

## Four Sisters' Story

*collected by Dr. Sonam Dradup*

**Left to right: Yangmu 27, Raza 30, Alu 18 and Gazom 25**

Yangmu, Raza, Alu and Gazom are four sisters and are born with blindness. The old man in the middle is their father, Sunga. Wait! They still have four other siblings at home and fortunately they are healthy and the girls have another father at home and the mother is dead. It sounds it's a big and complicated family and it is! Their two fathers are brothers and both shared one wife. It's common in some villages in Tibet. Often, brothers of a family marry to one wife for preventing a spread of the assets of family to the others. The mother has passed away and now the two fathers are raising



8 kids including 4 blind daughters !

Initially, Alu (the second one from right on the picture), the youngest one, didn't come to the camp. Sunga thought that it would be adding too much cost of transportation and accommodation if he took four of them with him to here. After long time struggling of dropping one off the list, Alu voluntarily chose to stay by forcing herself believe there should be some other opportunity for her in the future. Alu is the youngest but acts more mature than her age, and has told her Dad "My sisters are older and they are more desperate for the treatment. Please take them. The sooner they see, the better chance they find somebody to marry." When they all packed and walked out the door for the camp, Alu secretly cried and wished a million times that she was going with them, too.

As soon as I learned this story I immediately arranged a motorcycle by paying \$30 to pick Alu up. Luckily her home was 75 kilometers from the camp and didn't take a days' trip.

After a half day, the motorcycle man notified me Alu's arrival. I walked with him to the hospital gate. There she was, still on the motorcycle with half of her face veiled with her scarf waiting to get off. Alu looks very identical with her other three sisters; round face, big eyes, brown skin, red cheeks and shaved head. We escorted her into the



hospital to meet her sisters and father at the examination room. Sunga instructed them to put each of the right hand on shoulder of the person in front of them. He led the team by taking Raza's hand, Yangmu placed her hand on Raze's shoulder, Alu's to Gazom's, walked through the hall and to the examination room. They came out with the same as it has become a way of getting themselves around with Sunga's help. Operations are scheduled for them today and four girls are chitchatting among themselves in their local dialect as if they are commenting the results of the examinations. I approached them and interrupted their conversation and congratulate them that their blindness is treatable. I asked if they ever had long hair. Gazom answered "Yes, of course, we did. The last time we got our hair shaved was a few months ago. Shaving hair is occasionally done because it's very inconvenient for us to wash our hair. So we shave it to prevent lice in our hair." I agreed with her. The surgeries went well and Sunga felt a big relief.

Their postoperative visions, as not good as the other patient's, are finger counting, because their cataracts had remained untreated since birth and amblyopia developed to their eyes. Their visions are restored to the point where they could see the food in the bowl and go to the latrine themselves. Four of them were very happy that they were officially taking off the title of blindness from today on. If they find somebody to marry, they are grateful. If not, they will be living together as before but helping each other. Smiles rose on their faces and felt so much satisfaction for the first time in their life. There is one thing that they feel unfulfilled is regarding their mother, who passed away in 1994 with the regret that her four daughters never saw her face.