

BOULDER-LHASA SISTER CITY PROJECT

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Visiting Lhungtse 30 April-5 May 2015

Lhungtse is a teen-age Tibetan girl who lives in Kham on the Tibetan Plateau (Yajiang County in western Sichuan Province of China) with her mother and brother. Because her father passed away in 2004, her mother has been working for eleven years as a farmer to support her family of three. Around 2007, Lhungtse began losing her vision in both eyes and also started suffering from headaches and seizures. In



Lhungtse in 2010 in her home village with Dr. Li Tiaoying (right) and a village leader (left)

2010, Dr. Li Tiaoying, Sichuan Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (SCDC), Chengdu, Sichuan, diagnosed Lhungtse to have a serious case of neurocysticercosis (NCC).

This disease results from fecal-oral contamination from human carriers of another very serious preventable parasitic disease called taeniasis. The risk factors for taeniasis include eating undercooked pork, the use of free-ranging pigs, lack of latrine facilities, lack of meat inspection, poor hygiene, and a poor economy. NCC caused many cysts deep in Lhungtse's brain. The cysts caused hydrocephalus, for which there is an abnormal accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) in the ventricles of the brain. The hydrocephalus caused increased intracranial pressure inside

Lhungtse's skull. This increased intracranial pressure caused Lhungtse's headaches and damaged her optic nerves. This damage caused Lhungtse's total blindness.

2013 - Lhungtse's Brain Surgery Thanks to generous donations from many of you and others, Lhungtse received ventriculoperitoneal (VP) shunt brain surgery on 5 September 2013 at Sichuan Provincial People's Hospital in Chengdu. BLSCP raised \$13,000 before her surgery and \$6,091.71 afterwards to pay for all of the hospital costs and related expenses.

April 28 - Chengdu BLSCP members Bill Warnock and Shari Mayer arrived in Chengdu on April 26 to meet with Lhungtse's doctors and then travel to Kangding to spend six days with Lhungtse and her family. Bill and Shari used personal funds to pay for all travel costs. On April 28, we met with Dr. Li and Dr. Zeng Xian Rong, the neurologist who had examined Lhungtse on February 9. An electroencephalogram (EEG) showed some abnormalities in the electrical activity in Lhungtse's



Meeting Lhungtse's doctors on April 28 in Chengdu: Dr. Li Tiaoying, Shari Mayer, Bill Warnock, Dr. Zeng Xian Rong (left to right)

brain, which were apparently caused by calcified lesions at the sites of dead parasitic cysts. Dr. Zeng prescribed oxcarbazepine, one 300 mg tablet, twice each day, to help control the partial seizures that Lhungtse has experienced since her surgery in 2013. Dr. Zeng asked us to let her know how Lhungtse was responding to this medication. She also asked us to arrange tests for Lhungtse's white blood cell count, blood platelets, and liver function, which are indications of tolerance for taking oxcarbazepine.



Bill, Lhungtse, Shari, Lhungtse's mother, Lhungtse's brother

April 30 - Kangding Our excellent Kham Tour was provided by Conscious Journeys. Our excellent tour guide, driver, and interpreter/translator was Tenpa Tenzin. Lhungtse's mother and brother arrived from Yajiang and went with us to Ganzi Prefecture Special School to meet with Lhungtse and one of her top teachers. We learned that Lhungtse was still experiencing a short-term paralysis of the jaw and hands from time to time. This paralysis was lasting for 2-3 minutes, did not include any shaking or loss of hearing, was accompanied by some kind of image moving behind her eyes, and sometimes caused Lhungtse to fall down. These episodes were reportedly occurring several times each week and sometimes twice in one day. However, Lhungtse apparently had not suffered any injuries when falling down. We could not confirm whether Lhungtse was fully complying with the prescribed oxcarbazepine dosage every day. We also learned that Lhungtse had been forgetful sometimes, experienced some chest pains, and worried very much about the future of her and her family. We left the school with Lhungtse and spent the night at a hotel in Kangding.

May 1-3 - Tagong Before departing Kangding for the three-day International Labor Day weekend, we took Lhungtse to the Ganzi Prefecture Hospital for some blood tests and arranged for an electrocardiogram (EKG) and another blood test to be taken on the morning of May 4. We then drove northwest of Kangding around 70 miles to the village of Tagong. We stay at Khampa Cafe and Guesthouse, which was opened in May 2010 by Angela Lankford, who is from Westcliffe, Colorado. Angela has recently sold this business to a Czech man named Max. She is now building an eco-lodge around 6 miles outside of town. We visited Angela there and also toured Lhagang Monastery.



Lhungtse in Tagong



Lhungtse (standing on left) and her close friend Droma (standing on right) practicing massage therapy

May 4-5 - Kangding After finishing the tests at Ganzi Prefecture Hospital and eating breakfast on May 4, we returned Lhungtse to Ganzi Prefecture Special School. We met with one of the top administrators, who thanked us for our efforts to help Lhungtse. He said that the school has the same goal of helping disabled students to become independent. He said that the school now has a total of 93 blind and deaf students and hopes to expand the enrollment by several hundred in the future and also include other disabilities. He explained that the school normally requires its students to be physically fit and that Lhungtse requires extra support from the staff and other students. He was fearful that people could blame the school if Lhungtse died or became injured while enrolled at the school. He and some teachers were surprised that Lhungtse had experienced no seizures during the four days with us.

Lhungtse's mother returned to her home in Yajiang to hunt for caterpillar fungus, which is a significant source of income for many

Tibetans. Shari and I remained at the school during the afternoon to attend Lhungtse's massage therapy training class. The school has hired a blind massage teacher, who is providing potential vocational training to around 15 students.

On May 5, Shari and I returned to the school with Tenpa, our driver, guide, and interpreter/translator, and visited the afternoon massage therapy class again. After class ended, Tenpa provided some excellent advice and encouragement to Lhungtse. I told Lhungtse's close friend Droma that we are very happy that they are friends. Then they went off together to the cafeteria for dinner, and we left the school.

May 7 - Chengdu Dr. Zeng, the neurologist, agreed to an early morning meeting with us in her office at Sichuan Provincial People's Hospital. Although Dr. Zeng has some fluency in English, Tenpa agreed to join this meeting so that he could also discuss Lhungtse's situation in Mandarin Chinese. Dr. Zeng examined the hospital reports for Lhungtse's blood tests and EKG and concluded that they were all normal. She concurred with our suggestions that stress may be the cause of Lhungtse's chest pains and also may be a trigger for some of Lhungtse's partial seizures. Dr. Zeng prescribed that Lhungtse should increase her dosage of oxcarbazepine to one 300 mg tablet, three times each day, for one month, after which Dr. Zeng requested a report on Lhungtse's response to the increased dosage. She said that Lhungtse would need to take this medicine for some time, so we purchased a 100-day supply of 300 tablets at the hospital pharmacy. Dr. Zeng also wrote and signed a note for the school administrators, which indicated that Lhungtse is under her medical care.



Enjoying dinner together at the Elephant Restaurant in the Tibetan quarter of Chengdu: Bill; Shari; Tenpa; Kush (Kunchok Sherab), Trip Coordinator for our Conscious Journeys Kham Tour

Since Tenpa was scheduled to drive back to Kangding on the following day, he offered to take the medicine and note to the school. Shari and I traveled from Chengdu back to our homes on the following day. I understand from Tenpa that Lhungtse started the increased dosage of medicine around May 13. We are hopeful that the medicine will lessen her partial seizures.

Lhungtse's Continuing Medical Expenses BLSCP received some donations in December 2014 for Lhungtse and a 2015 BLSCP Health Mission. These funds have been used to pay \$463.06 for the costs of medical examinations in February, blood and EKG tests in early May, and the new supply of medicine. We now welcome your donations for Lhungtse's future medical expenses.

Bill Warnock, President
31 May 2015