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My Path Leads to Tibet Summary

My Path Leads to Tibet by Sabriye Tenberken is a memoir depicting how Tenberken established a school for blind children in Tibet. Sabriye Tenberken is a blind woman from Germany. At the start of the novel, Sabriye was a college student studying Chinese and Asian civilizations at the University of Bonn in Germany. As she was studying the Tibetan culture, Tenberken realized it was impossible to read Tibetan texts because Tibetan braille did not exist. Sabriye then devised her own Tibetan braille system. Having accomplished this, Tenberken realized how the blind in Tibet suffered. Not being able to learn to conventionally read and write prevents the blind people from going to school and being independent. This inspired Tenberken to bring this new medium of communication to blind Tibetan children and help integrate the children into regular schools in Tibet.

In 1997 Sabriye left Germany unaccompanied for Tibet, without any connections in Tibet or any knowledge of the layout of the cities. Tenberken used the assistance of strangers to navigate around the airports and cities along with the help of her cane and hearing senses. She immersed herself in all aspects of the Tibetan culture while searching the country for families that would be interested in having their blind children attend her school. Tenberken soon realized the sort of life blind people have in Tibet. Many families view blind children as burdens and force them to beg on the street to support their family. Tenberken also came across children that were completely isolated from society. For example, one little girl that was nearly 5 years old had never learned how to walk because of her inability to see. Her family considered her useless and never bothered to teach her. Her muscles suffered from disuse atrophy due to the absence of walking. This fueled Sabriye's determination and she was able to find 5 children that were willing to attend her school.

Sabriye went back to Germany to search for an organization to fund her project. She eventually found an organization funded by the German government that was willing to support her school. The next obstacle that she faced was finding a building where she could teach and house the children. She stumbled upon a father and daughter, Lopsang and Chungda, who directed an orphanage in Lhasa. They offered her space in their building to run the school. The school was successful for a long time at that location. The children successfully learned Tibetan, English, and Mandarin, along with basic math skills. Sabriye also saw considerable growth in the children's self-esteem. The work Sabriye and her team accomplished permanently improved the lives of those children.

Lopsang and Chungda would prove to be very difficult partners to work with in the future. Their partnership would soon fail when Sabriye's assistants discovered that Chungda was taking money that was allocated to their school. Lopsang eventually expelled Sabriye and her students from their building, forcing them to find another location.

After changing locations and finding a new funding organization, the Tibetan school for the blind eventually found stability. In 1999, Sabriye decided it was time for her to return to Germany. She was confident in the abilities of the people she had

trained. At that point, the children that initially began the program were ready to be integrated into their local schools and new children were entering the program.

Sabriye, along with her boyfriend, Paul, who she met in Tibet, started the organization Braille Without Borders. They now plant schools for the blind all over the world.

I really enjoyed reading this book. I found it very inspiring. Sabriye knew the change she wanted to make and pursued it. She identified with the people she was working with on multiple levels. Not only was she blind like the children, but she also learned their language and respected their culture. Ultimately, I feel that was her key to success.