



# How to Make a Life

A Tibetan Refugee Family and the  
Midwestern Woman They Adopted

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**



WISCONSIN  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

**MADLINE URANECK**



# How to Make a Life

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Migmar and Tenzin made a difficult choice to leave the life they knew in the Bylakuppe refugee camp to start over in the United States. What were some of the reasons Tenzin and Migmar hesitated to go through with it? Would you have done the same in their situation?

What do you think of Madeline's efforts to help and later befriend Tenzin and her family? Would you reach out in a similar situation? What are some of the barriers or challenges to intercultural friendships like this?

How did Madeline's family members and other friends react to her relationship with Tenzin's family? Should they have done more to be inclusive, or were their actions understandable?

Madeline came to consider herself to be a part of Tenzin and Migmar's family. In what ways is this relationship more like family than friendship? How do you define family?

What are some of the cultural mistakes or missteps that Madeline admits to making? What is her attitude about these incidents, and how does Tenzin's family treat them? How does the possibility of making mistakes or offending someone sometimes play a role in how people of different cultures interact with each other?

Migmar and Tenzin's children found their spouses through a type of arranged marriage. How did they seem to feel about this tradition? Did anything surprise you about how these matches occurred?

How did Namgyal, Lhadon, Tamdin, and Thardoe end up feeling about their parents' decision to bring them to the United States? In what ways did this decision make their lives easier or harder?

Migmar and Tenzin's efforts to preserve Tibetan culture while adjusting to American life is a running theme in the book. In what ways did they succeed or fail? How do you think Tibetan culture will continue to play a role in Choegang's generation, as the family's first generation to be born in the United States?

What did becoming US citizens mean to Tenzin, Migmar, and their children? How was this different for Migmar, the only member of the family to have been born in Tibet?



Migmar and Tenzin spent many years in a refugee camp in India before being able to immigrate to the United States, and Tenzin was separated from her husband and children for several years before they were able to join her. Did reading about their experience affect your views of immigration at all? Should it be easier or harder for someone in their situation to come to the United States?

In the first chapter, Madeline recalls the story of how her grandparents came to the United States from Poland in 1920. What is your family's immigration story, and in what ways have your family members held on to their cultural heritage?

Have you interacted with recent immigrants from Tibet or from other countries? How have these experiences affected you?

