

Preface

The following work presents photographs from my exhibition on the people of Tibet. I think of it as a small expression and window into my experience among the Tibetan exiles in Northern India where I studied, worked, traveled, and lived. I first arrived in India in the fall of 1990, as a young American just out of college. I went together with my two Tibetan friends from the University of South Florida, Jampal Chosang and Lhundup Tsering. Jampal and Lhundup were returning to official posts in the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in India after having completed two years of academic study. Thanks to these friends, I felt welcomed and was able to immerse myself in the Tibetan refugee society.

During my stay of almost a year in India, I learned much from Tibetan teachers, from the many friends I made, and from the variety of people I interacted with. On my day of departing, several close friends came to wish me a safe journey and each placed a traditional white silk scarf, called a *khata*, around my neck. I remember having quite a few of them on before getting into the taxi. It was a difficult moment for me as my taxi started driving away. The happy memories of that year remain vivid in my mind and as strong as ever. They shall last my lifetime. Sometimes I look back and wonder why I didn't stay longer. But I remember why. I had felt a strong sense of urgency about raising global awareness about a cultural genocide. I would like to mention one more thing: I learned from my Tibetan Buddhist teachers that when one's mind thoughtfully reflects and opens wider to compassion, one's identity can expand beyond the narrow limitations and identities embedded by our given upbringings and societies, past those identities defined by one's birth, nationality, religion, ancestry, and even species. While these identities ever remain part of who we are, we have the potential to reach out and connect with all. A different person returned to America. I came back as both an American and as a Tibetan.