Interviewee: Li Shiying, female, born in 1936

Place: Wanbaochang Village, Tongchang Country, Yimen County, Yunnan Province

Interviewer: Wen Hui, female, born in 1960

Interview date: 02/15/2011  
Interview place: Li Shiying's home

**Interview note:**

Li Shiying was the first elderly interviewee of mine. She was not very talkative but spoke really quickly. When she finished a sentence, she would lower her head and remain silent for a while. I always got caught in a nervous anticipation of her following speech, thinking that she must have a lot to tell me. Yet her husband, staying beside us, told me that “she is undereducated and cannot express herself very well.” But I insisted on having her finish her sentences before asking her husband. That’s why we always hear her husband’s comments in the recording of her interview.

**Interview transcript**

**It was miserable in the commune canteen years**

I’m Li Shiying and I’m 75 years old. The years when the canteen was operating were very hard. Yes, those two years were so miserable. Let me tell you, there was no guarantee that we would have food for dinner after finding something to eat for breakfast. I was 23 years old when the canteen started and I had a 2-year-old baby at that time. Actually, not only people in my village suffered from hunger, life was miserable everywhere.

**I was so starved that I couldn’t walk up a slope**

When the canteen was operating, I was already married and moved here. Back then I had to do a lot of hard labor and I suffered so much from starvation that I couldn’t even walk up a slope. I was so hungry yet there was no food at the canteen or at home. When I could not bear such hunger any longer, I would have some pickled vegetables boiled in water, or just salty water, or boiled water only.

I ate beans, potatoes, wild vegetables like shredded wild ginger and capers’ leaves. The capers grow in the mountain and their leaves are very big. After gathering and carrying the leaves home, I would wash and mince them and then mix with little flour to make steamed buns to eat. The capers’ leaves were non-toxic, but not tasty at all, in fact extremely bitter.

**My great-uncle actually starved to death**

Some people in my village died of starvation. Actually, my great-uncle, who was living in the Zhao Village over there, starved to death. He first developed hunger edema because of the long-time starving and then he died of starvation. The situation in their village was about the same as that in our village, he seldom got enough to eat. I remember that he passed away when we were required to eat at the canteen. One day, when I went to collect the capers’ leaves with Zhang Moying and other people, Zhang told me that my great-uncle passed away. He truly died of starvation but people were so poor and miserable at that time that no one even went to pay the last tribute to him.