind of together to form like a larger wheel kind of. So I mean I don't think—I mean I think that's just human nature. I mean you just kind of form kind of groups within bigger, larger groups. So I don't see that as a negative aspect. But yes, I don't—I mean I can't really point out anything negative.

Like I think even with like—just by having the Community Center, that's something that's been really positive, too. Because at least we have something that we can call like our home almost. It's like, to me it almost feels like my second home. Like I'm there so much that—like I'm there almost every weekend and in the summer I'm almost there like every other day for practice. For instrument practice. So it's almost like another home. Like I kind of like being there. It feels like it has like a positive vibe for me when I'm there.

**CL:** There was a shooting this spring. One Tibetan was shot. A Tibetan and one of his friends who is Hmong. They were both shot and killed. Did you—were you friends with anybody that was in the group that was involved with the incident?

**DN:** I didn't—they weren't like friends, but I knew them and I see them. Because our community is so small, like I will see them from time to time. So like—and like some people who were actually at the incident, like I knew—like they were kind of close family friends with us. So I knew them but they weren't like friends. I didn't like—I

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mean, yes. They were basically like, we were not friends but we were kind of close. Just acquaintances kind of. Like family friends.

**CL:** Did you have any reactions at all when you found out what had happened?

**DN:** I was kind of shocked at first. It was almost unbelievable and as time went on like I learned more about it and I think our community did a real good job of kind of bringing people together and we talked. We openly talked about it. It wasn't something that was kind of suppressed, which was really good. It is better to talk about it than kind of hide it in a community. So we had like open discussions. Like the whole community discussion at the Culture Center. We talked about what we can do to improve so that incidents like tragic incidents like this would not repeat itself within our community.

So I thought that was really positive. Like even at the discussion people were really open-minded. They were kind of . . . they were like, if they had an opinion they were willing to kind of share it with everyone else and that was good because that kind of brought like that kind of—that was kind of the purpose of the discussion to learn what the community was thinking and what was their reaction to the event. So I thought that was something that we did pretty well.

**CL:** Do you think in those discussions, do you think there was anything that came out that people were kind of surprised at?

**DN:** I think it's like—a lot of it is just kind of like the—it has always been an issue of parents spending time with their kids. That came up again. Like that was—that always comes up whenever we have conflicts in our community. Like that always comes up about how parents are not spending enough times with their kids and how parents are not kind of monitoring their kids well enough. That because of this they have—they discover outlets that they can kind of go—like they can do drugs and stuff like that and they can kind of not go to school. They can like hang out during school time and stuff like that.

So like a lot of that stuff came up and a lot of like—and because it was so . . . it was such like a . . . it was such a surprise kind of to the community. Like a lot of people willing to help. A lot of that came up. Like people were just kind of willing to do anything to help the family and stuff like that. So that was pretty—that was nice, I think.

**CL:** Do you think that drugs and gangs and things like that are a problem in the community?

**DN:** I don't think—no. Because gangs—and like definitely gangs are not a problem. And like drugs, I don't think there is—like there has been any major instances with drugs. There may be like one, like some kids who do drugs, but it's not—there's nothing that has kind of like harmed the community at all. Like it might—like maybe, like maybe one or two fights at like a party or stuff like that.

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But it hasn't escalated to like for something—like it hasn't escalated to a level that has kind of brought the community down or kind of like seen as kind of any—like it hasn't become that severe. Like it's just kind of like in any community that problem exists. Like with drugs. With students with drugs and so I don't think it has any big bad influence on it.

**CL:** Do you think there's a reason why—I mean, well, even though the Tibetan community here is the second largest in North America, it's still relatively small as, you know, other social or cultural groups go in the Twin Cities.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** And I don't think there's any other group that hasn't in some way been affected by drugs or alcohol or violence or gangs. Do you think there's a reason why the Tibetan community seems to have gone so long without a major incident like this?

**DN:** I think my opinion is that I think those . . . I think the students, I mean like kids from other cultures that kind of go into these like drugs and things is because they lack the kind of like—they lack support. Like they lack—they feel like they're kind of left alone, I think, and they lack kind of like relationships. I mean it may be with like your parents or with other people in your community and when they—I think when they lack that kind of a relationship they feel . . . I guess they feel depressed. They feel like they don't have a role. They feel like they're kind of just like a number in a community. So I think when that feeling kind of takes over then you resort to drugs to kind of suppress all that.

But like in our community, I think because even though if your parents are not spending as much as time, but you can—you always have that feeling that they have like a genuine, they have like a genuine—like you always feel that kind of genuine love from them. Even though they have to go to work. I mean that's just the case for them because you have to make money and that's just the case for a lot of families here. But even though like they're not with you all the time, you always feel that they care about you and I think that's probably maybe developed through some early . . . like parenting. Like process. It's probably different so I don't know how that.

And then also because the aspect of kind of friendliness in the community. Like even . . . like there is no such thing as kind of outcasting kids. Like in the Western kind of culture like in America like kids who are like weird you just kind of—you don't even talk to them. Like you kind of leave them out of your group. But like I've never noticed that in my community. Like kids, like I've never noticed a kid being left out. Like he always has friends and I think that really helps. That really helps in kind of minimizing the kids kind of resorting to drugs and like other things like that. Because even though the kid is like weird, the other Tibetan kids, they'll just kind of just adapt to the person. They'll always find a way of kind of building a relationship around that person. So it's not like—I think that's one difference.

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Like I've noticed that growing up here and then kind of going through the phase of junior high and high school. Like kids who are kind of weird, they're kind of left alone and like they're not really paid attention to and stuff like that. But that's like, that's really hard to find in the Tibetan community. Like even if you're—I don't know if like even if you're different . . . not weird, but even if you're different, there's always—you'll always find like friends within the community. So I think that really helps in minimizing.

**CL:** Why do you think or what do you think it is that has allowed say the Tibetans or the Tibetan community or whatnot to kind of—to be that way? To adapt that way? You know. What is it do you think that makes Tibetans then and Westerners or other Americans different in allowing or not allowing or including or separating out those people that are different?

**DN:** I think a lot of it kind of depends on stereotypes and also the society. Like if someone is different, you kind of fear them. Because like in America, even as a child in America you're told like not to talk with strangers and not to talk to people that you don't know. But like in India, in the Tibetan community in India and even within the Indian community, it's not like that. Like you just kind of—like even as a young child, at a young age I remember just kind of like exploring the surroundings. Like going to shops and talking with random people and like—just kind of like talking with random people in my Tibetan community and the Indian community. And I think that kind of helps break down a lot of the intimidation that you feel when you see someone different or a lot of like the feeling, like the weird feeling that you get when you see someone different and you kind of want to leave them out of your group. Like it kind of breaks down a lot of that.

And also because I think kids who kind of grew up here, they always have—like they are kind of born with a stereotype which is like either—and I find like—I don't know. Like the Western culture, it's like you're either good or you're either bad. Like it's either black or white. So you either fit in or you don't fit in. Like there is no middle ground. That's probably because of stereotypes from like an early time on. Like if you're weird then you're just kind of like—even like . . . I think even movies promote that. Like movies that are about like high school and stuff like that. They promote like the bullying the geek kind of thing and I think that really kind of—I think that's kind of bad for the society as a whole. Like media and movies that kind of promote that stuff. Like stereotypes.

Because . . . and I think you see that less in the Tibetan community because we have kind of been breaking stereotypes all the time. Like in India. I mean in India you have like the Tibetan and then you go to the Indian schools and you're interacting with a lot of different people. So you don't have time to build like the stereotype of who is bad, who is good. Like you're meeting all these different people all the time and then you move here and then you're meeting even more people that are different. So it's like you don't—you can't really sit back and say, "Well this is bad, this is good." Like if he dresses like that—I mean if he looks like this he's weird. Like that. But like—I don't know how to explain it, but . . .

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**CL:** But even the stereotypes, especially those stereotypes in India are so ingrained from day one, too. The caste system. Even though the caste system is technically illegal and constitutionally nonexistent, I think you and I and everybody else that's studied or been to India knows that the caste system is alive and thriving. So that there are those divisions that people are—they're not established. You're born with them. I mean whatever caste system you're born into. I know—you know, traveling around there are certainly things that you come across every day. You know, people that will not allow other people to serve them or will not touch something after somebody else has touched it or will not buy something from someone else from a different kind of caste. And the whole aspect of even Untouchables, which is this caste, this group of people that are so bad or dirty or whatnot that even, you know, associations with them are kept to a minimum. Is there something about the Tibetans, you know, living in that environment for forty, almost fifty years now . . . overcoming that seems incredible.

**DN:** Yes. But like maybe it's probably because we're—we don't kind of—I think it's probably because we kind of stay within our community so we don't really get to explore the Indian community a lot. So we don't get to—I mean we see that there is these stereotypes but we don't actually—but we don't actually kind of take that into our community. Like our community is like, I find it—I mean there is no like caste. I mean if there is, it's like it's really subtle.

And like, I think if you were—like as we were comparing between the American—like the American society and building kind of—and like the lack of like building, like talking about the subject of building friends and why it's a lot easier in the Tibetan community. Like I think it's because we lack a lot of that caste system and a lot of kind of like—like in the Tibetan community you don't have like stereotypes of like geeks being weird and stuff like that. Like if you're different it's nothing bad. Like I don't know how to explain it but it's just—I think that's one part. Like here . . .

**CL:** Do you think maybe individuality is more celebrated than it is kind of shunned because a lot of American culture is about assimilation?

**DN:** Yes. And like kind of fitting in.

**CL:** Buy the right clothes. Eat the right food. Drive the right car. That kind of thing?

**DN:** Yes. Where in the Tibetan like it doesn't really matter that much. Like friends. Kind of friendships are built on more internal things. Not like how someone dresses. If they have something that—something common that's like, kind of like superficial.

But it's probably also because once you're here you're such a small community and like everyone's kind of together and you really don't have a lot of choice, maybe. Because you always see the same kind of like twenty or thirty kids every weekend. So I think that also forces you to kind of just come together and build friendships.

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**CL:** I know that in our group discussions that went on, you being part of this whole project and whatnot, we've talked about the difference between Tibetans that have a, you know, a good grasp of English and Tibetans that don't.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** And Tibetans that have, you know, higher position jobs and Tibetans that have to work two or three, you know, less kind of—I don't know how you describe it. Less kind of, you know, ranking. We know that Western culture seems to kind of rank, you know, academics, doctors, things like that on the top and people who work in laundry rooms or whatnot kind of at the bottom. And we've talked about this difference. That there are those well off Tibetans and the not so well off Tibetans in the community. So do you think that there is an economic divide between the Tibetans within the community here in the Cities?

**DN:** I think even though there is like a huge kind of strata like between, like there is like, you have a good doctor in our community and then you have kind of like the people who are working in the hospitals and stuff like that. Even though there is like this huge—like there is a huge kind of a spectrum, when you're actually in the community and you're actually gathering together and when you're doing things together, that doesn't really . . . that doesn't really create any barrier at all when you're building friendships. Like that doesn't really affect anything at all. Like the doctors, they don't act different. Like when you're in the community, we're all Tibetans. That's how I feel. Like that's my opinion. So even though you're doing all these different like—some people are highly educated. Some are not educated at all. Like when you're together I don't—like there is no tension. There is no tension at all, and I think maybe that's also why there is kind of that friendly environment in our community. Because of the lack of that kind of attitude of like, "I'm smarter than you," or like, "I have a better job." Like that's really not there, I don't think.

**CL:** This might be kind of hard to do on tape but I'm going to bring this up. We've talked about difference and whatnot. And sitting in your dorm room here I'm looking behind you. There's a caricature on the wall. A quick drawing of you and three of your other friends. And the first thing I noticed about them, I don't know who the other three people are in this group, but that in this caricature you look similar to everybody else. That there's no ethnic or racial or cultural difference between, from you to any of your other friends. How do you feel about that? Do you have any opinion on that? Or anything that strikes you about that?

**DN:** I think, like for me, race or ethnic background has never been like a determining factor when I make friends. It's probably because I grew up in a different country where I was obvious—it was like my class was all, like my school was all mostly Indian students. So I was always exposed to kind of making friends with different people. I was just kind of forced to. So when I came here like it was really easy. Like some kids find it hard to make friends outside their kind of like, not race but outside their kind of culture, I think. And like for me that was like—that wasn't a hurdle. Like I could—I can make friends easily. Like it felt like I had an almost easier time making friends with people

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that were kind of multi-racial or like multi-cultural because I felt like that was something else that we had in common.

**CL:** So let's talk a little bit about the project now. You are one of four people that have been—one of four young college-age Tibetans that have been involved in this Tibetan Oral History Project with us at the History Center. Could you talk a little bit about how you got involved in it?

**DN:** I got a—like I found out through the Tibetan American Foundation website that there was such an opening and by the time that I found out, it was past deadline. It was past the deadline for to apply. So I just assumed that you guys already had like people that were working. So then I just kind of put that behind my head and I just—it was just kind of like doing my own thing. Because summer was just kind of starting up and I was making plans and like what to do and stuff like that. Then I got, I think it was either you or Jim[3] that left a message on my cell phone saying that I think that they wanted like—they were wondering if I was interested in becoming a part of the project. And when I found that out I was really excited because I actually wanted to do it but then when I found out through the website it was too late and I really wanted to be a part of this project, so like when I got that opportunity then I kind of took it right away and I became a part of the project.

**CL:** And you were really unique experience because we found out about you from somebody else.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** And they had said that you had done something with the Great American History Project or something.

**DN:** History Day Project.

**CL:** History Day Project. That's what it was.

**DN:** Yes.

**CL:** So we went—and since the History Day thing is run by our institution, we went to the guy that runs it and said, "We heard about this kid, this Tibetan kid. Do you know him?" He didn't know how to get a hold of you. But he contacted two of the people that I think you went junior high with that also did it and we got your phone number from them and called you. Because we were looking for one more person to participate. We didn't have any—we had two females at that time. We added the third female about the same we added you. We wanted a little bit of a balance in the program. So it was really . . .you were really a unique circumstance in coming to the program.

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[3] James Fogerty, Head of Documentary Programs, Minnesota Historical Society.

What was it about the program that made you interested? You said that you wanted to participate. So what was it that about the project, that little bit that you knew in the beginning that got you excited and wanted to participate?

**DN:** There's a couple things. First kind of the least important was I wanted, I need something to do in the summer. Like I didn't want to waste it. And then the second thing is I wanted to learn something about my community and I thought I would learn a lot by kind of doing these like kind of one-on-one interviews with kind of the—like not kind of just the people that are in my community that I don't know about. Like I see them all the time and I know their roles in the community but I don't ever to kind of sit down and talk and kind of get like in an in-depth conversation with them. So that was another reason.

And then the third reason was the importance of this project to the community and to the community like the larger Minnesotan community, I thought. Because there isn't—like there is nothing that has been documented yet about our community. Like our story as this project has done. And I wanted, I kind of wanted to be part of something that would be kind of—that would kind of help in bringing the community to kind of the public. So that was the main reason that I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to kind of make our community . . . kind of help establish it as like a group in the Minnesotan . . . the larger Minnesota history. So that was probably my main reason for joining.

**CL:** Do you think you've been able to do that? And do you think the project has been able to do that?

**DN:** I think . . . yes. I think the project has been able to do it really well. Because when we—like we interviewed a lot of different people and we have interviewed people from different backgrounds and how . . . like how they have adapted to life here. So I think even from someone who has no knowledge of the Tibetan community and who sits down and listens to this tape will kind of get a good view of—like they will be able to get a good view of what the Tibetan community is like after listening to a few of these tapes and kind of what are the struggles in the community that's so small like the Tibetan community. And kind of what are some things that we value in our community and also what are some changes that have been occurring within our community. So I think anyone who sits down and listens to the tape will get a good view or kind of a good grasp of what the Tibetan community is like.

**CL:** And you think that you've accomplished your second goal of learning some things yourself about the people that you've interviewed?

**DN:** Yes. I learned like—because before that I kind of had my own perspective on my community and kind of through by interviewing all these people I kind of learned different ways that people saw my community. It was kind of interesting. So, yes. I think that was—I learned a lot, actually. Like the kind of different perspectives and how the Tibetan . . . how individuals felt about certain things, certain events. How individuals felt about what they thought was most important in the community and what they thought

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was still something that the community was struggling with and stuff like that. So I think it was overall a really good kind of learning experience for me.

**CL:** Is there anything else that you wanted to add at all? Anything we haven't covered at all that you wanted to or anything you wanted to say at all?

**DN:** I don't think so. No. That's about it.

**CL:** All right. Well, I wanted to thank you very much for your time and participating in this interview and especially for participating in the project as a whole. You've been a really valuable asset to us and a great member to have on the team. So thank you very much.

**DN:** You're welcome.

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