

## PERSONAL JOURNEY

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### Personal Journey: A plea to China: Just go home

By Margie Goldsmith  
For The Inquirer

The elderly Tibetan woman at her loom in the Tibetan Refugee Center in Kathmandu, Nepal, looked at me with sad eyes. "Please," she said, "tell everyone back home and on the Internet - tell the Chinese not to get out, but to go home. We wish them no harm, but please tell them to go home."

I shot pictures as she pulled the colorful yarn expertly through the loom and knotted it by hand. She smiled for the camera, but tensed up as she asked me to pass on her message to everyone back home. And while this happened a few years ago, the message remains the same.

My trip to Tibet in 2000 was organized as the 10-year anniversary of the Everest Peace Climb, in which Americans, Russians and Chinese scaled Mount Everest to show they could work together despite differences in politics, language and climbing styles. A group of us went to sightsee and to climb partway up the mountain that Tibetans call Chomolungma, or Goddess Mother of the World.

At 11,460 feet, Lhasa is one of the highest capitals in the world, and we got used to the altitude by visiting the 360-year-old Potala Palace, the former home of the Dalai Lama. I expected what I'd seen in the movie *Seven Years in Tibet* and was dismayed to see modern buildings of concrete and blue glass that were out of character with the ancient city.

For 2,000 years, Tibetans have lived on gravel slopes without trees, bushes or even a blade of grass. They have farmed in some of the most severe conditions on Earth, beneath jagged brown peaks, in the shadow of the towering, white-peaked Himalayas. As we drove across the plateau, we'd pass a Chinese Army outpost every 30 miles or so, but we focused on the farmers plowing their mud-caked fields with yaks and the women sowing seeds from cloth sacks slung across their shoulders.

We visited monasteries in Shigar and Shigatse, where monks chanted, sometimes accompanied by horns, drums, and cymbals. For four days, we bumped along dirt roads before finally arriving at Mount Everest.

The plan was to climb to an advanced base camp at 18,300 feet, but I'd been worrying the entire trip: What if I couldn't handle the trek?

We set up our tents near the Rongbuk Monastery, which once housed more than 500 monks. In 1959, during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese destroyed much of the building and slaughtered all but a handful of the monks. On ly a score of nuns and monks remain.

Our climb took us to the ruins of the Changchub Tarling Nunnery, which the Chinese destroyed in 1959 and will not allow to be rebuilt. What harm could praying nuns possibly do, I wondered. Why did the Chinese seek to destroy Buddhism? Why couldn't the world operate more like the Everest Peace Climb and work together as a team?

My "team" and I did make it to the advanced base camp - only about 10,700 feet from the summit. The wind howled as we stared down at huge seracs that looked like giant blue waves frozen in space. We pulled out a set of Tibetan prayer flags, tied them between two rocks, and sat contemplating the unworldly ice wilderness.

Now, each morning I read headlines about the Tibetan lockdown by the Chinese. The other day, I bought vegetables from a Tibetan exile who lives on Long Island. What a terrible thing is happening in Tibet, I said. "Yes," he replied, "but it is making everyone aware of what is going on, so this is a good thing."

My prayers are with the Tibetan people, especially the elderly woman who sat at her loom eight years ago, pleading with me to tell the Chinese that the Tibetans mean them no harm. They simply want them to go home.



MARGIE GOLDSMITH

In 2000, a Tibetan woman at her loom in Kathmandu made an appeal to a visitor that seems current today.

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