

disapproved of the destruction of the ancient statues and religious texts. I didn't see what the revolution gained by destroying these things. They were already in existence, so why not just let them alone?

Perhaps more important, while I supported the idea that older people in power should be struggled against to cleanse the system of the old ways of thinking, I felt that the process was becoming much too indiscriminate. I couldn't get the example of my old friend Söpela out of my mind. I couldn't help thinking that the only reason he was singled out was that he was vulnerable—and perhaps because to keep its momentum the revolution had constantly to find new victims. Yes, Söpela had worked for the government in the old society. But they obviously didn't know him at all. He wasn't antirevolutionary. He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Despite all these doubts and disagreements, however, I still identified with the students and was on the side of the new activism. I have discussed these events and my ambivalent reactions many times since with various foreign friends, and they always ask the same question: "Tashi, you are obviously a good nationalistic Tibetan who loves your culture and people. How could you be a Red Guard?" I have thought about that question many times and the answer is always the same. Like so many others, I felt that Mao's fundamental ideas would be good for Tibet. I believed that in order to create a truly modern society based on socialist, egalitarian principles we first had to root out those in authority who were secretly against the revolution. In retrospect, I think this line of thinking allowed me and many other Tibetan and Chinese students to rationalize the excesses and wrongs we saw as unfortunate side effects of a vitally important political movement. Although I was never fully accepted as a Red Guard, in my own mind I felt I had a pure revolutionary spirit and enthusiasm, and I worked to further the Red Guards' goals. Seeing the changes in Lhasa and the lives of her people had shocked me and sown deep doubts, and I spent endless hours in the quiet of the night thinking about these issues and trying to evaluate their significance. But in the end, I continued to be full of zeal for the revolution. And I was not alone. Tibet was full of Tibetan Red Guards and revolutionary activists, and, to be perfectly honest, I was proud to be a part of that movement. We were creating a new and more equitable proletarian culture in China and Tibet for the well-being of all Tibetans and Chinese. Or so we thought. How ironic considering what was about to happen.

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The date was October 13, 1967. There was no warning.

The morning went normally enough, and after lunch I went to our regular afternoon meeting where political ideas and issues were discussed. I had just sat down, when the class activist sitting next to me suddenly stood up. In a loud, clear voice he said, "I suggest the anti-revolutionary Tashi Tsering be isolated from the people and placed under supervision." I couldn't believe my ears.

Obviously the whole thing had been planned well in advance. Even before the student who denounced me had finished speaking two others stood up and began to move toward me. A third ran out of the room and returned almost immediately with a slate blackboard with the words "Down with the counterrevolutionary Tashi Tsering" written in bold letters. While I stared at the blackboard, the two students who had been moving toward me took me forcefully by the elbows and marched me to an empty space near the front of the room. They forced me to my knees and pushed my head down so they could hang the blackboard around my neck. When the blackboard was in place my nightmare began.

In moments of trauma and crisis our minds race at amazing speed. As they were pressing my head down to receive the slogan-filled blackboard, my imagination began to play out the events of the past year, trying to see how I had been so blind to the possibility of what was now happening. People were yelling epithets all around me, but all

I could think of was my belief that I had done everything I was supposed to do and was not a counterrevolutionary. How could they be accusing me? I couldn't get past that question.

The weight of the blackboard and the shouting forcibly returned me to the present moment. The whole class left the classroom, pushing me ahead of them. As they marched me around the campus, students from other classes began to pour outside to see the new enemy of the revolution, and quickly a substantial crowd gathered for what was to be my first struggle session. In the span of a moment, I had been transformed from an agent to an object of revolution.

All eyes were on me when one of the class leaders raised his fist and began to chant: "Down with the counterrevolutionary Tashi Tsering! Down with the traitor to the Motherland." The crowd, numbering in the hundreds, roared back, "Down with Tashi Tsering, remnant of the big three exploiters."

The struggle session lasted several hours, but it was all a blur as one student after another came up and accused me of this and that, dredging up things I had said even casually or as a joke. For example, one female student from southwest Tibet screamed at me inches from my face that I had slandered the People's Republic of China by saying during a class a year earlier that there were so many people in China that it was like an ant's nest. The Chinese people, she yelled, were not ants, and this statement was proof of my counterrevolutionary views. I tried to answer truthfully, to explain what I meant, but my effort only seemed to make matters worse as students got more angry and accused me of being stubborn and obstinate. Some took glee in physically forcing me to bow at the waist every time the pain got too bad and I tried to ease up a bit. They made sure that I was kept standing bent over at the waist—that was the required style. I honestly don't know how long I stood that way, but after what seemed like a full day it was finally over and I was marched back toward the classroom. The real struggle was to follow.

I was placed in what had been a storeroom, just adjacent to the dorms. It was about three yards square and had nothing in it but two crude wooden beds. While I was being taken there, other activists searched my room thoroughly and took everything I owned, all my clothes and possessions plus my suitcases that were in storage, and even my watch and wallet. I had brought diaries and letters from my years in America, and all these I later learned were carefully translated

into Chinese. Other students stayed with me and searched me thoroughly; in fact, the school doctor even looked into my anus. I was in a daze, unable to understand why they were doing all this to me. I had returned from a comfortable life in America to serve my people and here they were looking into my anus for God knows what. I don't think I ever felt so vulnerable and insignificant.

From then on, my every move was monitored by students every hour of the day. Someone watched me when I slept, when I went to the cafeteria, and even when I went to the bathroom. Normally, they didn't talk to me, just watched. And for the first full week I was humiliated before the students by being made to stand at the front of the cafeteria at meal times wearing a blackboard around my neck that proclaimed my crimes against the state. I ate only when the other students had finished.

That first night I could not sleep because I was so frightened and angry. I kept thinking about what I had done wrong to bring this on, and how I could have avoided it. The thought of being sent to prison—which I had heard meant terrible suffering—was more than I could contemplate. How should I act to avoid imprisonment? Thoughts popped into consciousness as if my mind had started to operate independent of me. And several times as I started to doze off, I had a terrible nightmare of a horse jumping on top of me, crushing me to death. It was horrible. I was so frightened that I began to think that the only answer for me was to make a run for the adjacent railway station and lie down on the track as a train arrived.

The next morning, after breakfast, my real interrogation began. Six or seven student activists came accompanied by an older Chinese textile worker named Mr. Chen and our political ideology teacher, Ma Ximei. They were the team that would handle me. Mr. Chen turned out to be a skilled interrogator, and my main adversary. I had been separated from the people but my "crimes" were not yet decided, so the goal of the interrogation was to get me to confess to the crimes they believed I had committed. The process was like squeezing toothpaste. That's how we sometimes described it. The substance was all there in the tube, but would not come out until somebody gave it a good squeeze. That morning the squeezing began. It lasted continuously for about forty-five days.

I was seated on a stool in the center of the interrogators, and they began by asking me if I knew why I was picked out. When I said no,

Mr. Chen said, "Oh, I don't think that's true. I think you know very well." I was nervous and unsure how to respond since I knew that there was a fine line between being totally obstinate—that is, admitting nothing—and being too cooperative and confessing to "crimes" the interrogators didn't even know about. One could survive this process, I knew. President Wang, the head of our institute, for example, had been released back to society because the students finally concluded that his attitude was positive and revolutionary. On the other hand, one of the vice-principals was ruthlessly struggled against for a long time because he was labeled "stubborn" and hostile toward the Cultural Revolution: he had insisted day after day that he had committed no crimes, that he had served the party loyally since he was a youth.

At first, I decided to tell the truth, and not to make up lies just to please them. I also would not admit that there was anything wrong with what I had done, so I answered Chen, "Yes, I do not know why I am here." Ma Ximei and the others had worked on my case carefully, and Chen was immediately ready with key questions from my earlier years. "Who sent you from Lhasa to India?" he asked, starting a whole line of questioning on this part of my life. What had I done there, who helped me there? Again and again he hammered away at me, first moving one way, then another, and then back to the first in a slightly different context. I didn't want to say I went mainly to study English, so I said I went to do business and see religious sites. But no matter what I answered they didn't believe me, and there seemed to be no end of difficult new questions. For example, they made a big deal about the fact that other young Tibetans who were supportive of socialism went to study in China and joined youth groups, and even the reactionary aristocrats brought their children back from school in India to Lhasa, but I had done exactly the opposite by going to imperialist India for years. Now wasn't that peculiar? Why was that? Did you not like to live in China? Were you opposed to our society? That day the interrogation jumped around a lot—or so it seemed—but came back to three main questions: Who sent me to India? Who sent me to America? And who sent me back to China? They saw my movements as too incredible to be just a coincidence. There had to be a deeper, more sinister explanation, and they were adamant about ferreting it out of me.

I said truthfully that nobody had sent me anywhere, that I went on my own. I started explaining how I raised the money I needed through

Sounds like 1984

trading, but Mr. Chen quietly interrupted to lecture me on the party's line regarding such interrogations: "Tashi, we examined your behavior and we have suspected you for some time. That's why we picked you up. You are now under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Chairman Mao gives you an opportunity to become a proletarian intellectual and serve the people's interests, but you must tell the truth and transform your old thoughts and ideas. If you resist cleansing your dirty mind, refuse to report your previous crimes, and do not expose your criminal partners in crime, we will show no mercy. The party's policy is that those who collaborate with us are treated with leniency; those who are stubborn and do not cooperate, we send to prison or a labor camp. So please tell us everything. We know what you have done very well, but it is up to you to confess and repent."

Day after day, they hammered away at me, asking endless questions: What kind of papers did I travel on? Who helped me find a British teacher? How did I pay for the expenses? What was my goal? What work did I do? As the days turned into weeks, I began to falter. They were very good at interrogation—at squeezing out toothpaste.

No matter what I answered, my interrogators wouldn't believe that I could have taken all the steps necessary to go to India and America on my own. While they had no proof the Dalai Lama sent me to India or that the United States was behind me, they pushed hard, trying to use logic to destroy my presentations. Sometimes these sessions were mild, and the interrogators simply tried to coax me to cooperate. But sometimes they would yell at me and threaten me with prison and so forth if I persisted in being obstinate. And all the time I thought over and over about what I should say. Should I tell them 100 percent, or should I leave out some things I felt they couldn't possibly know? Gradually, I began to admit "small" mistakes such as going to India rather than China or comparing China unfavorably with the United States—comparing the abundance of milk in the United States, for example, to the shortage of boiled water in China. Often I blamed capitalist influences that had invidiously affected my thinking, since I thought they would accept this explanation. But all the time I refused to accept blame for any serious crimes. Then toward the start of the third week of nonstop interrogation, as they led me once again through my years in India in great detail, I decided to tell them truthfully about how I had worked for Gyalo Thondrup, the Dalai Lama's older brother, and how he had sent me to Assam to interview newly arrived Tibetan refugees in 1959

just after the Lhasa Uprising. Since these accounts had ended up being the basis for the International Commission of Jurists' scathing report on Chinese aggression and atrocities in Tibet, I knew this admission was a risk, but I thought it was better to be frank and try to downplay my role as just that of a lowly worker (which was true). But it was a dreadful mistake. They rejoiced in this information and used it as proof that I was an advocate of Tibetan independence, a serious crime. I should never have told them about this work; they didn't know and probably would never have found out. But I wasn't sure and was too afraid to lie.

And so it went, day after endless day enduring tough interrogation sessions, each of which was followed by writing accounts of my life history in the evening—all the things I had done against the people, against the state, and against the revolution. During this period I was totally isolated and spoke to no one except the guards and interrogators. Usually these interrogation sessions were not violent, but sometimes a student would become abusive and pull my hair or kick or slap me around. I was miserable and sad and frightened all at once.

But no matter how many questions they asked, I refused to admit that I had been "sent" to America or that I was working for anyone when I returned. I insisted I came back of my own free will to serve the people. One day, about three weeks after the interrogations started, the interrogators were reading the notes I had written the previous evening when they came across a quotation I had used from Chairman Mao that said something to the effect that "the dark clouds will wither away and the bright twilight will soon break out." They immediately became livid with anger and started screaming at me: "How dare you use Chairman Mao's quotation like that. Do you think we are your enemy? Do you consider that we and the Communist Party and socialism are your enemies? Who is this darkness? Whom are you referring to when you talk about the darkness? And whom are you referring to when you mention the twilight? Tell me today what you are talking about, and why you wrote that? Do you consider us as your enemies, and are you threatening that some backers of yours are about to defeat us?" Nothing I said made the slightest difference to them, and they ended the session saying that my attitude toward the Cultural Revolution must be corrected.

The next day when the morning interrogation session began there were no questions. They at once put the blackboard around my neck

and half-pushed, half-dragged me out to a hall packed tightly with about five hundred students and teachers waiting to struggle against me. This meeting, my second large struggle session, was organized by Chen and Ma Ximei for the purpose of teaching me a lesson for my use of Mao's words. They thought I was so arrogant and obstinate that I needed to be humbled. It was their strategy for breaking people. These large meetings were really not to find out information, but rather to intimidate and put you down.

The meeting started when the student leader yelled out, "Drag in Tashi Tsering the counterrevolutionary." As I was being pushed in others shouted, "Down with Tashi Tsering's arrogance," "Down with the enemy of the Motherland," and so forth. Then the highly theatrical public accusations began. The first accuser was a young girl from Nakchuka in northern Tibet. She started accusing me of being against Chairman Mao's thought and Marxism-Leninism. When I gave a good rebuttal, Chen himself jumped in and said that I was reactionary, stubborn, and arrogant—not with the arrogance of an ordinary man but with that of a counterrevolutionary. What he meant was that I was so counterrevolutionary that I had a very strong mind enabling me to dare to say clever things against the revolution and the interrogation. That's what counterrevolutionary arrogance meant. Chen then launched into questions about the quotation by Mao I had used: "You seem to consider that we are your enemy, is that right? If not, who is this darkness? To whom are you attaching the word 'darkness'? Whom are you referring to?" he asked me. "Who is the darkness and who is the twilight? Tell me why you said such things?"

I responded saying that the darkness was my situation. "I am here now and have become the enemy of the people. I'm sorry to have become such a man. When I said darkness I meant darkness for me, not for you and not for anybody else. It's darkness only for me." Naturally Chen wasn't satisfied by my answer and simply responded harshly with another question. "What is the twilight?" he asked, speaking to the crowd and looking smug and self-satisfied. I said that the twilight was also a description of me. "It's something I'm expecting to become; it is only something better than the darkness I am in now. That's what I consider to be my twilight. I really didn't mean to insult you or the proletarian class."

Chen, of course, was having none of it and retorted, "You are stubborn and persistent in your dirty ideas. Your attitude toward the Cul-

tural Revolution is a disgrace. You know the Cultural Revolution of the proletarian class is so great. It is the initiative of great Chairman Mao, and it is guided by our great Chairman Mao." Then the whole meeting joined in, somebody shouting, "Down with the reactionary lackeys of imperialism," and "Down with the traitor Tashi." Finally, after several hours, the manager of the meeting said, "Tashi Tsering, the party policy is clear. You know it very well. There are two ways that you can choose. You can go along on the enlightened road or continue on the path of the black road, the hell road. This is totally your choice. If you are honest with us and show a good attitude toward the revolution, then you may get a light punishment. But if you maintain this stubborn opposition, we will find out everything and you will be severely punished."

The next day, after breakfast, the interrogations continued nonstop. After a few weeks more, I got so fed up with the same questions and insinuations every day that something inside me broke and I did something wild. I no longer cared what they did to me. All I knew was that I wasn't going to say what they wanted, and I wanted them to know that clearly. One of the guards was a rather nice boy, and that night he was on guard duty with me. I asked him to please write me a few sentences in Chinese since my writing skill in Chinese was not very good and I wanted everyone to be able to understand perfectly. He agreed, and I dictated a statement that had three simple points:

- statement
deklaration
1. When I left Lhasa in 1957 and went to India for studies I left alone, on my own, and was sent by nobody.
 2. When I went to America to study, the opportunity was obtained through a Williams College student named Robert Dunnam, whom I met in India, and I left against the wishes of Gyalo Thondrup.
 3. When I left America, it was against the urging of my Tibetan friends. I made the decision on my own. Therefore, in all these three events nobody sent me. If you have any evidence that contradicts this, I will take the full responsibility.

At this point I wanted to let them know that this was my final word on these matters so I took a small needle and stuck myself in the finger to draw blood and then I signed the letter affixing my thumbprint in blood. Whatever the consequences, they now knew I would admit to nothing more. Afterward, the questions gradually stopped. My answers were not good enough to convince them I was telling the truth, but at least this phase of the questioning was now over.

My private prison ended soon after that, and I was sent to a large building near the center of campus that was a makeshift jail for people in my situation. It was so dirty and horrible that everyone called it the "cow shed." My fellow prisoners were mainly teachers, writers, intellectuals, and officials from the school. There were both Han Chinese and Tibetans there. The Cultural Revolution did not let ethnic background influence the targets. We numbered between 160 and 170 souls, each of whom was considered a class enemy in some way. By far the largest group were teachers and administrators. Ma Ximei's husband, Mr. Wu, who had been the head of the Education Department, was among them. Only those considered genuinely "proletarian" intellectuals had escaped persecution.

Our daily routine was rigorous. We were made to get up early in the morning, given some watery rice soup, and then sent to the fields to do intentionally demeaning manual labor. We worked in the pigpens or carried human excrement and urine from the institute to the fields, where it was used as fertilizer. We also, of course, were still subject to relentless and systematic indoctrination to correct our thinking. In the evening we were divided into study groups in which we read Mao's works, newspaper articles, and party documents. We were then made to write personal reports of our crimes and our thoughts about historical and recent events. We also had to include accounts of what they called "living thoughts"—our daily, hourly, and minute-by-minute mental activities. Periodically, individuals were called out for interrogations or to be the centerpieces at mass struggle meetings, like the ones I have described above. The interrogations were always one of two kinds—the rough ones that involved physical beatings and intimidation, or the more gentle ones that just involved yelling and insults. During those evenings in the cow shed, some of the worst experiences for me were when we were all made to stand for several hours before going to bed. While we stood at attention, members of the Red Guards would walk past and scream insults and slogans at us. We were made to bow our heads and not look at any of them above the chest as they shouted things like, "You are now under the proletarian dictatorship. If you clean the filth out of your dirty minds, if you honestly report your previous crimes, if you agree to report the criminal activities and thoughts of your colleagues and collaborate with us, the party will be lenient and reward you."

The private prison lasted into the next year, but in the spring of 1968 we got a kind of reprieve. The worst excesses of the Cultural Revolu-

tion were beginning to be seen for the disasters they were, and the Communist Party issued an order that private prisons like ours were to be abolished and the prisoners released. And so we were, but little in my own situation changed for the better. When I left the cow shed I discovered that the majority of my classmates had by then completed their work at the school and in many cases had already been sent back to Tibet for their first assignments. My heart ached with envy when I learned that they were being allowed to begin doing what I had risked so much to attempt, while I was still clearly under suspicion as a class enemy and forbidden to join them or return to my country. As it happened, though, I didn't have a lot of time to feel sorry for myself.

The threat of a war—it was feared a nuclear war—between Russia and China was brewing in the later months of 1968. (Actual hostilities broke out in 1969 and the whole school was evacuated.) Because of the general threat of possible nuclear attack, those of us who were left at the school were sent to Changwu County (a six-hour drive) to help dig fallout shelters. This was to be my period of what the Chinese called “mass probation.” I was not in jail but not free and thus liable for all kinds of forced labor. This new status involved the same kind of indoctrination and intimidation and also some extremely hard manual labor.

We spent most of our days underground in tunnels not more than a yard high and two yards wide, where we hacked at the hard brown soil with pickaxes and shovels and carried out the loose soil by hand. We began early in the morning and stopped only for minimal meals that gave us just enough nourishment to allow us to continue the digging. And the evenings were the same as in the cow shed—the same routine of study, self-examination, and verbal or physical abuse. After the full evacuation of the school in January 1970, the atmosphere became even worse. Besides everything else, there were more people around whose duty it was to spy on one another and report possible criminal activities. There was a point at which I remember thinking that my situation couldn't possibly get any worse or seem any more hopeless than it had already become. I was wrong.

On March 23, 1970, there was to be another mass struggle meeting and this time I had a feeling something big was up. When the meeting was about to begin, two Red Guards escorted me to the meeting ground but kept me off to the side. I remember it was a crisp, beautiful day. The sky was a brilliant blue, and the air was clear. Suddenly I heard a voice saying, “Now the meeting is to begin, and Tashi Tsering,

spy and advocate for Tibetan independence, should be brought forward.” The two guards then marched me roughly to a spot before the platform and directly facing the crowd. I raised my head a little and saw that the meeting ground was packed; there must have been six or seven hundred students and teachers present. Before I even had time to think, one Red Guard forced my head and neck down and said in a voice that the whole assembly could hear, “You are now before the people's court, and you had better remember how to act.” Then the chairman of the meeting read the order for my arrest, issued by the security office of Changwu County. When the arrest had been formally announced, two young soldiers tied my hands tightly behind my back. The blood seemed to have rushed out of my body, and I was trembling. After being released from the cow shed, my worst fear was being realized: I was being formally found guilty of being a spy and advocate of Tibetan independence. While I was still trying to understand my situation in full, a sharp pain brought me back to the reality of the moment. These first two students didn't seem to be able to pull the cords tight enough, so a Tibetan teacher stepped forward and pulled the ropes so tight that I knew he was intentionally trying to hurt me. The youth was extremely proud of himself. By this dramatic gesture, he had made himself a “people's hero,” and he was later rewarded with a judgeship on the Chamdo high court.

When I was tightly bound, Ma Ximei walked slowly up the steps onto the platform and addressed the crowd. In a loud, clear voice she said she was there to expose what she called my “sky-full of crimes.” The two principal charges against me, she said, were that I had received a letter from an American named Tolstoy directing me to wage war against the barbarian communists, and that in an article in an American newspaper (the school paper in Seattle) I had said that Tibet was independent. When the young, idealistic students and soldiers in the crowd heard these charges, they began to shout, and then hiss, as a sign of great surprise and disapproval. Both these events were partially true, but they had happened in America and Ma Ximei very cleverly had now made them seem as if they had occurred after I had been in China. Ma Ximei continued with a full report of my crimes, my work with Gyalola, and so forth. The meeting ran its course. And when it was over I was thrown tightly bound into an open truck, guarded by armed soldiers, and driven off to the Changwu County prison. My worst fear was now about to become reality.