

**NICK GRAY** *with* **LAURA SCANDIFFIO**

A True Story

**ESCAPE**  
*from* **TIBET**

**FOREWORD BY**

**HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA**



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THE DALAI LAMA

## FOREWORD

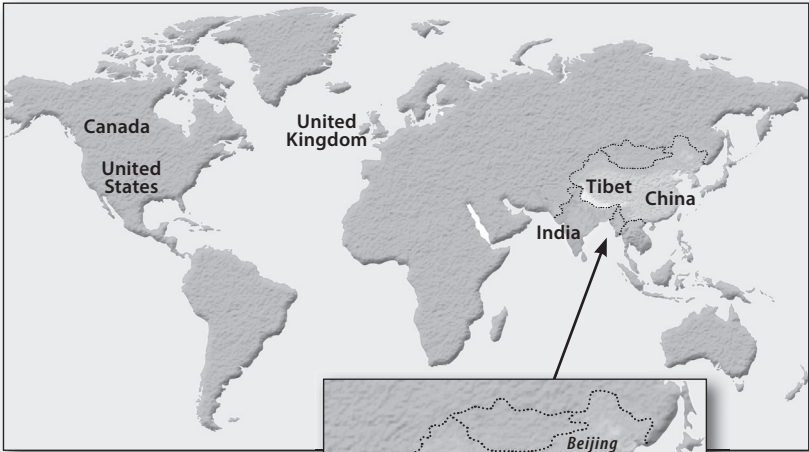
It is now more than fifty years since events in my homeland compelled me and many tens of thousands of other Tibetans to seek asylum in India. We not only lost our freedom, but the very survival of our culture and our identity as a people is continually undermined.

I believe it is important for the international community to speak up on behalf of the Tibetan people, because the survival of Tibet's Buddhist culture concerns not only six million Tibetans, but also millions of people in the Himalayan and Mongolian regions who regard it with respect. Being based on the principles of nonviolence and compassion Tibetan culture has the potential to contribute to a more peaceful and harmonious world.

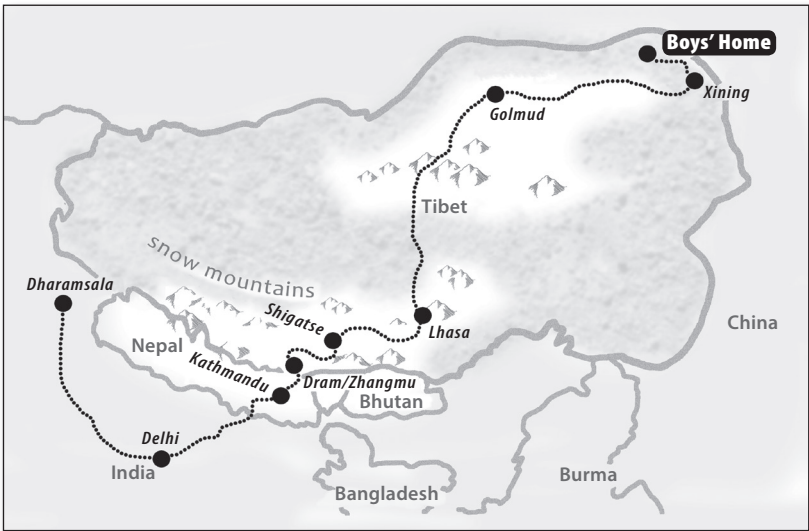
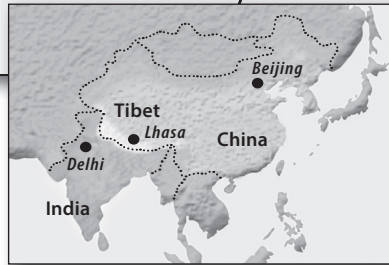
What happens in Tibet also affects the fragile environment of Tibet and the entire Himalayan region, which in turn has an impact on the lives of billions of people across South and South-east Asia. In addition, a meaningful solution of the Tibetan issue will contribute to peace and security in the wider vicinity of Tibet that is home to more than a third of the world's population.

Today Tibet is passing through a very critical period; the Chinese government's unremitting efforts to assimilate Tibetans is eroding the Tibetan people's distinct cultural and spiritual heritage. Such material improvements as have been made in life in Tibet have not brought the contentment that might have been expected; life for Tibetans in Tibet remains very difficult.

Even today Tibetans continue to make the difficult and dangerous journey across the Himalayas in search of the education and freedom to live as Tibetans that they are denied in their homeland. This story of two brothers escaping from Tibet and the hardships they endured describes the common experience of many Tibetans who over the years like them fled into exile.



World Map



Pasang and Tenzin's route from their home in northeast Tibet to Dharamsala, in India

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he aim of this book is to shine a light on what is, for many, a dark corner of the world. The brothers Tenzin and Pasang were born and raised in northeastern Tibet, in the center of Asia, far from Europe and North America, far even from the sea, high up on the Tibetan plateau. They are members of an oppressed people. The Chinese Communist government has ruled their country since the 1950s. This book tells the story of the brothers' escape from their point of view—to describe their struggle for freedom from a personal perspective. Their unique experience offers a rare opportunity to better understand the many dangers that refugees from Tibet face in their quest for freedom.

Tenzin's escape from Tibet with his elder brother Pasang seems an unbelievable story of horror and heroism. But it is true. Nick Gray first met the brothers while making a documentary film exposing the plight of the Tibetan people, and has remained friends with them ever since. He was a witness to some of their journey, and has visited many of the places where the events of their story took place, including the

brothers' home in Tibet. In the last few years, the brothers have shared with him extensive descriptions of their experiences and feelings during their escape, and this book is a faithful record of their accounts. However, their names and those of their fellow escapers have been changed.

Only now are the brothers willing to have the full story of their escape from Tibet told, an authentic record of what refugees, including children, will attempt in order to achieve freedom from oppression.

Nick Gray and Laura Scandiffio

## PROLOGUE

### Return of the Fugitive

**I**n the clear, moonlit night, a shadowy figure leaned against the courtyard wall, while those inside the house slept, unaware of its presence. Outlined against the sky was the dark shape of a man, tall and thin, his shoulders stooped with exhaustion. He had walked fifty miles from the nearest town, and had reached this tiny village, which clung to a Tibetan hillside, with only the moon's pale light to guide him. But he was no stranger. For him it was the end of a long, long journey. He had left this place as a thirteen-year-old boy, a novice monk. Now he returned as a young eighteen-year-old man.

He was so weary that for a time he rested against the familiar metal door to the courtyard. On either side stretched the high, thick mud walls that kept the yard cool in summer and warm in winter. But the well-known surroundings only awoke painful memories. Those awful days after his father died came back, vivid in his mind. "You must grow up quickly now," his mother had told him.

He shut his eyes for an instant, as if to block the flood of memory. For a few moments longer he lingered in the doorway, uncertain. He listened, but could hear no sound from the house. Even the animals were fast asleep. He pictured his three brothers sleeping inside—Dorje, Tenzin, and young Palden. He longed to talk to them. They would be older now, different from the memories he had carried with him. His body remained still, but his mind was in turmoil. How would his mother and brothers react when they saw him? For five years there had been no contact, not since he had run away from the monastery where his mother had sent him. He imagined how frantic she must have been at first, then mournful, and perhaps, finally, giving up hope. What would she say to him now? He straightened up and took a deep breath.

The metal door was locked, but he expected that at night. He paced around the outer walls, looking for another way into the courtyard. Finally, at one corner he found a foothold and clambered up.

“Open the door!” he called over the wall, his hoarse voice shattering the silence. “Open the door—” He almost added “Mother,” but it had been so long since he had used that word, it caught in his throat.

Inside, the house dog barked. The bark turned to a whimper. Had he recognized the voice calling outside? The young man felt tears sting his eyes as he clung to the wall top. He called again.

“Who is it?” From somewhere inside, his mother’s familiar voice quavered. She sounded frightened. “Leave us alone.”

“It’s me, Pasang!” he cried out.

But she didn't believe him. He called out his name many times before she opened the door, just wide enough to peek through. Pasang darted for the doorway, but his mother caught him by the wrists. Her grip was strong. As she blocked his way, moonlight fell across his face. She relaxed her hold and stared up at him.

"Have the gods dropped you from the sky? My son, have you come back to me?" She began to sob.

This was too much for Pasang. Overcome, he dropped to his knees. She knelt next to him, and they held each other, weeping. For the first time in many years, they were tears of pure joy.

Yet even as he felt his mother's arms enfold him, Pasang was already wondering how he would tell her. How would he explain that this was no simple homecoming? He hadn't returned just to stay and go back to their old ways. He had come here with a purpose, a plan she would certainly call reckless. Yes, he knew, she would resist it. But he had to find a way, somehow, to convince her.



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Visit Nick Gray at: [www.escapefromtibet.org](http://www.escapefromtibet.org)

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