

A Letter to the Reader



1145 17th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036-4688

4/4/18

Dear Reader:

I would like to start off by saying I am honored to be the special guest on this month's edition of National Geographic Magazine. Never in a million years would I have thought that I would be able to share my experience of being a sky burial operator in a highly respected magazine. The reason why I agreed to be in this magazine is because I think that it's refreshing to learn about different cultures. By reading this magazine, I hope you will learn more about Tibetan values. In this edition, I share the experience of my job in an interview, how witnessing a sky burial for the first time was like, a poem of majestic

vultures, and how this age-old funeral practice has changed since Chinese occupation in Tibet.

I have been a sky burial operator for almost 15 years now. Throughout this time, I have collected many experiences and stories about the Tibetan culture. When I took over my father's job after he passed away, I thought that this was the way it was always supposed to be. I did what the Tibetan society expected of me, which was to carry on my father's job (sky burial operator) and therefore carry on the Tibetan traditions. In my interview, I go over the procedure of a sky burial and how it has changed since the Chinese invasion. In my short story, I cover the social value of Tibetan sky burials. Lastly, the poem is an artistic look of the religious side of sky burials.

One thing I love about my job is that I am keeping the Tibetan culture alive by continuing the traditions. Although it is always an honor to be a sky burial operator, there are many hardships. As I explain in the interview, I am treated differently sometimes because of my job and that is one thing I hope changes in Tibetan society. One thing that still surprises me to this day is how little the younger generations of Tibetans know about sky burials. I hope that by reading this magazine, I can teach you more about the beautiful Tibetan culture. As for the next step in my journey, I realize that I need to research more about what happens in the transition between death and the next life in Tibetan Buddhism. I only know up to what happens when a person's body is gone, but I have never fully researched what occurs after. Hopefully, when I learn more, I can share my knowledge in the next special edition of National Geographic.

Sincerely,

Tenzin Dorjee