

family in Lhasa. He tried to explain something to me but I couldn't understand. Uncle had gone out somewhere so we had no one to interpret for us. Kalsang drew out stick figures of his *amala* and *chola* then added additional lines representing bars on a page of my notebook. Kalsang placed his wrists together as if handcuffed and quickly picked up the English words, “locked up”. The message about his mother and brother was quite clear. I soon learned that earlier that year, Kalsang fled from Tibet with his wife, Chungdak, and their three-year-old girl, Pema Dolkar. Kalsang's dramatic story about his family, his risky work doing information gathering, his detention, torture, and escape, is material for a whole book in itself.

This world was so far from the comfortable American life I had been used to and had always taken for granted. Things that Americans typically care about seemed rather trivial. Even with such great hardships, Tibetan refugee life seemed to me to be anything but somber. It is continuously full of activity, strong hopes, and even smiles despite the situation. After just a few months, I felt part of a large Tibetan family. I loved mixing with Tibetan people from all kinds of backgrounds – those who had lived in India most of their lives, the “newcomers”, monks and laypersons alike. No Tibetan person ever seemed to mind my Socratic inquiries into the religious beliefs they held either. I also joked with Tibetan friends that the newcomers are *kushus* (apples), and Tibetans who stay in India become *tsalumas* (oranges), because only the fresh Tibetan newcomers have light complexions and bright rosy cheeks.

Kalsang's story stayed on my mind. The more I began to meet Tibetan newcomers, the more Chinese oppression in Tibet became real to me. It became very clear to me that the Tibetan freedom movement and fight for justice was alive and full of hope. As I felt part of a large family now, I also felt that I had to do something to help the family. I think this is the basic feeling that many international friends of Tibet share. I decided to photograph a number of Tibetan refugees, and ask each individual to tell me about how the Chinese occupation of Tibet directly impacted their personal life.

I first returned to the U.S. in the late summer of 1991. I spent a few years focused on exhibiting the work that makes up the content of this book. I worked at temp jobs, at a restaurant, and also taught a few classes in photography. These part-time jobs helped to pay most of the expenses for producing my show and traveling with it. There were many helpful people along the way too. Those two years were full of ups and downs. I soon learned to understand what it was like to be a “starving artist” as I lived very frugally. But I always felt great satisfaction when the work was up on walls for the public to view and I remained constantly motivated about my purpose. All I had to do was to think of my Tibetan friends – the situation in Tibet, the reality of refugee life, and the Chinese assault on Tibetan Buddhist culture – to remain focused and inspired.

Having now lived a while in both the U.S. and in Japan, I found then and still find today, a lack of awareness about the Tibetan people's situation and its urgency. I have met many people who even think that the Dalai Lama currently lives in Tibet. There are many that think Tibet is an independent country – *at present*. Many people remain entirely ignorant of the take over of Tibet by the Chinese communist government by methods of deceit and intimidation followed by sheer armed force. They are unaware that the Dalai Lama fled to India, that Tibetans suffered (and still suffer) immeasurably under communist rule, and