

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Fall 2016

慈濟

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An Unpardonable Sin

Text and photo by Liu King-pong

One of the most versatile women I've ever known, M.G. has so far published three books in Taiwan and mainland China, including the best-selling novel, *Emerging From a Mundane World*. We first met over four decades ago, when we were both high school seniors. In the two decades after high school, the two of us became busy doing what other young adults typically do—going to college, studying abroad, beginning our careers, getting married, etc. My career in the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs made my life highly mobile. As a result, I was not able to maintain close contact with M.G. The last time I heard about her, I was told that she had left her husband and two sons behind and had gone to study in Japan. Her decision was certainly a mystery to me.

My puzzlement was resolved one day in 2005 when she called me at the Taipei branch of the Tzu Chi Foundation, in which I was then serving as an editor in the Foreign Language Publications Department. She told me that she and her husband had divorced and that unfortunately her two sons could not get along well with their stepmother. What made matters worse was that her elder son, Keith, who had been tormented with jaundice since birth, struggled to lead a fulfilling life despite his physical and mental deficiency. In contrast, her younger son, Sean, was remarkably skilled at almost everything he did. All of this contributed to Keith's depression.

M.G. had shaved her head and become a nun, so she could hardly help him materially. She asked me if I could offer Keith some help.

I suggested that he could perhaps serve as a volunteer in our department. M.G. agreed with my idea. She hoped Keith would be able to regain some confidence and self-esteem while working with our kind-hearted volunteers. He could read Japanese, and he seemed comfortable with helping to proofread articles for the Japanese-language magazine produced by our department. He worked slowly, but he always turned in his assignments on time. After volunteering for six months, he indeed began to act more cheerful and confident. He came to me one day and told me that he had been hired by a

company to work as a warehouseman. I was happy for him that he had found a paying job, and I prayed that his new boss would treat him with forbearance and patience. In the spring of 2009, I went back to work for the Taiwanese foreign service, and I was based in our offices in Europe and the United States. I finally returned home to Taipei in January 2015. M.G. called me a month later to tell me that she had just completed a five-year mission, assigned by her abbess, to mainland China.

"How is your son Keith doing?" I asked eagerly. She calmly told me the terrible news: Keith had become increasingly frustrated and depressed because he had lost one job after another due to his mental and physical impediments. The miserable young man, who regarded himself as a worthless loser in contrast to Sean's remarkable performances, found temporary escape from his dreadful situation by drinking, which only made his physical condition worse. M.G. could not count how many times an intoxicated Keith had been sent to the emergency ward when he fell and struck his head. But the most unbearable suffering that M.G. had to endure was his suicide attempts.

"He must have felt real anguish and despair. He once even told me that I should be happy for him if he eventually 'made it,'" M.G. placidly confided.

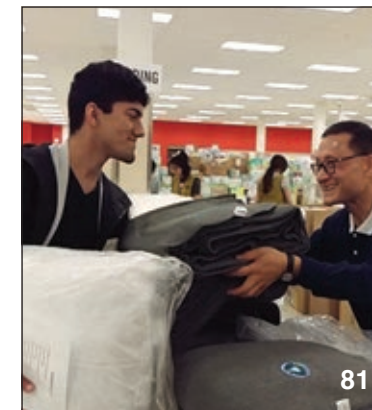
I admired her for being able to share her excruciating pain with such composure. Buddhist nuns are taught to let go of all attachments to anything in this world, but I knew that her son's well-being would have been the only thing in the world that she would still have clung to. She seemed to be tranquil in regards to Keith's death, yet I'm sure her heart was broken. No wonder Master Cheng Yen once said that committing suicide is an unpardonable sin, since anyone who does it not only shows disrespect for life but also commits the crime of torturing one's beloved parents. As a result, one is doubly guilty.

Life is a gift. It's a shame that we don't realize the value of life till it is taken away from us. We should constantly bear the Master's admonition in mind and never commit this inexcusable sin. ❀

Master Cheng Yen teaches us that committing suicide is an unpardonable sin.

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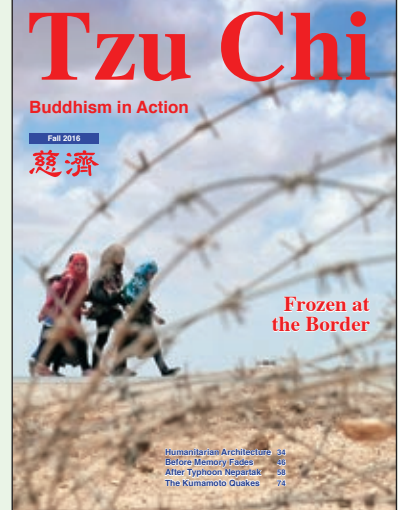
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The *Tzu Chi Quarterly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right to edit the letters for purposes of space, time or clarity. Letters should include the writer's name, address and telephone number.
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Frozen at the Border

Many nations in the Middle East have been entangled in civil wars or social unrest. As a result, a large number of their citizens have chosen to pull up their roots and seek safe haven in other countries.

Jordan has admitted many such refugees, many of them fleeing the long-running Syrian civil war across the border. But supporting those refugees for such a long period has now become a heavy burden for the Jordanian government and aid organizations alike. Tzu Chi volunteers in the nation, though small in number, have done what they could to help out.



Schoolchildren at the Zaatari refugee camp walk home after school. The camp, which opened four years ago, is the largest in Jordan.

By Zheng Ya-ru
Translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa



CROSSING THE LINE

Toward the end of May 2016, about 12,000 Syrians were stranded in the Hadalat area on the Jordanian border, waiting to be accepted into Jordan. During the day they were allowed to cross the border to get food and water from international aid groups, but they had to return to Syria before nightfall.



GOOD HEALTH

This woman waits in front of a pharmacy for her medications after seeing a physician inside the Zaatari refugee camp.

The camp has grown to become almost a town. It currently has two hospitals, nine healthcare centers, and a delivery room. However, for more complicated cases, refugees have to get treatment outside the camp at their own expense.



A volunteer cheers up a boy who has just returned to his bed in the hospital after receiving a Tzu Chi-sponsored operation.

Each month since then, Tzu Chi has provided his family with money, shopping vouchers, and asthma medication. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has also given them shopping vouchers. As long as they spend carefully, they are able to get by with what they have.

On this day, the family had prepared a nice meal to welcome us to their home. The meal included steamed wheat with fried onion topping, salad, yogurt, and mint tea. Though they were just barely getting by, they served the very best.

"You mustn't refuse what they offer," Chen told us. "Otherwise, they'll think that you look down on their food. Be sure to sample everything. This is their way of saying 'thank you' to us."

"June 6 marks the beginning of Ramadan this year. They invited us to return after a month to join them for the celebration of Eid al-Fitr." Hana Sabat, a volunteer who has worked closely with the family, translated their invitation for us. Eid al-Fitr is the religious holiday that marks the end of Ramadan. "Each year they yearn to spend Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr in Syria," Hana lamented, "but that wish has yet to come true. It's been four years since they left home."

A large refugee population

Jordan has remained a peaceful country despite being in the midst of so much turmoil in the Middle East. Many Jordanians can trace their family trees back to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Sudan. Despite such diverse ethnicities, Jordanians have learned how to live together in peace.

Chen, originally from Taiwan, has lived in Jordan for 42 years. He said, "Jordan is a small country with few natural resources, but its people are compassionate. They're willing to open up and receive people from other nations. Even before this Syrian civil war, Jordan accepted many Palestinian refugees during the war between Israel and Palestine."

After five years, the fighting in Syria still shows no sign of abating. Wave upon wave of Syrians have scattered to neighboring countries, journeying even as far as Western Europe. The UNHCR indicates that through June 2016, more

It was May 2016 in Amman, the capital of Jordan. Anticipation for the upcoming centennial of the nation, as well as the holy month of Ramadan, was palpable in the air. The national flags that lined the streets nearly brushed our car as we made our way towards the Ras Al-Ayn district of Amman. We were there to visit a few Syrian families receiving Tzu Chi's long-term care before the start of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during the daylight hours.

"Many Syrian refugees live in this area for the low rents," said Chen Chiou Hwa (陳秋華), the head of Tzu Chi in Jordan. "All of our care recipients in Amman live here."

We first visited Khaled's family of seven. They fled to Jordan in 2012, initially settling in the Zaatari refugee camp. The dusty surroundings at the camp were hard on Khaled's asthmatic son, so they moved to Amman, leaving behind the refugee camp and its free food and services. They were on their own now.

Khaled, 48, could not find work in Amman, so he gradually fell behind on household expenses such as utilities, food, and rent. They sought help. "We tried four aid organizations, but even after waiting in line for eight hours, we received nothing from them," Khaled said. "Then we met the Tzu Chi volunteers. They gave us food and 50 dinars [US\$70]. With that money, I was able to buy asthma medicine for my son the next day." The father was grateful as he recalled his family's first encounter with the foundation in 2012.



A woman smiles and thanks volunteers for paying for an operation for her granddaughter, now in post-surgery recovery.

and their safety once inside a camp, he decided to shelve that idea temporarily.

Then it dawned on him. "Many refugees live outside those camps," he said to himself. "In fact, more are living outside than inside, and they're more in need of help."

Many refugees, like Khaled and his family, have opted to forgo the free food and services available in the camps to live outside, in the hope that their lives would be better. They have dispersed to places such as Amman, Irbid, and Marfaq. Some of them have received help from or moved in with relatives or friends. Others have been completely on their own.

Jordanian volunteer Abeer Aglan M. Madanat remarked, "Generally, the living conditions of the refugees aren't good. They average just one and a half meals a day. I've seen people eating a quarter of a flatbread with jam for a meal. Adults are often turned down when

they look for jobs. Many children are therefore forced to quit school to work." In fact, it is not uncommon to hear news of refugees begging on the streets to scrape by, or turning to prostitution as a last resort.

Targeted relief

In the winter of 2011, Tzu Chi volunteers distributed emergency supplies to refugees in the border town of Mafrq. In September 2012, they began providing aid such as blankets, food, powdered milk, and clothes in Ar Ramtha, a mere five kilometers (3.1 miles) from the Syrian border. The distributions have been staffed by

Tzu Chi volunteers from Jordan and other countries, parents and students from the Taekwondo school where Chen taught, and Tzu Chi-paid Syrian refugees.

Volunteers also specifically visit and provide aid to some refugee families. "We're giving regular assistance to 52 families in Ar Ramtha and 23 in Amman," Chen explained. "They receive money and shopping vouchers or daily necessities each month. We also visit their homes from time to time to check on them."

Among the millions of Syrian refugees, these 75 families are just the tip of the iceberg. "We're limited in our capacity to help," Chen said frankly. "At this time we're able to give regular support to only those families. However, as long

A volunteer, right, helps a family comfort a child before he is wheeled into the surgery room. Despite the language barrier, smiles and body language seem to suffice.

as we're at it, we don't limit our efforts to just giving them things. We are also trying to help make their lives better in a substantive way."

Medical relief

One day in 2015, Chen saw Achar, a Syrian refugee, at a monthly distribution in Amman. She was wearing sunglasses, and she seemed secretive, not wanting to be seen. Chen approached her to express his concern and discovered she was wearing those sunglasses to hide a bruise. She had been beaten by her husband, Saddam.

A bomb blast in 2012 back in Syria damaged Saddam's pelvis. After that, he underwent seven operations over three years. He was forced to end his treatment when aid organizations became unable or unwilling to fund further operations for him. Bedridden with painful wounds, he worried about the future of the nine people in his family. One day he lost his cool and beat Achar.





By helping refugees through this hard time in their lives, volunteers have helped imprint the name of Tzu Chi on their minds.



When Chen learned of the abuse, he began working with the family more closely. “The most important thing at the time was to treat Saddam’s injuries. We enlisted the help of an orthopedic surgeon in December 2015 to assess Saddam’s condition, and he operated on him.”

Saddam recovered well after the surgery. When volunteers visited him after the operation, his wounds were improving. Six months later, he was well enough to get out of his bed and walk a few steps.

“Saddam, don’t beat up Achar again,” Chen admonished him.

“I won’t. It won’t happen again. I’m really grateful for Tzu Chi’s help,” Saddam replied with a smile. Off to one side, Achar and the rest of the family smiled too.

Faisal is an 11-year-old boy from another Syrian refugee family in Jordan. A stray bullet had struck his head in front of his home in Syria, damaging his cerebral and visual nerves. Despite several operations after he and his family had fled to Jordan, his ability to learn and care for himself was impaired. He even had to stop going to school.

“The boy had to take medications for his condition, which put a strain on the family’s finances,” volunteer Hana Sabat said. “His mother was worried but didn’t have the courage to ask for help from Tzu Chi.” After volunteers got to know the family and their situation better, they offered to help ease the burden on the family.

This way of caring for needy refugee families has been characteristic of Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan. In addition to helping with refugees’ everyday needs, volunteers help them obtain medical treatment.

Since November 2014, help with medical expenses has taken on a heightened importance for refugees. That was when the United Nations stopped providing medical care subsidies to refugees not living in refugee camps. Refugees living outside the camps now have to pay the full prevailing rates that Jordanians themselves pay. These unsubsidized rates are out of the reach of most refugees. They literally cannot afford to be sick.

But the reality is that people do not choose to be ill. When they fall very ill, they must either get medical care or face the consequences of permanent damage, disability, or death.

By the end of June 2016, Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan had fully paid for hospital operations for 19 refugees. These cases involved various

medical conditions, such as congenital defects or war-inflicted injuries. Whatever the situation, volunteers supported the refugees through their necessary treatment, surgery, and rehabilitation so that they could return to normal.

People often ask Chen what his standard is for taking on a case. He always replies, “If fate steers them to Tzu Chi, then we help them.”

After the medical treatments, the recipients have turned out differently—not always what the volunteers might have anticipated or hoped for. For example, having recovered from his treatment, a young rebel fighter returned to Syria to fight again. In another instance, volunteers sponsored a woman to deliver her child through a difficult labor only to see the preterm baby die three days later.

Despite these negative outcomes, “We’ll continue to help when there’s a chance,” Chen said.

Persistence

When the civil war in Syria broke out five years ago, many aid organizations pitched in to help the refugees that fled to Jordan, but the duration and size of the crisis have gradually outgrown and worn down the ability or willingness of these organizations to help. Many organizations have either withdrawn entirely or scaled down their efforts.

Some refugees told Tzu Chi volunteers, “At first we had aid organizations help pay our rent and utility bills, but such aid has ceased. The shopping vouchers from the UNHCR were first reduced by half and then totally terminated.”

Chen commented that many aid organizations are more willing than able to help, so they can only pick out some cases to sponsor. They typically do not fund surgical operations that have low probabilities of success, or cases that require multiple surgeries. “Some hospital personnel have told me that they like working with Tzu Chi because we pay our bills promptly.”

This year, volunteers received permission to enter the Zaatari refugee camp to help pay for hernia surgeries for 57 children. In addition, at the request of the United Nations, volunteers distributed aid to Syrian refugees at the Jordan-Syria border. Though the number of Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan is small, they are still helping out.

Challenges

Needless to say, there have been challenges for the volunteers in the process of providing

aid. In February, they drove for four hours with relief goods from Amman to the border for a distribution. When they arrived, however, Jordanian armed forces personnel told them that it was too dangerous at the border and requested that they leave the goods with them and turn back.

Chen knew from experience that complying with the soldiers' request all but guaranteed that the goods would not reach the refugees for whom the volunteers had made this trip.

Volunteer Zheng Shun-ji (鄭順吉), who is from Ireland and is helping out in Jordan, explained in more explicit terms: "Several organizations have requested our aid. They hoped that we would just give them money. Instead,

Volunteers take comfort in seeing refugees' lives getting better with their help.

we bought relief goods ourselves. When they realized that there would be nothing for them to gain personally, they gave us the cold shoulder."

Volunteer Abeer firmly explained to the soldiers at the border that it was standard practice for Tzu Chi volunteers to put relief goods directly in the hands of their intended recipients. After listening to this explanation, the soldiers finally agreed to let the volunteers go on with their work, and they escorted them as they gave out supplies. The distribution was successfully held without further incident.

But the volunteers still needed to tie up some loose ends. They had brought more goods than they handed out that day, so there were supplies left. The soldiers suggested that they store the goods in a military storage facility, and they said

that they would call Chen two weeks later about the time for a follow-up distribution.

That suggestion bothered Chen, but he had no choice but to accept it. "It's not that I don't trust the Arabs, but experience has told me that I can't always take their promises at face value," Chen said. Sure enough, just as he had predicted, two weeks later the soldiers dragged their feet. Only after much prodding from Chen did military personnel agree to let them hold the follow-up distribution.

This anecdote may not epitomize the ethos of Jordanian society, but Tzu Chi volunteers have often encountered similar incidents over the years carrying out their relief work. "In an incident like that, it's important that we Tzu Chi volunteers stick to our principles," Zheng said. "But insisting too strongly on conducting distributions in our own way could upset the people who work with us so much that they refuse to work with us again. So, carrying out Tzu Chi work can sometimes be quite a challenge in Jordan."

Bright spots

Volunteers have helped refugees with sincerity and persistence. Their efforts have not gone unnoticed by the recipients and have even made an impact on them.

Refugee Hala was a pediatrician in her native Iraq. Volunteers have procured her service at some free clinics for refugees. "I once had a very hard time making ends meet in Jordan. [By paying me for treating patients at free clinics,] Tzu Chi has not only helped me financially but also allowed me to use my expertise. Without them, I'd be idle and feel useless."

Waffa, who lives in Ar Ramtha, is a Tzu Chi care recipient and volunteer. She has taken part in monthly distributions and home visits to the needy. In May 2016, she went for the first time with other volunteers to visit needy Bedouin families in southern Jordan. Reflecting on the visit, she said: "We've often heard refugees complain about how tough their lives are in Jordan or how little people are helping them. I'd suggest that these refugees see the lives of some Bedouin families, who have had it tougher than us refugees."

Refugee Abdul Maqsood came across Tzu Chi volunteers when he was ill and helpless. They helped him get surgery, and he recovered. "Though we don't share the same religion, I was most grateful when the volunteers intro-

duced me to the foundation and Master Cheng Yen," he said. "You saved me and my family." He cherishes his affinities with Tzu Chi so much that he keeps a photo of the Master on his cell phone.

Hamza, aged 8, had heard stories of Tzu Chi members saving pocket change in coin banks and donating the money to the foundation, because Master Cheng Yen had taught them that trickles of money add up to significant sums that can be used to help the needy. When Hamza saw a classmate become ill, he got six classmates to each donate a little money to help that classmate see a doctor. The teacher was surprised at this and wondered how he knew about such a way of raising money. Hamza told the teacher that he had learned it from Tzu Chi.

Volunteers were impressed when they heard this story during their visit to Hamza's home, and they praised him for his action. "We've cared for his family for just six months, yet our stories have already had an impact," Zheng said. "It shows how pure-hearted children are."

Spiritual nourishment

Chen works for the Jordanian royal family. He started volunteering for Tzu Chi over two decades ago, providing assistance to local needy people and Bedouins. His calendar is often very full. Nevertheless, he has reserved an exclusive slot at midnight every day to listen via video-conferencing to the Master's 5:20 a.m. sermon in Taiwan.

After that, in the quiet of the night, he continues to think of ways to help refugees in spite of the inadequate manpower and resources of the Jordan Tzu Chi branch. There is so much to do and yet there is so little help; the pressure can be overwhelming. "Luckily I have the Buddha's teachings on my side to help me think and stay grounded. Otherwise I would surely become very depressed," Chen said with a chuckle.

Nobody knows when the Syrian civil war will end. They know even less whether the suffering and sacrifices of the refugees—in property, their children's education, or human life—will ever be compensated. Despite the unknown, Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan forge on.

In addition to charity and medical care, Chen pointed out another area toward which volunteers can devote their future efforts. "Education [for refugee children] is what we need to focus on next," Chen said. "These children will help shape the future of Syria."



Guardian Mothers

Some mothers want more than aid; they want to use their skills to work and support their children.

A volunteer brings a solar-powered fan to a family living in the Zaatari refugee camp. Because there is no electricity most of the time in the camp, this fan will come in particularly handy.



Aisheh, 40, and her children live in a pre-fabricated housing unit in the Zaatari refugee camp. When Tzu Chi volunteers visited them one day, flies buzzed about in the hot, stuffy interior. Aisheh busily waved the flies away as she deftly doused with a syringe the navel area of her daughter Hanaan, age two. The little girl cried hysterically as stool slowly oozed out of her exposed intestine.

"Her surgical wound needs cleaning once a day," Aisheh said. "But as temperatures rise, so do the risks of infections." She has learned much about wound care by looking after her daughter.

She does her best to care properly for her, and every Saturday she takes the little one to Amman for follow-ups with her doctor.

Volunteers took out an electric fan that they had purchased especially as a gift for Aisheh and her family. Because electricity at the camp is very limited, the fan is solar powered.

The fan started working the moment a volunteer turned it on. The circulating air cooled down the place and calmed Hanaan, and she soon stopped crying. Her five siblings huddled near the fan, their smiling faces oscillating in unison with the fan.

Seeing how much her children were enjoying the fan, the mother's face relaxed. She said to the volunteers, "Thank you very much for the fan. It will help drive flies away and keep Hanaan's wound dry. That'll help her a lot."

Even more urgent than hunger

Over the years, volunteers have helped a number of refugees in Jordan to obtain medical treatment. In the process, they have gotten to know medical workers at Al-Bayader Surgical Hospital. They have had a good time working with them. As a result of the connections provid-

ed by doctors at this private institution, Tzu Chi volunteers were able to collaborate with the Arabian Medical Relief clinic inside the Zaatari refugee camp this year for the first time. The clinic provided the names of children in the camp needing hernia operations, and Tzu Chi sponsored the surgeries. Hanaan was among the 57 children Tzu Chi helped.

Hanaan had a more serious case than the other children, so she was the first in her cohort to receive surgery. She would need additional surgeries as well, for her congenitally misplaced intestines had encroached on her uterus and

impeded her ability to expel waste from her body. If not treated properly, she would become prone to intestinal infections and ulcers. Ultimately, her ability to conceive and carry a child someday could be impaired.

Aisheh had taken Hanaan to see doctors at the hospitals in the refugee camp. “They weren’t sure what was wrong with her at first,” the mother said. “But then a doctor determined the problem, and he suggested surgery. I checked with several aid organizations, but none of them would pay for the operation.” With the health of her daughter in the balance, Aisheh had been on pins and needles until Tzu Chi volunteers stepped in and offered to help.

Volunteer Zheng Shun-ji lives in Ireland but has made several extended trips to Jordan to help the local volunteers. Providing support for those 57 children has recently been one of his

Aisheh, third from left, her older brother, and their respective families have lived together in the Zaatari refugee camp for three years. She is thankful for the help of charity organizations, but she hopes to rely on her own strength to create a better life for her family.

main tasks. In addition to accompanying them through their hernia operations, he has also established files on each of them for follow-ups. The initial round of surgeries for all 57 children had been completed by early June 2016. Only two of these children required three or four additional operations.

“Hanaan’s surgery is going to cost a lot of money, and our budget is tight,” Zheng once said to Aisheh. “We’ll certainly do our best to help, but it’d be great if you could think of ways to help too.”

Aisheh said immediately, “I understand, and I’ll think of something.” Zheng was impressed by her calmness and fortitude.

Aisheh has been a tough, strong mother. She and her children escaped to Jordan with her brother and his family after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. No one in the two families works, so they rely entirely on the subsidies provided by the UNHCR. There are many people in their household; with what they receive, they are only able to eat about one and a half meals a day.

Even so, Aisheh managed to lay aside enough money over two years to buy a plane ticket for

her son, 21, who had lived with her at the refugee camp, to fly to Turkey. From there, he crossed the Aegean Sea, traversed the Balkan Peninsula, and finally reached Germany.

“He’s been in Germany for eight months. He’ll go to college later,” Aisheh said. She borrows a neighbor’s Internet service to keep in touch with him. That he is safely in Germany has made her feel that all her hard work and sacrifices have paid off nicely.

A huge refugee camp

Established in July 2012, the Zaatari refugee camp is just 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from the Syrian border. With almost 80,000 inhabitants, it is the largest refugee camp in Jordan and second largest in the world. Only the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya is larger.

One prefabricated house or pitched tent after another stands in the Zaatari camp, which consists of 12 zones with named streets and numbered units. The camp is managed by the UNHCR, but outside organizations or people have helped set up schools, hospitals, healthcare centers, community centers, and marketplaces. There are shops catering to refugees’ everyday needs including food, clothing, and entertainment. There are even establishments offering wedding services.

Looking around, we saw people of all ages everywhere in the streets. They strolled leisurely, looking relaxed and completely at ease. They readily granted our requests to take their photos. Some even greeted us on their own initiative or struck up a conversation with us. The tense atmosphere when the camp was first set up was no longer there.

“I’m okay with the living conditions here, except for one thing: We get just one hour of electricity a day, which starts at around seven in the evening,” Aisheh said. “It’s very hot and stuffy in summer, but we couldn’t use electric fans because there’s no electricity [now they have a solar-powered fan], and children can’t do their homework at night without light.”

In fact, there are other restrictions or inconveniences: Their water is rationed, their homes cannot keep out the sub-freezing cold in winter, and inadequate water drainage makes their homes prone to flooding. Education is also a problem. Half of the refugees in the camp are young people—one in five is younger than five years old—but there are not enough educational resources for them.

Helping mothers find work

Many Syrian refugees are seasoned workers with employable skills, which regrettably they cannot put to productive use in the camp. Unwilling to waste their lives away, some of them have gotten approval to work outside the camp. Camp rules allow them to stay out of the camp two weeks per month. Even so, most refugees would still rather move out in search of a better future if they can.

“I can sew,” Aisheh said. She had done tailoring back in Syria. “If I had a sewing machine, then I would be able to earn money to supplement our finances or help pay for Hanaan’s surgery.”

Aisheh’s husband had married a second wife before the civil war erupted. [Islam allows a man to have more than one wife.] This had made Aisheh quite sad and unsure about herself. She regained her self-confidence only after she began to sew for a living.

After the outbreak of the civil war, Aisheh’s husband and his second wife stayed in Syria, but Aisheh brought her seven children to Jordan. She alone took care of her children, a tough task for any single mother, much more so because she was a refugee. That she would encounter difficulties was to be expected, and she has indeed encountered her share of hurdles. Despite that, she has never lost heart. Everything that she has done and every decision that she has made have been for the best interests of her children.

“Aisheh has been a remarkable mother,” Zheng said. “We’re considering buying a sewing machine for her, but we first have to find a way to supply power to the machine.” Zheng believes that helping a family is less about giving them money or supplies than about giving them an opportunity to put their skills to work so they can support themselves.

Volunteers are also helping Wafaa, another tough mother. She lives in Ar Ramtha, 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) from the Zaatari camp. Wafaa, 37, and her daughter Ayad, 14, fled their hometown of Darra, Syria, in 2013. They were in a group of more than 40 people that journeyed out of Syria together. They walked for three days along the border before they made it into Jordan.

“We walked all day, as long as it was daylight, stopping to rest only after nightfall,” Wafaa recalled. “My ear began to bleed for no reason when we reached the border checkpoint. I even



got bitten by a scorpion.” Despite the tough and eventful journey, Wafiaa and Ayad safely checked into a refugee camp in Jordan.

Public safety was not a hallmark of the refugee camp, however. Incidences of rape occurring in households without male family members were not uncommon.

One night a stranger broke into Wafiaa’s home. “My daughter and I quickly ran away,” Wafiaa said. “I decided to move out of the camp the next day.” She would rather rent a place and live outside the camp than expose

In disbelief and in tears of joy, Wafiaa covers her face after she opens a box from volunteers that contains a set of hairdressing tools. Her dream has been to open a hair salon of her own. Her daughter, Ayad, left, is happy for her and for herself. Volunteers have promised to finance Ayad’s return to school.

her daughter and herself to the ever-present risk of danger.

Her decision might have been a result of what she had been through back in Syria, where her husband had beaten her for eight years. “The worst incident of all was when he got drunk one day and smashed my head on the floor,” Wafiaa recalled.

The physical abuse over the years may have caused some permanent physical damage. In recent months, she has often felt dizzy and has had headaches. She has even passed out. Her condition forced her to quit her job at a clothing store, and it has left her with no energy to pursue her dream of opening a hair salon to put her expertise to productive and gainful use.

Concerned about her, Tzu Chi volunteers accompanied her to a hospital for a CT scan on her head. “She wasn’t in the best shape on the day of the scan,” Zheng recalled. “We felt we



Volunteers go through a lengthy application process at a hospital so that Wafiaa, in wheelchair, can receive examinations and treatment.

should help build up her hope for a better future regardless of the CT scan results, so we decided to plan a surprise for her.”

Ayad had been out of school for three years, but unlike many refugee dropouts who dreaded school, she had always wanted to resume her education. She wanted to become a medical doctor. Volunteers decided to help her by hiring an experienced teacher to tutor her once a week until school opens in September. Then they will pay Ayad’s expenses so she can resume her studies.

Volunteers told Wafiaa what they were going to do for Ayad’s schooling. They also gave her a box of gifts. When she opened the box, Wafiaa covered her face with her hands in surprise and joy. The box contained tools that she would need as a hairdresser.

“She was really moved that day,” Zheng said. “She was all smiles, quite unlike the sickly patient that she had been at the hospital.”

Wafiaa took out the tools and treated everyone to a hair makeover. After such a long hiatus she was both excited and nervous at first, but she quickly began to work as intently and confidently as a pro. In the end, everyone was happy about how she had cut their hair.

Volunteers then talked to her about fashioning a corner of her home into a salon. She kept nodding her head but said nothing, as if the good things that were happening to her and her daughter had not yet really sunk in, as if she could not believe that her dream was really coming true.

Without a doubt, Wafiaa and Ayad can now hold their future more firmly in their own hands. Volunteers will continue to look among refugee families for people who have marketable skills or a willingness to further their studies. They just may be able to help more of them to improve their lives in their host country.

A Wretched Limbo

Jordan borders Syria on the north, with the 375-kilometer (235-mile) border between the two nations stretching through a seemingly endless, uninhabited desert.

Taking advantage now of the clearer days and warmer nights, wave upon wave of Syrians are fleeing bloodshed and turmoil in their country and seeking refuge in Jordan. With few belongings, they walk through the desert by day and sleep by night in simple tents they carry with them. It takes them three to five days to reach the border crossings at Rokban or Hadalat.

The Jordanian government says that refugees

pose a security threat because some come from areas controlled by the extremist Islamic State group, and so the refugees need to be vetted before they are admitted. While waiting to be formally admitted into Jordan, they have to live in tents on the Syrian side of the border. They are allowed to enter Jordan only at designated times during the day to obtain water, food, or medical treatment. Older people, women, and children are given priority.

The number of refugees has risen in recent months. In early May 2016, Rokban had 52,000 stranded refugees and Hadalat had 7,200. With

so many people to care for, the UNHCR has urged aid organizations to help. In response, Tzu Chi volunteers in Amman made three trips to Hadalat between February and May to distribute necessities.

In Hadalat, refugees stand or sit near “the berm,” a raised barrier of sand on one side of which is Jordan, and on the other side Syria. The refugees wait here to receive supplies or, more importantly, to be admitted into Jordan. The wait under the hot sun is hard. People are restless. A hundred Jordanian soldiers are on hand to keep order.



A DROP IN THE BUCKET

It is May, and the temperature at noon is around 37° Celsius (99° Fahrenheit). Sweaty and thirsty, these refugees wait in the stifling heat for their rations of water. For a period of time, there were just 7,000 liters (1,850 gallons) of water a day for 12,000 refugees. That comes out to a mere 580 milliliters (20 fluid ounces) per person per day. That's scarcely enough for people under normal conditions, never mind those sweltering under the scorching sun.



AID FOR THE WAIT

Refugees at the border carry boxes of daily necessities that they have just received from a Jordanian aid organization. They rely on such aid to tide them over until they are admitted into Jordan.



MEDICAL AID

In these tents put up by the International Red Cross, refugees can receive basic medical care for things like snake or scorpion bites or heat-related conditions.





HIT THE BOOKS

Children comprise a large part of the refugee population at the border. Adult refugees provide them with classroom instruction, while Tzu Chi volunteers have provided books and school supplies. ♣

Humanitarian Architecture

Chien Chih-ming

By Liu Yi-wen

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Yang Zi-tuo

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Architects from developed nations have long built structures for people living in developing countries. Such architects typically consult with the end users of the structures, giving them a voice in the final design. Working together, the locals and the architects are able to produce buildings that meet the unique cultural needs of the area.

This humanitarian approach to building structures for people in less developed communities is much less mature in Taiwan—but there is a man working hard to change that.

Chien Chih-ming at one of the humanitarian architecture projects in which he has participated. The building, located in Emei, Hsinchu, northern Taiwan, was built in collaboration with National Chiao Tung University.





Chien's first humanitarian architecture project, on the campus of Shuanglong Elementary School in Nantou, central Taiwan.

PHOTO COURTESY AHA

Soul searching

After earning his graduate degree in architecture, Chien spent a fair amount of time exploring what he wanted to do with his life. He often asked himself how an architect could best contribute to society.

At one point he got a job working in a village near the Shuanglong aboriginal tribal settlement, 1,000 meters (3,300 feet) above sea level and deep in the mountains of Nantou County, central Taiwan. In his free time, he wandered around the area meeting local people and learning their customs and culture. During one such walk, he learned that the arts and crafts classroom at the local Shuanglong Elementary School had been damaged in a typhoon and that the school could not afford to have it repaired.

Later, in 2008, when he was serving in the executive branch of the Taiwanese government, he learned that the arts and crafts classroom had been more than just damaged—it had completely toppled. This prompted an urge to do something constructive for the school. Taking advantage of his contacts in the executive branch, he started a drive for small donations to rebuild that classroom for the Shuanglong school. He also extended the fundraiser to circles of his friends and to acquaintances in construction companies. In the end, he managed to raise NT\$130,000 (US\$4,200). After consulting with residents at Shuanglong, a bamboo structure in the shape of a fruit stone was built. Bamboo is a traditional local building material, and the shape of the seed represents growth and hope.

The project started Chien on the path of humanitarian architecture. Raising money for his projects was never easy, at least not at first. His appeals were turned down nine times out of ten. "Maybe my shaved head made people think of me as an ex-con or a monk raising funds to pay back society," Chien reflected.

Aside from raising money, Chien also needed helpers who could work on a project with him for free. "I might not be able to help him much with fundraising, but I can surely connect him to a whole lot of people at my school eager to help with his work," said Chien Sheng-fen (簡聖芬), an associate professor with the Department of Architecture at National Cheng Kung University.

Chien Chih-ming (簡志明) does not fit the image of a typical architect. Instead of wearing a suit or sitting in front of a computer screen drawing precise blueprints for construction companies, he is more likely to be seen sweating in everyday work clothes at an Association of Humanitarian Architecture (AHA) construction site.

Chien, born in 1981, is the executive director of the AHA, a non-profit organization that usu-

ally constructs buildings in far-off, disadvantaged communities. Such buildings are conceived and designed with the needs of the local people in mind, and are typically constructed using locally produced materials. Thus, the final designs are often a product of extensive and lengthy exchanges of ideas between local people and the architectural team. After all, the team knows that those local people are the owners and end users of the structures. The architects thus

strive to respect the wishes of people in the community and not to impose their own values and views on them. The locals have raw ideas of what they want in a building, but they may not be able to readily express their ideas in words. The outside teams merely help elicit these ideas and transform them into actual buildings for use by the public. Due to limited resources, the AHA usually does not get involved with the construction of private residences.



Chien (left) and a team of volunteers take a break at the construction site of a medical clinic in Jugedi, Chitwan, Nepal.

PHOTO COURTESY AHA

She is a supporter of Chien and his ideals for humanitarian building.

Professor Chien has not been the architect Chien's only source of help when it comes to securing manpower. Since he embarked on this path, teachers who know him have invited him to their schools to talk to students about his ideals and on-going projects. The teachers vouch for Chien and encourage students to take part in his projects by making a working vacation out of their participation. They can mix work with fun while supporting a worthy cause.

Humanitarian architecture projects have, as a result, become quite popular on college campuses, often attracting more student volunteers than are needed. For example, a 2015 building project for the Emei community in Hsinchu, northern Taiwan, called for ten volunteers, but 60 people signed up.

Such popularity means that Chien and his team sometimes need to tactfully turn down applicants. They explain that they are unable to accommodate everyone because of the limited

number of available slots, and that the project just happens to need people with different skill sets than theirs. They tell these applicants to keep up their enthusiasm to help others and to keep signing up in the future; maybe there will be projects down the road that will need people with just their kind of skills. They hope to see them again and work with them in the future.

The AHA approach

The AHA does not merely go into a community, build something, and then leave. Its time horizon is much longer, and its involvement with the community is much broader than just building a structure. In fact, building a structure is but a small part of the project.

When the AHA decides to build in a community, it first gets involved with the people there and learns about their history, culture, ethos, and way of life. In other words, the team gets to know the people of the community before they get to work on the building. They strive to learn the core values that the local residents share.



Students read in an AHA structure at Haiduan Elementary School in Taitung, eastern Taiwan. The design was based on traditional homes of the Bunun tribe.

Shared values are the core strength that brings cohesiveness to a community. "If the people of a place possess common values and demonstrate cohesiveness, then we're very happy to work with them," Chien said. "It doesn't matter if they don't know much about architecture or design details."

One such undertaking was in the tribal settlement of Taromak, the only community of Rukai aborigines in eastern Taiwan. In 2012, Yang Shih-hung (楊詩弘), an assistant professor in the Department of Architecture at the National Taipei University of Technology, along with architect Chien took university students to Taromak to make a long-term inspection. The team spent close to a year in the settlement talking and getting to know the elders, church pastors [the majority of Taiwanese indigenous peoples are Christian], and children. They discovered that local children, though full-blooded Rukai, could not speak their native language very well. Tribal elders expressed an interest in creating a space where their youths could learn

the tribe's language, culture, and heritage. After a great deal of discussion, the architectural team and local leaders developed a consensus on what such a building might look like.

That eventually developed into a final design in the shape of a butterfly, which is the Rukai symbol for a valiant warrior. Wood carvings by students of the local Danan Elementary School were added to the main wooden structure. The architecture team even scoured streams and brooks for pieces of stone slate, a traditional Rukai building material, which they used to pave the ground for the structure.

The local people and the university team were thus able to join forces to erect a building that fairly well reflected what the local people wanted in their community.

Social mingling

How does an AHA team, hailing from all parts of Taiwan, mingle with local people? "We'd make a bonfire in a clearing at night," Chien said, recalling those heart-warming hours.



Line One (left above), an AHA creation, at the entrance to a village in Emei, Hsinchu, northern Taiwan.

This structure (left below) in the Taromak settlement was created as a space where children could learn their Rukai tribe's language, culture, and heritage.

The Mini Reading Room (right) at Luoluogu, Nantou County, central Taiwan, is located in harmony with the surrounding natural beauty.

PHOTOS COURTESY AHA



"Then we'd sit around the fire and chat away, tossing ideas back and forth."

The AHA team talked to more than just tribal elders and pastors. They also bounced ideas off local children. "We asked them to draw their dream buildings," Chien continued. "We let their imagination loose."

The children gladly let their creative juices flow without constraint. At times the AHA volunteers wondered whether they even possessed the capabilities to build what the kids had imagined in their drawings. They had wanted a space in which giraffes, elephants, and squirrels could all live together, but the AHA could not very well build such a place for the children. So, to accommodate their youthful imaginations, the AHA team suggested they incorporate into the building wood carvings and colorful paintings of animals that the elementary students had made.

When an AHA team works on a project in a village, it doesn't matter if they are professors, architects, professional craftsmen, students, or volunteers—they sweat under the sun together, take quick showers together, and sleep on the floor together. "Together we harvested bamboo and blady grass [which has very sharp edges], and together we got bitten by mosquitoes and nicked by the grass," recalled Gu Zi-yong (谷自勇), approaching 60, a Shuanglong resident who once worked with the visitors.

Everybody also eats together around the same tables, downing local produce and wild game that locals have caught. Together they share their stories of the day.

The communities have generally put AHA buildings to good use, often going beyond the original scope for which the building was designed. In the Duli Story House in Taitung, for example, students pursued leisure activities and teachers told them stories. Then local elders used it to educate students about tribal heritage, legends, and folklore. In another example, community residents held wedding ceremonies at the Mini Reading Room at Luoluogu in Nantou County.

In the local fabric

Many of the buildings that the AHA has built for tribal communities or rural villages have used bamboo as the primary construction material, though wood and brick have also been used at some sites. These tribes usually live up in the mountains, where bamboo is the building material of choice for both indigenous and Han Chinese residents. This is because bamboo, if treated properly, can last a very long time. "As part of a course in humanitarian building at National Cheng Kung University, we visited a Siraya tribal settlement in Zuozen, Tainan," Chien said. "Their bamboo houses were still standing strong after 50 years."

Before bamboo can be used for building it is boiled in salt water to remove its sugar and starch. Bamboo quite naturally wears down, so the AHA team tries to minimize the wear by placing man-made materials on the outer surface of a bamboo structure, or by making components easier to replace. Proper maintenance and upkeep are also important to make build-



A bamboo model (left) made by students at the humanitarian architecture lab at National Chiao Tung University.

Students (right above) experiment with lighting in a bamboo structure.

Students (right below) work with master craftsmen and local people at an AHA project site. Every project is a learning process for the participants.

PHOTO COURTESY AHA

ings, bamboo or otherwise, last longer. Fixing problems early on can avoid more severe damage later on.

The AHA project team also takes into account environmental factors, such as wind or the local climate, when designing a building. For example, because bamboo buildings have been known to be more vulnerable to strong winds, the rebuilt arts and crafts classroom at Shuanglong Elementary School took on its eventual shape and contour to help ensure that the structure would withstand the winds that could come in from all directions in the valley.

Nepal

The AHA has also taken its service abroad.

At the invitation of Zhang Jing-wen (張靜文), the CEO of the Landseed Culture and Education Foundation, Chien and Kung Shu-Chang (龔書章) took on a project in 2011 to build a clinic for the village of Jugedi, Chitwan, Nepal. Kung is the chair of the Graduate Institute of Architecture at National Chiao Tung University.

When the residents of Jugedi needed medical care, they had to trek 130 kilometers (81 miles) up and down hills and mountains to Kathmandu, the national capital, to see a doctor. Zhang's foundation decided to collaborate with Kung and Chien to build a clinic in Jugedi to make medical care more accessible to local folks, and to spare them the arduous foot journeys that daunted people seeking medical attention.

The project recruited volunteers from colleges in Taiwan. A month before the trip, potential volunteers went to Chiao Tung University for

screening and training. They learned to build with bricks, even building a brick structure for composting at a local kindergarten. That was a practice run for the group. That exercise also gave the project leadership an opportunity to evaluate the volunteers.

After the second phase of training, five volunteers from the colleges, four technical advisers, and three managers were selected for the trip. The team spent 26 days in Nepal and taught local people to manage the construction site, work with building materials, use machinery, mix concrete, and put up posts, beams, and walls. "To build a stable structure, the pillars must be stronger than the beams," Chien said. "But Nepalese built their houses exactly the opposite way." There were few building codes in the nation to go by, so the AHA delegation used Taiwanese building codes.

Language was not the only barrier between the two sides. Cultural differences hindered their progress, too. "The Nepalese kept shaking their heads whenever we said things to them," Chien recalled. He could not understand why the locals seemed to simply reject out of hand all the ideas that the AHA team put forth. Then he learned that when Nepalese shook their heads, they meant agreement, acceptance, or affirmation—not disagreement, denial, or rejection, as is common in many other cultures. The local people had been agreeing with what the AHA delegation had said all along.

To facilitate more effective communication with their hosts and avoid further misunderstandings, the team picked out local villagers



Children play in this AHA structure in Fushan Village in Taitung, eastern Taiwan.

who had a better command of the English language. Of course, the universal *lingua franca* in this sort of situation—body gestures—also came into service frequently.

Members of the AHA team also experienced frustration dealing with mundane matters, such as transporting building materials. Local ethos were such that the wheels of government bureaucracy had to be greased. For example, they had to pay “tolls” to move their building materials along.

Some team members became sick while in Nepal. At first a Landseed free clinic delegation from Taiwan was stationed there, and the doctors could examine the AHA members and prescribe medicine for them. But after the medical delegation returned home, the AHA team could only rely on simple medicines that they had brought with them.

Challenges and physical fatigue notwithstanding, the AHA team found their stay in Nepal very rewarding. “After a day of draining labor, a whole bunch of us lay on a suspension bridge staring up at a whole sky of stars and sharing our thoughts and feelings. Those were such tranquil and enjoyable moments,” said Chien.

After the AHA team returned to Taiwan, local residents took over the project. The construction of the clinic was completed over two years later. Because of the stringent codes the AHA team had introduced, the building withstood the magnitude 7.8 earthquake that devastated Nepal in 2015.

Money matters

Generally speaking, AHA projects cost an average of about half a million Taiwanese dollars (US\$15,700), which are funded with donations from the public. When donations do not cover the cost, AHA participants—teachers, students, etc.—chip in to make up the deficit. But Chien is trying to diversify sources of income.

Though already in operation for quite a few years, the AHA was only formally established in 2013 with Chien as its executive director. He and its members have since contemplated running the organization as a social enterprise. It has, for example, offered easy-to-follow workshops for city dwellers. “Last year our association offered carpentry and furniture workshops for a fee. All



the spots were snatched up in a day,” Chien said. He believes that self-support is a worthwhile and feasible goal for the AHA.


While Chien explores his way around the sphere of humanitarian construction, more college teachers and students have joined in or become interested in this approach to building. The National Taipei University of Technology has remained engaged since its involvement with Chen’s arts and crafts classroom project in 2008. National Chiao Tung University and

National Cheng Kung University have also offered courses on the theory and practice of humanitarian construction. Chien has worked with teachers and students on these campuses to help them along in their exploration of this subject matter and to act as a bridge between them and potential communities for humanitarian building projects.

Chien continues the pursuit of his dream with unwavering single-mindedness. “He has a dogged determination when it comes to carrying

out his ideals, despite the fact that a humanitarian building project often poses a lot of difficulties and challenges,” said Hsu Pei-hsien (許倍銓), assistant professor, Department of Architecture at Chiao Tung University.

“Engaging in humanitarian architecture is the way I express my love for architecture,” Chien declared. “I’ve never worried about whether a project would succeed or not. I only think about how to keep going. I know as long as I keep at it, things happen.”

A photograph showing a young woman with glasses and a dark blue jacket with a white collar, smiling and leaning over to help an elderly woman with grey hair. They are both looking at a small green fern in a dark pot. The elderly woman is also smiling. In the background, there are stacks of white plastic chairs and other potted plants.

A volunteer helps a participant plant ferns in a pot during a memory upkeep class in Kaohsiung. ZHANG JING-MEI

Before Memory Fades

By Zhang Jing-mei

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

The progression of dementia may be slowed if it is diagnosed and treated early. The Tzu Chi International Medical Association has been working to help identify those who may be at risk, and has offered workshops on memory preservation. Their noble goal is to help people retain their precious memory.

Alice Howland, the protagonist of the 2007 best-selling novel, *Still Alice*, was a cognitive psychology professor at Harvard University and a renowned expert in linguistics. One day while giving a lecture, Howland forgot the word “lexicon.” Soon after, she became disoriented while jogging near her home. The rest of the book follows the 50-year-old character as she was diagnosed with and struggled through her early-onset Alzheimer’s disease.

The book, by Lisa Genova, was later adapted into a movie with the American actress Julianne Moore playing Alice. Moore won the 2015 Academy Award for Best Actress for her portrayal of the courageous woman. The film thrust the personal reality of Alzheimer’s disease to the forefront for audiences to see.

Although Alice Howland was but a fictional character, she represents many real women and men from all walks and stations in life who suffer from this disease. Prominent and ordinary people alike have been victimized, from former American President Ronald Reagan and famous writer E.B. White to commoners of all stripes. The Taiwanese government, based on its 2013 census and a survey, pegged the prevalence of dementia—the most common type of which is Alzheimer’s disease—among its citizens to be one in a hundred. This is an issue that must be taken seriously.



At the onset of dementia, many patients attribute their episodes of forgetfulness to aging and consider such incidences a normal part of getting old. Typically, patients and families become alerted to the true nature of the problem only when such forgetfulness begins to interfere with the patients' daily activities.

As a patient's condition declines, symptoms grow beyond mere forgetfulness to include difficulties with language, disorientation, mood swings, loss of motivation, and failure to manage self-care. The care that is required for dementia patients 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as well as the stress of watching their loved ones slowly decay, often plunges families into challenging physical and mental miseries.

A TIMA member (above) conducts a dementia screening for an elderly woman at the recycling station at the Kaohsiung Jing Si Hall.

XU ZHEN-FONG

At the same time, many other volunteers (opposite) help with related activities elsewhere in the station.

LIN ZHI-MING

Too late?

There is no cure for most progressive dementias, including Alzheimer's disease. But early diagnosis and intervention may impede the progression of the cognitive disorder, which can be roughly divided into mild cognitive impairment (MCI), early stage, middle stage, and late stage.

For people with MCI, the symptoms of the disorder are just beginning to show but are not

yet severe enough to affect their everyday ability to function. They usually see no need to seek medical help. However, more and more evidence has shown that about 10 to 15 percent of people with MCI evolve into early-stage dementia within a few short years. Thus, people with MCI are most in need of caring and knowledgeable people to look out for them and recognize the signs of illness before it is too late.

Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital and the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) are engaged in efforts to identify people who have MCI or are in the early stages of dementia in hopes of bringing about early intervention.

Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital set up a dementia center in 2012. Hospital medical teams started visiting communities in 2013 to screen interested residents for very early-stage signs of dementia. More specifically, the teams interview residents using the AD8 Dementia Screening Interview in an effort to identify individuals in need of treatment and support.

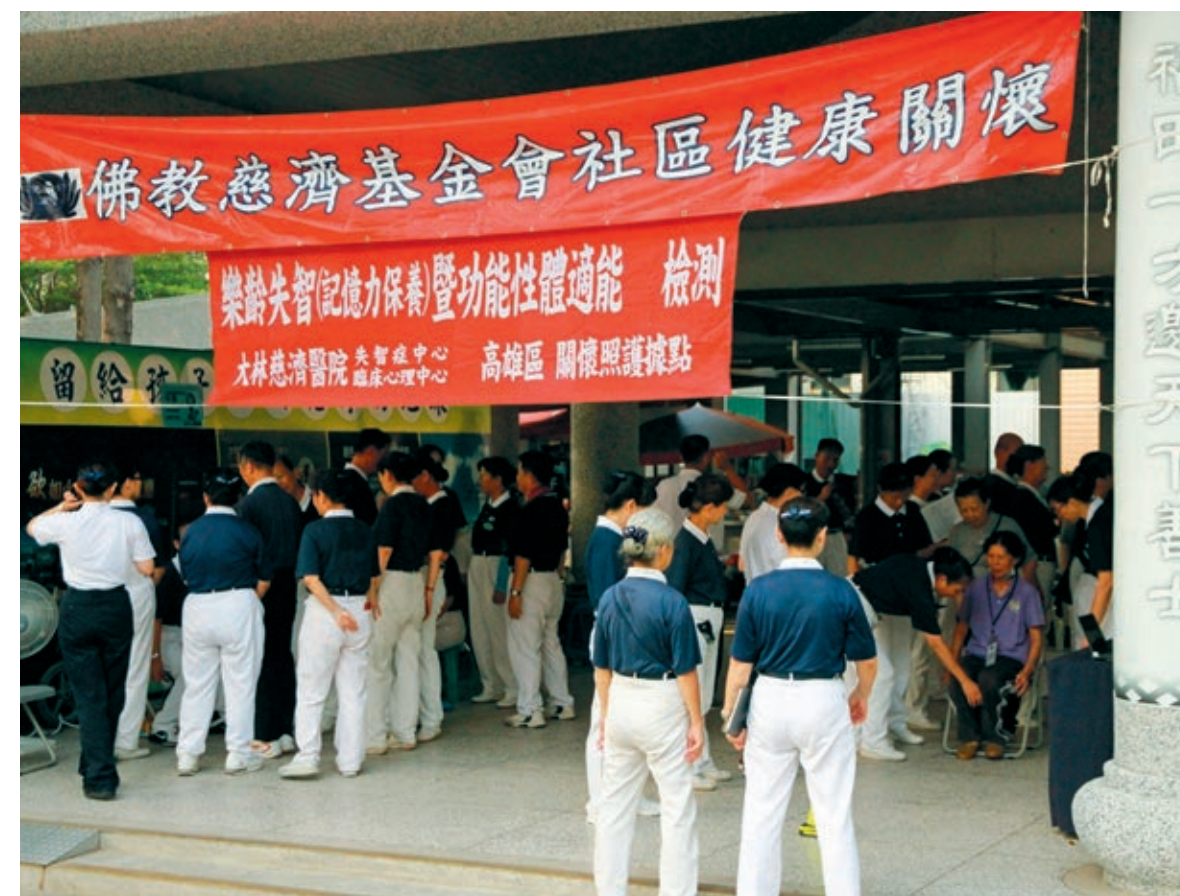
The teams have also expanded their reach southward in Taiwan. In 2014, they began join-

ing forces with TIMA members in Kaohsiung and Pingtung to screen elderly volunteers at Tzu Chi recycling stations in those regions.

Tsao Wen-long (曹汶龍), director of the dementia center, has established a community-based model of care for early-stage dementia patients. The model combines community resources and efforts by Tzu Chi volunteers to offer memory upkeep classes in many towns in Chiayi County, where the hospital is located.

The TIMA branch in Kaohsiung, located to the south of Chiayi, has been involved in a similar initiative. Since 2013, it has trained volunteers in this regard, conducted dementia screening in communities, referred suspected patients to specialists, visited patients in their homes, conducted memory upkeep courses, and assisted communities to initiate their dementia programs.

Hsu Chiu-tien (許秋田), director of the Clinical Psychology Center at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, said, "We should take action to seek out dementia patients instead of just sitting in our clinics waiting for them to show up." He explained that if screening leads to an earlier





diagnosis, a patient can benefit earlier from medical treatment and engagement in community activities and physical exercises. “Imagine the incredible good we can bring to patients and their families if we can help delay the onset of dementia by 10 or 20 years, say from age 65 to 75, or even 85.”

Memory upkeep courses

In 2016, the TIMA branch in Kaohsiung joined forces with Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, Kaohsiung Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, and the National Chung Cheng University Department of Athletic Sports in offering courses to help dementia patients preserve their memory. One such course, consisting of nine classes that spanned March and April of 2016, was held at the Kaohsiung Jing Si Hall.

On April 8, TIMA members escorted ten elderly people, averaging more than 70 years of age, to a Tzu Chi recycling station in Niaosong, Kaohsiung, for the first outdoor activity of the course—drumming. Volunteers at the station had prepared red bean pineapple soup and stir-fried king oyster mushrooms for the visitors. They had also cleared an area and set up ten drums.

Sitting in front of a drum and holding drumsticks, the older folks probably felt like fish out of water. They were in a setting with which they had had no prior experience. Nobody knew what to do. But then, unexpectedly, somebody struck the first drumbeat.

That was Zeng Tian-fu (曾添福), 79. Cheerfully beating his drum, he remarked, “This was how people used to play the drums during temple festivals when I was little.” His wife, Xu Wei-yun (許瑋芸), sitting beside him, chuckled. She was too slow to stop her husband from beating his drum. Zeng’s unexpected act nicely broke the ice and got the event off to a lively start.

“All right, let’s get started,” said the young drum teacher, Xu Jia-zhen (許家禎), to the group. “Raise your hand and repeat these words after me, ‘A big elephant!’ Then hit the drum hard. Dong!” He taught everyone to beat out tempos slowly and then faster. His students did the best they could to follow his directives and copy his motions, beating sometimes on the drumhead

TIMA members from Kaohsiung and Pingtung help community residents who are older than 55 fill out the AD8 Dementia Screening Interview forms at a health checkup event.

HUANG QIONG-HUI

and other times on the rim of the drum. Under Xu’s guidance, the old folks beat out the rhythm of a familiar nursery rhyme, “Tricycle.”

Drumming was an entirely new experience for these elderly people, so they inevitably fell out of rhythm or missed a beat here and there. When they made mistakes, they smiled apologetically, like a first grader caught with his hand in a candy jar. But no matter the quality of their performance, everyone there gave them generous rounds of applause and cheered them on.

Mr. Qiu, a mid-stage dementia sufferer, was accompanied by his wife and their children on this day. Counting the beats in earnest after the teacher, he forgot to beat the drum, his arms suspended in mid-air. His son Qiu Fang-jie (邱芳傑) quietly moved behind him, held his arms, and guided his hands to beat on the instrument. After a few strokes, the father, smiling all the while, got back in the rhythm and beat the drum with increasing accuracy.

Fang-jie was glad to see his father have a good time, which he attributed to the friendly environment that the Tzu Chi volunteers had created. It was easy for people to relax there.

The old man used to be a very capable dad for his children, but now he had to rely on them for his care. Fang-jie at first found it hard to accept this reversal of roles, but fortunately he and his family had been quick to adjust. His father was no longer his previous self, but they had to accept him the way he was, without attempting to change him.

“Were it not for my dad’s dementia, I probably wouldn’t have been able to interact so intimately with him,” the son said. “He’s my dad. I feel nothing but joy and gratitude for being able to do anything for him.”

What will tomorrow bring?

Mr. He, another participant, sat off to one side. A stroke 12 years ago had caused him to lose the use of his left arm, left leg, and left ear, as well as his command of speech.

Sitting in front of a drum, he was expressionless and silent. Pretty soon, two volunteers cajoled him to take part. Each held one of his hands and moved them repeatedly up and down to the drum. Unable to resist the volunteers’ enthusiasm, the old man soon began drumming by himself.

Sitting beside these three senior men—Zeng, Qiu, and He—were their wives, who had accom-

panied them through thick and thin over the years. When their husbands fell ill, they took care of them the best they could, but it was a task that often quite thoroughly sapped their strength. Therefore, it was a welcome respite for them to attend this drum event at the recycling station. They enjoyed these rare moments of relaxation as they drummed out light-hearted beats.

Looking at the group of older people in front of him, Dr. Ye Tian-hao (葉添浩), a TIMA mem-

Senior citizens play drums at a Tzu Chi recycling station. The activity was part of a memory upkeep course held in Kaohsiung from March 5 to April 30. Qigong, acupressure massaging, bead threading, and gardening were among the activities used to enhance older people's cognitive functions.

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ber, observed cheerfully, "Drumming is a rejuvenating activity. I'm so happy to see the bright smiles on these seniors' faces." Under the afternoon sun, everyone's face beamed.

In *Still Alice*, Alice Howland said, "My yesterdays are disappearing, and my tomorrows are uncertain, so what do I live for? I live for each day. I live in the moment. Some tomorrow soon, I'll forget that I stood before you and gave this speech. But just because I'll forget it some tomorrow doesn't mean that I didn't live every second of it today. I will forget today, but that doesn't mean that today didn't matter."

The memory of a dementia patient will eventually fade away, but that is not necessarily a tragedy. As long as he or she can choose to enjoy and live every day fully, their life journeys will still be enriching and beautiful.



Sharing the Load

By Zhang Jing-mei

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Hu Qing-qing

Stress levels invariably increase in a family as the condition of a dementia sufferer inexorably deteriorates. Caretakers need physical and mental support to help shoulder the heavy burden they carry for the ones they love.



One doctor visiting another: Dr. Ye Tian-hao (left) of TIMA chats with Zeng Tian-fu, dubbed "the doctor of home appliances" for his repair work at a recycling station.

Xu Wei-yun always kept her home spotlessly clean. The furniture, the windows, and even the leaves of the potted plants on the balcony were clean and shiny, displaying the pride of a dutiful housewife.

On this day, platefuls of peanuts, biscuits, and bananas and apples cut to bite size were set on a table in the living room. A pot of burdock tea was brew-

ing in the kitchen. Seeing all this preparation, Zeng Tian-fu, Xu's husband, sauntered into the kitchen and asked her, "Is someone from my hometown coming to visit?"

Xu did not bother to answer her husband's inquiry. He had already asked her that same question several times, and she had repeatedly replied that Dr. Ye Tian-hao of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association and other volunteers were coming to visit. Zeng did not even remember that he had asked the question before, to say nothing of his wife's answer.

House calls

Zeng, nearly 80, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease four years ago, in 2012. He has taken medication since then to try to slow down the progression of the disease and preserve his vanishing memory. Though his condition seems to have stabilized, his family members know better. They have been caring for him day in and day out. They know that they are losing him as his memory slips away, bit by bit.

Xu is tickled when Zeng offers her a snack.



Although Xu knew that her husband was afflicted with Alzheimer's, she—a perfectionist—had not always been able to remain unruffled when he displayed symptoms of the disease, such as forgetting things as soon as he was told or talking about the old days over and over again. Sometimes she felt so agitated that she thought she was on the verge of losing her sanity. It is no wonder she really looked forward to the volunteers' visit.

Home visits like this were part of a nine-session memory upkeep course in March and April 2016. The course was jointly offered by the TIMA Kaohsiung branch, Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, Kaohsiung Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, and the National Chung Cheng University Department of Athletic Sports. It was designed to help slow the progression of memory loss among dementia patients, but a second purpose was to offer a measure of relief to the caretakers. "In fact, family members have a tougher time than the patients themselves," said Dr. Ye. So TIMA organized volunteers including physicians and pharmacists to visit the homes of dementia patients who attended the courses, to give family members a respite from their daily grind.

The first family that they visited was the Zengs.

They need encouragement

As soon as the group of volunteers had arrived and sat down in the Zengs' living room, Xu asked her first question: "Dr. Ye, can you take a look at his medications for me?"

Ye inspected the medications. "This is B12 to help repair nerves. And this is for Alzheimer's disease. Taking too much of this may trigger vomiting."

Xu was glad to find someone who knew what he was talking about. "Isn't that the truth!" she exclaimed. "One time he forgot that he'd already taken the medicine, so he took it again, and he had a bad fit of vomiting. My son and I were scared to death."

Ye took a picture of each medication and said, "Home visits allow us to more clearly understand a patient's situation, which helps our team to provide more comprehensive care."

"Mr. Zeng, do you know what day it is?" asked nurse Huang Bao-yan (黃寶燕). Zeng thought and thought before finally shaking his head no.

"He's been like this," Xu said, unable to suppress the urge to dig up an anecdote from the mound of his past behavior that had nearly driven her up the wall. "The other day, not long after Chinese New Year, he kept bugging me for red envelopes to give away again." [Giving others red envelopes containing money is a tradition during Chinese New Year.] Volunteer Chen Mei-yue (陳美月) held Xu's hand in understanding.

"Mr. Zeng, what's his name?" Huang asked him again, pointing to a man, Cai Nai-rong (蔡迺榮), sitting beside him. Zeng took a long look at him and slowly said, "I know him. That's Cai."

He had remembered. His reply made everybody hopeful again. Cai had often volunteered with Zeng at a Tzu Chi recycling station, where Zeng often helped fix discarded electric fans. Though he had lost a clear sense of time and reality, he seemed to still remember bits of information about things he loved.

Pharmacist Chen Hong-yan (陳紅燕) suggested to Xu to let her husband share a few household chores, which would make him think and move about more. "But I'm afraid that he won't know how, and the dishes will still be dirty," Xu responded. Zeng, who had until then been listening quietly, suddenly turned to his wife, lightly tapped her forehead, and said, "You always say bad things about me."

Everyone went still for a second, and then they burst into laughter at Zeng's endearing reaction. His response told everyone that dementia patients were not oblivious to everything, and that they needed encouragement and praise to help them stay confident so they would not shut themselves out of the world. "Let's all be optimistic," said Dr. Ye. "Keeping things the way they are is progress."

"You know, he has always been a gentle soul. He's never lost his temper," Xu said as she looked at her husband, her love and feelings for him obvious in her voice.

Another little thing showed the visitors how much the wife still cherished her husband. Even though Zeng had already forgotten that he had made some clay strawberries and red peppers in a session of the memory upkeep course, Xu still kept them in a glass credenza to display as if they were some kind of treasure.

Obviously, whether or not his memory would decline more, Zeng would continue to be cherished and treasured by his family.

Don't Forget Me

Narrated by Xu Wei-yun

Written by Zhang Jing-mei

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photo by Tu Feng-mei

My darling,

It seems to be particularly cold this winter, and it has begun to rain again. The chill prodded you to put on a jacket. Then you began to pace the room anxiously. You said to me thoughtfully, "It's cold. I need to go check on Mom."

I stood in your way so you couldn't get out. You protested: "She may forget to bundle up and catch a cold. I'm worried." I knew all too well that you meant well, but still I shouted at you, "Your mother died more than 20 years ago! Who are you going to see?" Perplexed and astonished, you just stared at me.

Some time ago, we had our family reunion for Chinese New Year, but only a few days later, you kept bugging me to summon all our children and grandchildren home. You said to me, "Hurry to the bank and get some new bills. Chinese New Year is coming up soon. I need to give red envelopes to our grandchildren."

Episode after episode of your forgetfulness have played out repeatedly. You forget what you just said or did with increasing frequency. Once you even forgot your way home. All this told me that something was wrong with you, and sure enough you were diagnosed with a mild cognitive impairment. It gradually encroached on your ability to function normally. You're officially a demented old man now.

My dear, I know contracting this illness at our ripe age is nothing unusual. But at times it still irks me to hear you talk repeatedly about events that happened a long time ago, to see you forget that you already took a shower for the day or that you already had dinner. I really want to cry my heart out. I'm mad at you for forgetting, but I'm angrier at myself for not being more understanding.

Our son urged me to go easy on you and on myself. He said it's just that I haven't gotten used to the new reality. Thankfully, our son and daughter-in-law are kind enough to share the

around-the-clock work of caring for you, but they can't share the ache in my heart.

My dear, it's been very hard for me during the four years that you've been ill. I often feel like a bird locked in a cage with no hope for a better tomorrow. Besides the love in our family, what has helped me through these moments of darkness is our daily visit to the Tzu Chi recycling station where you and I volunteer.

You've been a certified Tzu Chi volunteer for more than a decade, and recycling work has always been your favorite activity. But as your condition went through its ups and downs, I debated whether I should cut your ties with the recycling station.

But I just couldn't bring myself to do that, so after a while you and I stepped into the Chongshang Recycling Station in Zuoying, Kaohsiung, once again. The volunteers there greeted us as usual. I brought them up to date on your situation, and I told them that I really didn't want your presence there to become a burden or bother to them. They just smiled and held my hand. "Don't you worry," they said. "You must bring him here every day. Don't let him hole up at home. Contact with people may help slow down his memory loss, and we'll keep an eye on him."

Their warmth touched my heart, yet I was still worried—until I saw how at home you were at the recycling station. Without being guided, you walked straight to the spot where you had always sat before. You picked up an electric fan that its owner had thrown out. You looked at it, opened the motor compartment, clipped off a section of a wire, replaced it with a new wire, swapped out a few worn screws, and plugged the power cord into the outlet. Voilà! The once lifeless fan came back to life just like that!

"Nowadays people have become more wasteful. They put in air conditioners and

throw out electric fans," you commented to the volunteers sitting near you. "These seemingly bad fans are still fundamentally sound. I can fix any fan so long as its motor still works."

You probably didn't remember this, but everyone there knew that you were an expert repairman for electric fans. The recycling station even kept your seat for you, waiting for you to go back.

"I've got to hurry up and fix all these fans. When it gets hot, people will snap them up like hotcakes," you mumbled to yourself.

I looked at you fixing the fans as if you weren't sick, and I thought of when you were a handsome young paratrooper. You must have fond memories of those days. Why else do you still remember how to maneuver the steering lines of a parachute even though your memory has faded quite a bit?

Your sketchy memory makes me afraid to ask this question: Will you forget me one day, my dear?

I want you to remember me, so I signed us up for a memory upkeep workshop that Tzu Chi co-sponsored. We went to all nine classes on topics like qigong exercises, playdough molding, accu-massage, sign language, drumming, painting, and gardening.

Volunteer Xu Yu-fang [許玉芳] was most charming. She kept calling you grandpa to help you feel at home. She taught us to use playdough to make strawberries, snap peas, and radishes. I kneaded some dough and tried to replicate the samples that she had put on display. After I had shaped my dough into a thumb-sized strawberry, I carefully made and pasted four little green leaves on it. I was so absorbed in the experience that, my dear, I must confess that I forgot that you were right beside me for a good 30 minutes. I never expected that I myself would enjoy the class so much when I took you there.

When I finally turned around to check on you, I found that you had made a huge strawberry with four big green leaves to match. Xu was all smiles when she asked you, "Grandpa, is this a strawberry or an apple?" You said, "Big is good. Big and red make it nutritious." You made everyone laugh, and they all came over to admire your handiwork.

It'd been a very long time since I'd last enjoyed such high-spirited companionship and felt so cheerful.

My dear, perhaps I'll continue to feel angry or frustrated about your forgetfulness, but I also know that I'll continue to hold your hand as we go further down this life journey. ☘



AFTER TYPHOON NEPARTAK

The village of Xianglan in the town of Taimali, Taitung County, is located right on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. After Typhoon Nepartak passed, the ocean was calm again, and the sky was as blue as ever. But many homes had been badly damaged, and most farm crops had been destroyed.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE



A resident of Xianglan cleans up in the aftermath of Nepartak. HSIAO YIU-HWA

After a Long Night

By Huang Hsiu-hua

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Yang Shun-bin

Super Typhoon Nepartak landed in Taiwan at the town of Taimali, Taitung County. Overnight the flourishing sugar apple crop, almost ready to harvest, was scattered all over the ground. Even if farmers took up their shovels and replanted the trees, it would be three or four years before there would be another harvest. Farmers cannot help but shed tears, nor can their neighbors. "I'll help you, you help me."

A sugar apple orchard lies in ruins after Typhoon Nepartak. The storm inflicted damages estimated at NT\$800 million (US\$25 million) on farm crops in Taitung County, with sugar apple cultivation suffering the greatest loss.



Typhoon Nepartak made landfall in the rural town of Taimali, Taitung County, in the early morning of July 8, 2016. Having peaked earlier at category 5 on the Saffir-Simpson Scale, Nepartak's destructive winds terrified Taitung residents and left a path of devastation in their wake.

Two days later, a colleague and I working for the *Tzu Chi Monthly* magazine left Hualien at 6:00 a.m. on a southbound train to cover the disaster in our neighboring county. Hualien had escaped Nepartak largely unscathed, so when we looked out the train window, we saw serene scenery, greenery, and flourishing trees. Nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary. But as we approached the county line, scenes of raw destruction began to emerge—rows of fallen trees and downed power lines greeted our eyes. The damage became progressively uglier the deeper we traveled into Taitung County, closer to the more heavily devastated regions. The storm seemed to have laid waste to every farm and orchard. Support structures for betel leaf plants were blown down, torn nets hung loose, and fruit trees were snapped. Sugar apples and dragon fruit littered the ground.

When we got off the train, we were greeted by the empty frame of the station sign on the platform. The signboard that used to identify the station, "Taimali," was nowhere to be seen. It had been blown off.

Yang Zhen-zong (楊振宗), a local resident, picked us up at the station. He shook his head as he told us, "I've never experienced a typhoon as monstrous as Nepartak. It beat even Typhoon Morakot." (Typhoon Morakot in 2009 was the deadliest typhoon to impact Taiwan in recorded history.) Of all the areas in Taiwan, Taitung suffered the most severe damage from Nepartak, and nowhere in Taitung was the damage as great as that in the town of Taimali.

Nepartak, the big one

When Typhoon Nepartak landed in the town of Taimali, the village of Xianglan at the mouth of the Taimali River was the first to be smashed. The whole village—houses, farms, and everything else—was left in a complete mess. It looked almost like a war zone. Many roofs especially could not withstand the force of this super typhoon.

The typhoon had no sooner moved on than Xiao Hui-ming (蕭惠明), the village head, started working nonstop, including checking on the families in his village and accompanying gov-

ernment officials to assess the damage to farm crops. His wife stayed at the temporary shelter for victims to sort donated goods and distribute them to those who needed them.

Xiao choked up with emotion several times as he described to us the horrors of the typhoon and the sorry scenes he witnessed afterwards. He said that when the typhoon was at its strongest, he fought to keep a window in his home from being blown away. But the wind was simply too

After Typhoon Nepartak, farmer Zhan Yi-xian (詹益賢, right) and his entire family worked together to salvage their betel leaf plants and to rebuild their net house.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

much for him, and he had to give up after fifteen minutes. The window went, and then so did the door. Next went the roof tiles. He, his wife, their son, and his mother huddled in a corner for safety and waited out the storm.

The typhoon finally began to ease up after 6:00 a.m., and Xiao ventured out of his house to look around. He saw row upon row of toppled trees, broken roof tiles, and other debris littering the streets. The roads were too cluttered to allow vehicles to pass through; he could not even get his scooter through. He instead walked down the road and checked on each house in turn. He paid special attention to older people living alone. An old man had been injured by a falling



object, so Xiao called an ambulance to take him to Taitung Mackay Memorial Hospital.

According to preliminary estimates, about a third of the 300 households in the village suffered damage to their homes, including 84 homes whose roofs were badly damaged. Rainwater made its way into most houses in the village. Crops such as betel leaves, sugar apples, and dragon fruit were all but totally wiped out. Farmers were heart-broken.

In the aftermath of the storm, Tzu Chi volunteers contacted Xiao and asked him to call on residents to take part in a clean-up-the-neighborhood campaign starting on July 10. Volunteers paid cash to the villagers taking part in the cleanup, and they also gave between 10,000 and 30,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$300 to \$950) to each family that had suffered damage.

The Red Cross and other charities were also present to offer cash. Some people donated emergency goods and drinking water. Some even drove food trucks from Taipei, at the opposite end of Taiwan, to cook hot food for victims. The kindness of these people and organizations touched the hearts of the villagers.

Li Tai-ping returns to his home to find it in a mess. Nepartak also thoroughly damaged his crops.

Victims

We went with Tzu Chi volunteers to visit some victims.

Mrs. Dai's house had taken quite a beating. Her living room leaked badly, and there was a gaping hole in the roof above her kitchen. No wonder her 76-year-old heart was tied up in a knot. She had put out a few buckets to catch the leaks, and she had moved her gas range so that it would not be spoiled by the rain.

Her parents moved from Hsinchu, northern Taiwan, to Taitung when she was just a year old. She grew up and got married in Taitung. She and her husband worked hard as farmers, and they saved enough money to build the house where she now lives. After her husband died in his 50s, she worked as a farmhand and did other odd jobs to support her four children, who are now grown and living elsewhere.

She had planned to live in that house for the rest of her life, but Nepartak had damaged it so badly. She worried that she might not be able to go on living there, but then her youngest son and his wife promised to fix up the house for her.

"Actually, I thought about abandoning the house after the typhoon," she said. Only her youngest son returned home to help her clean up. Her other children did not bother at all. She



Su Xin-lan lost her betel leaf crops in the typhoon. She had borrowed money to set up her farm. Now she has no revenue to pay back her debts.

was put off by their lack of care. But then she saw how enthusiastic Tzu Chi volunteers were in helping strangers like herself and her fellow villagers. That really warmed her heart and gave her the encouragement she needed to pick herself up. She even joined the volunteers in cleaning up the village. As she worked, she seemed to forget her anxiety and sorrow. When asked how she felt, she said, "Wonderful!"

We then came to the home of 83-year-old Wu Jin-cha (吳金茶). She and her husband had moved to Taimali from Zhanghua, central Taiwan, more than half a century before. They worked as farmhands and laborers, doing whatever work they could find. They needed the money, so she would not refuse even work as hard as moving stones for the building of embankments.

With hard work, they managed to save enough to upgrade their straw hut to a wooden

building to accommodate their growing family. In 1979, they moved up yet again to a brick house with a tiled roof, where she has lived ever since.

Wu's husband passed away long ago. Her first son, Li Tai-ping (李太平), and his wife have lived with her for a dozen or so years. They happened to be out of town on the night of the typhoon, leaving Wu alone at home. As the high winds raged, the roofs over their living room and three bedrooms were all blown off, allowing rain to fall in. Wu was forced to move out of her bedroom into another room to stay dry. Though the typhoon made a big mess of her house, she was fortunately not hurt.

Li hurried back home as soon as the storm had passed. He almost cried when he saw the damaged house. Then he went to check on the avocados that he had grown on the 2.5-acre tract of land that he had leased from the government. It was a total loss. "I invested two million dollars [US\$63,000] in the plantation, and it's all gone," he said. He could no longer hold back his tears.



Getting out

Su Xin-lan (蘇心蘭) was another typhoon victim. She used to work for betel leaf farmers, helping them put up trellises and other plant-support structures, do odd jobs, and harvest the crop. After she had learned the ins and outs of the trade and saved a little capital, she struck out on her own as a betel leaf farmer.

She leased a small lot, about half an acre, for 600 American dollars to cultivate the plants. She borrowed money to purchase fertilizer and the materials necessary to put up a net house for the plants. She built the net house herself, and she worked hard to care for the plants.

But just six months later, Nepartak struck. Su had only had one harvest, and now the typhoon had ruined everything. Her heart broke. Fate had just dealt her another setback, a big one.

Her husband was injured in an automobile accident seven years ago. His injuries required brain surgery, which left him epileptic, reliant on medications, and unable to work. She became the sole provider for the family, a responsibility that kept her working very hard.

Her life has not been easy, but she still cheerfully agreed when volunteers asked her to help mobilize her neighbors to help clean up their own communities and to guide volunteers to visit typhoon victims. She said, "It's better to get out of the house than stay home and feel sorry for myself."

Su knew quite a few elderly people who lived on the seashore. Her intimate knowledge of them made it much easier for volunteers to get closer to the elderly when they visited their homes and to reach them at more personal levels.

She led us to the home of an 89-year-old woman. The woman had lost two sons to accidents, one more than a decade earlier and the other just seven months before. The typhoon brought some rain into her house, but other than that there was no major damage. The strong winds gave the old woman quite a scare though. Su warmly asked her how she was doing and reminded her to take good care of herself. Volunteers gave her cash to help her recover.

When we arrived at the next home, Mr. Lin, in his 80s, was climbing a ladder up to his roof to patch leaks. Concerned about his safety, volunteers urged him to get down immediately. He did so, surprised by the large group of visitors. He soon turned melancholy as he told the volunteers that his wife had been hospitalized for a fall during the typhoon and would undergo surgery the

following day. He wanted to be at the hospital to care for her, but he could not because he was afraid that their house might leak. He wished that he could attend to both matters at the same time. The volunteers determined that this family would need long-term care from Tzu Chi.

As for Su, her house was damaged as much as those that she visited with the volunteers. It would leak whenever it rained, and she had been quite bothered by having to clean up again and again after the rain. It just never seemed to end. She had bought cheap plastic sheets to cover her roof, and she kept the sheets in place with broken pieces of roof tiles. She was not happy about the damage caused by the typhoon, but the visits to other victims helped her feel less alone as she tried to keep things together after the disaster.

The moment of truth

Up to the time of our visit, Su had not yet mustered enough courage to visit her betel leaf farm. She was afraid to find out how badly the storm had ruined her plants. But on this day, due to our visit, she decided to take us there to check it out.

As we walked towards her farm, we first came across fields of blackened sugar apple trees, stripped almost entirely of leaves. "These trees are now useless," Su mourned. "All of them will have to be dug up and removed."

Her steps became increasingly heavier as we got closer to her farm. Still she managed to tell us how much money she had spent on fertilizer and how much work and effort she had spent putting up her net house. But when we were about 50 meters (55 yards) from her farm, she suddenly began to sob. Then the sobs turned to outright crying, as if she wanted to release all the worries and frustration that she had bottled up until then.

Our hearts went out to her, but we could not come up with a single word of comfort for her.

"It really hurts to see the devastation," she declared. "All my plants are down. All the light-duty frames and nets will have to be removed and rebuilt. That will cost at least NT\$800,000 [US\$25,000]. I'm doomed."

She went on after she had regained her composure: "My betel leaves were so big and vibrant. Everyone told me that I'd done a superb job taking care of the plants. Before the typhoon, I'd work for other people from morning to about 2:30 in the afternoon; then I'd come home and

work on my own plants. I'd put on my headlamp and work well into the night, sometimes till as late as two in the morning. But what have I got for all that hard work? I was about to enjoy the fruit of my labor, but then everything was destroyed...."

Not only has her labor yielded next to nothing, she has also ended up with debts to pay back. She does not have any savings to draw on, so she will have to continue to work for others so she can repay her debts and support her family of three.

Fortunately, her daughter will graduate from nursing college in a year, and she works in the summer to help ease her mother's burden. She is Su's biggest comfort.

The thought of her daughter soothed Su. She wiped away her tears. We knew she will bounce back and move forward despite the setback.

Guarding their homes

Typhoon Nepartak blew away half the roof of the house of Ms. Lin, 45, a single mother of five. Its three bedrooms and kitchen were exposed to the rain. Unable to cook, the family had to go to Lin's mother's house for meals.

Lin has a sunny disposition, and she held up quite well in the face of such serious damage to her house and the inconveniences brought by

it. "We're only partly damaged, and we still have our own beds to sleep in," she told her friends who called after the typhoon to check on how she was doing. "Compared to families who have been forced to move into shelters because their homes were totally damaged, we're pretty fortunate."

She used to work in an administrative position at Taitung Mackay Memorial Hospital, but she quit her job to recover after she had surgery in the middle of June.

Lin's five children range in age from 12 to 19. The oldest is studying physical therapy. He will graduate in a year and should then be able to help support their family. The youngest child is in the seventh grade, so Lin still has quite a bit of financial responsibility ahead of her.

After Nepartak, Tzu Chi recruited and organized villagers to clean up their own communities. Lin and her children all took part in the work. After they had cleaned up their own village, her children continued to work on the initiative, following Tzu Chi volunteers to clean up other places. They worked at places as far away as Taitung Physical Education Senior High School.

Lin was quite proud of her children. "Granted, they received money for their work from Tzu Chi," Lin said. "But I'm thrilled to see them willing to help others."

With self-help and help from other people, typhoon victims are working their way out of the destruction. They are regaining their footing and rebuilding their dreams.

A typhoon victim talks with a Tzu Chi volunteer in Xianglan Village, where 84 homes were damaged, 40 of them no longer fit to live in.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE



Tears and Sweat

By Yang Shun-bin

Excerpted and translated by Tang Yau-yang

After a long night of being battered by a major typhoon, weary Taimali villagers emerged from their bruised homes in the morning to survey the damage. What they saw was like scenes from a war zone. Through rain, sweat, and tears, they began to sweep up the debris. With the toughness and tenacity of farmers, they began to restore their homes.

Villagers and Tzu Chi volunteers clean up in Xianglan Village.

YANG SHUN-BIN





尼伯特颱風台東防災協調中心統計

上午	07/10 北區投入志工 31 (木工 2, 水電 4, 語言類 19)
師父	6
總指揮	31
台總工	120
外區支援	131
社工同仁	14
物資	850

16:40 花蓮 50 箱 (50 箱香檳酒) (50 箱餅乾) (25 箱香檳酒) (40 箱餅乾) 75 (第一車) (第二車) 96 保險

住宿: 公署文會會室 (689) 310-14 432NN

差備用利 5 位 (機車 1 台) 2 人 [\$1400 x 7 \$1500 x 8 (共 15 房) (36)]

高雄 3 人 [\$1900 x 4 \$1900 x 3 (共 7 房) 總共 51 人]

07/11 9:00 方師父 1500 份麵包和餅乾送給



An old man bursts into tears as he thinks of his hospitalized wife and the damage that Typhoon Nepartak inflicted on his home. YANG SHUN-BIN

Typhoon Nepartak left Taiwan on the afternoon of July 8, 2016, but not before inflicting severe damage on properties and crops in Taitung County. After the storm had moved on, Tzu Chi volunteers rushed into action to help victims.

According to Tzu Chi's aid plan, volunteers would visit the homes of survivors and give NT\$10,000 (US\$310) to each family whose home had been damaged. If the home had been seriously damaged, the foundation would provide NT\$20,000. If a family was just too poor to recover without help, volunteers would give out NT\$30,000 and schedule follow-up visits to help these families get back on their feet.

This plan, however, was not as easy to implement as it sounds. There were not quite 300 Tzu Chi volunteers in Taitung, and many of them were themselves typhoon victims. How could they visit the large number of affected families in a short time and deliver timely aid?

Taitung volunteer Yang Ting-yuan (楊廷元), the head of the Tzu Chi relief project, pointed out that they were short-handed the first day after the typhoon, so volunteers in the county limited their home visits to those located within their usual areas of care. They visited over 300 families amidst rain and wind on that first day.

Inside the Taitung Tzu Chi branch office, volunteers map out routes of home visits.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

The next day, more than 300 volunteers arrived from outside of Taitung to help. They included volunteers experienced in home visits and social workers employed by Tzu Chi. With this infusion of manpower, the project shifted into high gear.

Time was of the essence. Volunteers were divided into teams of four or five people, each person performing a specific but different function in the group. This ensured that the project could progress with maximum efficiency. Each team had at least one local volunteer to help the team navigate the streets and alleyways. Once they arrived at a family home, team members recorded the damage, handed over emergency cash, and so on.

From July 9 to 17, Tzu Chi volunteers and social workers from all over Taiwan worked 2,500 shifts and knocked on more than 9,000 doors. Not all attempts at home visits were fruitful because some doors were not answered and some families declined the visits. Even so, volunteers were admitted into 5,400 homes, gave out gift packets to 4,600 families, and distributed emergency cash to 2,600 families. They covered areas including Taitung City, Taimali, Beinan, and Luye.

Tzu Chi also organized cleanups to help clear damage and debris. That project logged 2,077 shifts, with 1,717 cash gifts given out to participants.



The Kumamoto Quakes

By Chen Jing-hui and Wu Hui-zhen

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Wu Hui-zhen

For three weeks in April and May 2016, Tzu Chi volunteers provided support to survivors of the devastating Kumamoto quakes. Hot tea, hot food, a little music, and group exercise sessions helped calm the victims and inject energy into their lives.

In April 2016, a series of earthquakes struck Kumamoto Prefecture on the Japanese island of Kyushu, the most southwesterly of Japan's four main islands. A 6.5 magnitude foreshock on April 14 was followed on April 16 by a magnitude 7.3 mainshock. More than 75,000 buildings were damaged, 68 people died, and more than 1,600 people were injured. One month after the quakes, 11,000 people were still taking shelter away from home.

Tzu Chi volunteers directly provided material and emotional support from April 22 to May 14 in Kumamoto Prefecture. We focused our efforts specifically in a sports complex in Ozu, which was near the most heavily damaged town of Mashiki. The complex was being used as a shelter for about a thousand quake survivors.

Japan Self-Defense Force soldiers distributed rice balls twice a day at the shelter, and an Indonesian volunteer group in Kumamoto provided hot vegetable soup once a day. The latter service lasted until April 24. We decided to pick up where they left off and we started providing hot food that very day. We invited local residents to join us in cooking the food. That afternoon, many housewives in Ozu brought their kitchen knives, cutting boards, and aprons and gathered

with us to prepare the food. We made 150 rice balls and enough soup for 400 people for that first meal.

Because of the temblors, schools remained closed through May 9. As a result, many students also joined us and volunteered after they learned of our service. They washed cabbages, carrots, and Napa cabbages. They chopped the vegetables to size the best they could, which wasn't always very well, but that made no difference so far as safe consumption was concerned. The energetic, vibrant voices of the youngsters added vitality to the scene.

Aside from providing hot food, we also offered black and oolong tea at the shelter. The tea was very popular. "We've been drinking plain water every day since the quake," some said. They apparently preferred tea to the plain water that they had been drinking. Others added, "For us Japanese, happiness begins with a cup of tea."

Young among the old

The shelter grew less crowded as the days wore on. People checked out to go stay with family or friends or move into rental places. Those who stayed were mostly older people whose homes had been badly damaged. They



Buildings in Minamiaso village in Aso District sustained heavy damage. Fifteen villagers died in the quake, and one was missing.

felt stuck with nowhere to go, and their days at the shelter became longer and harder to pass.

Young students went with us to serve tea. We reminded them to give the elderly their warmest smiles, which we believed was what the older people longed to see most.

Two sisters, both in junior high school, knelt before shelter residents and bowed as they offered cups of tea. When we were leaving, one of the girls said to an old woman, "I hope you live to a hundred. I'm pulling for you! Cheers!"

The students learned from us to speak softly to the quake victims and bow as they offered tea. The young people all hoped to do something to help out after the quake. They were indeed little angels at the shelter.

Strike up the band

Haruyo Kunitake and her mother-in-law were residents at the shelter. One day, she accepted a cup of hot tea from volunteers. That act unleashed a wave of emotion. She began to cry uncontrollably on the shoulder of a volunteer. Over ten days had passed since the quake, but it was the first time she had cried. Her home was damaged, the quake and its aftershocks had been terrifying, and the future of her family was up in the air. She had until then kept all of her emotions bottled up inside, but the hot tea melted the levee with which she had held her fears and frustrations in place.

A local television station had sent a crew to cover the volunteers' interactions with quake victims, and how they cooked hot food for them. After seeing Kunitake crying on the shoulder of a volunteer, the TV producer said that he finally understood why Tzu Chi volunteers had taken



the trouble to fly in and offer their services. He could feel that the sincerity of Tzu Chi volunteers had allowed love to permeate among everyone there.

Between April 22 and May 14, volunteers worked 284 shifts and served 3,360 hot meals. The menu included soups, rice balls, and other vegetarian food. Student volunteers gathered outside the shelter, and they would sit or lie on their stomachs to design and draw menu posters based on what volunteers had planned to cook for the day.

When the day's work was over, we asked each of the students to take home some tea, offer it to their mothers, and tell them how much they appreciated their mothers' love and care.

One day, tenth grader Yukino Koyamada's mother came to the shelter to thank the volunteers for allowing her daughter to volunteer. "The opportunity for my daughter to work with

An emergency shelter was set up in a sports complex in Ozu. Survivors whose homes were still habitable checked out of the shelter after the aftershocks had subsided and water and electricity had returned to their homes. People living near Mount Aso could not go home just yet because of mudslides and damaged roads, so they stayed at the shelter.

international volunteers will help round out her character. She's made many friends too."

The shelters in the area were slated to be consolidated on May 1, so on April 29, while washing vegetables, we persuaded the students to give a concert of sorts the next day at the shelter.

"A performance? Really? Are you serious?" the kids moaned.

"You know that the elderly would like some merry noise around here, and they love to see

your smiling faces,” we pleaded. The students eventually agreed to our request.

Some of them brought their musical instruments from home after lunch. We bought a few more at a nearby variety store. Our emphasis for the performance was not on the quality of the instruments, but on something else that the kids had plenty of: high spirits.

The young people gathered in a corner of the shelter to practice. Volunteer Wang Mei-ling (王美玲), who had played wind instruments for a long time, acted as conductor. With the performance scheduled for the next day, the group practiced in earnest.

The moment came soon enough. On the 30th, the students played their instruments as they filed in two lines to a small crowd of senior citizens.

That they had practiced only very briefly did not seem to matter in the least. Their three-minute

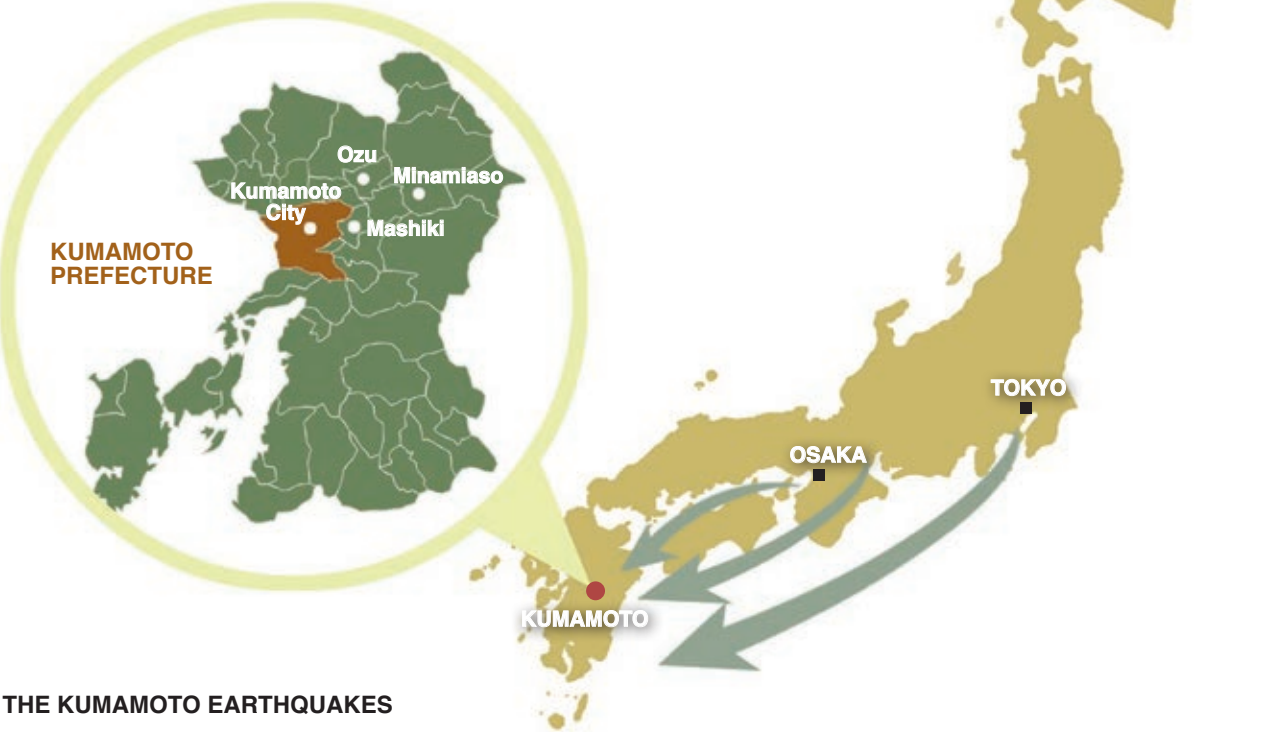
A volunteer offers care to quake victims at the shelter.

performance added a lot of liveliness to the otherwise quiet, subdued air of the place.

The audience smiled and applauded after the performance had ended. The youngsters then spread out and gave massages to the old folks. Some of them were overheard saying, “That’s enough, thank you. Your hands must be sore.” The students earnestly replied, “No, no, not at all, I’m not tired,” and continued kneading their backs.

In this warm atmosphere, one grandma belted out a folksong called “My Hometown.” For them, this place was now their hometown, and we were one big family.

Thank you, grandma. Thank you, little angels.



THE KUMAMOTO EARTHQUAKES

Time: At 9:26 in the evening of April 14, 2016, a magnitude 6.5 quake struck near the town of Mashiki, Kumamoto Prefecture, on the island of Kyushu. This was followed by the mainshock, a magnitude 7.3 temblor, at 1:25 in the morning of April 16.

Damage: 68 dead, one missing, 1,652 injured; over 75,000 buildings damaged. Due to ruined buildings, broken roads, and power and gas outages, over 11,000 people were still taking shelter away from home a month after the quakes began.

Tzu Chi efforts: Volunteers arrived at the disaster area on April 22 to assess the damage. They decided to focus their efforts on the town of Ozu, not far from the most heavily damaged town of Mashiki. Volunteers from different areas of Japan took turns serving quake victims from April 22 to May 14, 2016.





A volunteer (above) holds a menu poster designed by students.

Tzu Chi volunteers (below) cook meals for shelter residents.



Good News, Bad News

The Fort McMurray Wildfire



The evacuees may have lost a lot, but what's important is not to lose the power to laugh, to love.

By Yungli Tseng Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting Photos by You De-kun

SHE LISTENED TO ME INTENTLY with her big eyes shining bright and her smiling face beaming.

I bent down to her, a girl of about six years old, and said, "This is a coin bank of love. Every time you drop a coin into it, be sure to wish yourself, your family, and the whole world the best. This is important. Maybe one day you can use this bank to help others and give your love to them."

I then asked, "Do you want this bank of love?"

She nodded, took the bank from me, and hugged it tight to her chest. I put an arm around her and said, "Now you're rich with love!"

This girl, who was rich because of love, had just lost a lot, perhaps even her home. She had

come to the Edmonton Emergency Relief Services Society (EERSS) distribution center with her family for relief supplies. They were victims of the Fort McMurray wildfire.

In May 2016, a wildfire started southwest of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada. It spread across nearly 600,000 hectares (2,300 square miles) before it was brought under control in early July. Though the burnt area was mostly forest, about 2,400 structures were destroyed and over 100,000 people were evacuated ahead of the flames.

People who had lost their homes to the fire had lost almost everything, and those who were evacuated only had time to pack some important documents and a few pieces of luggage before



Miao Wan-hui (苗萬輝, second from left), vice CEO of Tzu Chi Canada, talks to Cindi Hache, executive director of the Edmonton Emergency Relief Services Society, about aid provided by Tzu Chi.

we had: "This was made from recycled PET bottles." Our explanations always drew looks of surprise.

The Fort McMurray conflagration was the worst wildfire in Canadian history. The demand for the most basic necessities was

they had to flee for their lives. They needed help. The municipal government of Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, entrusted EERSS, a non-profit organization, to help coordinate the donation relief effort and set up a distribution center to provide evacuees with necessities.

On May 16, Tzu Chi volunteers from Vancouver set up a station at the EERSS distribution center, offering items such as blankets, pillows, bath towels, and washcloths. Because the temperatures were still low at night, hovering around 4°C (39°F), the Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, quickly sent over 4,000 blankets in four air shipments to help out.

While I helped wildfire victims obtain aid items at our station, I also introduced Tzu Chi coin banks to them, encouraging them to save money in the banks to help the needy. One woman, thinking that I was trying to solicit donations from her, said reluctantly, "Okay..."

"No, No!" I quickly explained. "This bank is a present from us. It carries our wish that you'll be rich with love and that one day when you're back on your feet you can pay your love forward."

Her face immediately relaxed into a smile. Taking a coin bank from me, she said, "I will! This is my lucky charm. I'll keep it safe."

I truly do believe she'll get firmly back on her feet and pay her love forward.

THE DISTRIBUTION CENTER was divided into several large stations, each offering different kinds of supplies. People had to pick up the items they needed as quickly as possible and then move on to the next station to prevent a jam.

The light, soft blankets provided by Tzu Chi were popular. When we handed one over to an evacuee, we always explained in the short time

beyond imagination. The city of Edmonton almost ran out of such supplies as pillows and bath towels. One day, Tzu Chi volunteers who lived in Edmonton scoured the entire city and only managed to secure about 300 pillows from 16 stores. Tzu Chi Canada quickly ordered pillows and bath towels from several manufacturers and had them rushed to the distribution center.

Despite our best efforts, we still sometimes ran short. One day, all our bath towels were picked up before the next shipment was to arrive. After I had helped an elderly woman obtain a blanket and a pillow, we moved on to the area for towels. I said to her, "I have bad news for you: We've run out of bath towels. But I have good news for you too: We have washcloths in an assortment of colors from which you may choose." The woman was a little disappointed she didn't receive a bath towel, but she seemed happy at the same time that she could pick out washcloths in colors that she preferred.

Another middle-aged woman selected a few washcloths in different colors. I pointed to some chair cushion covers off to one side and said, "These cushion covers come in a variety of patterns and bright colors. You can pick some you like."

"But I don't even have a chair," she said, her voice a little sad. In an attempt to cheer her up, I said with exaggeration, "So-o-o, the good news is that you can have some free cushion covers, but the bad news is..." She burst into laughter and, picking up where I had left off, said, "I don't have a chair!"

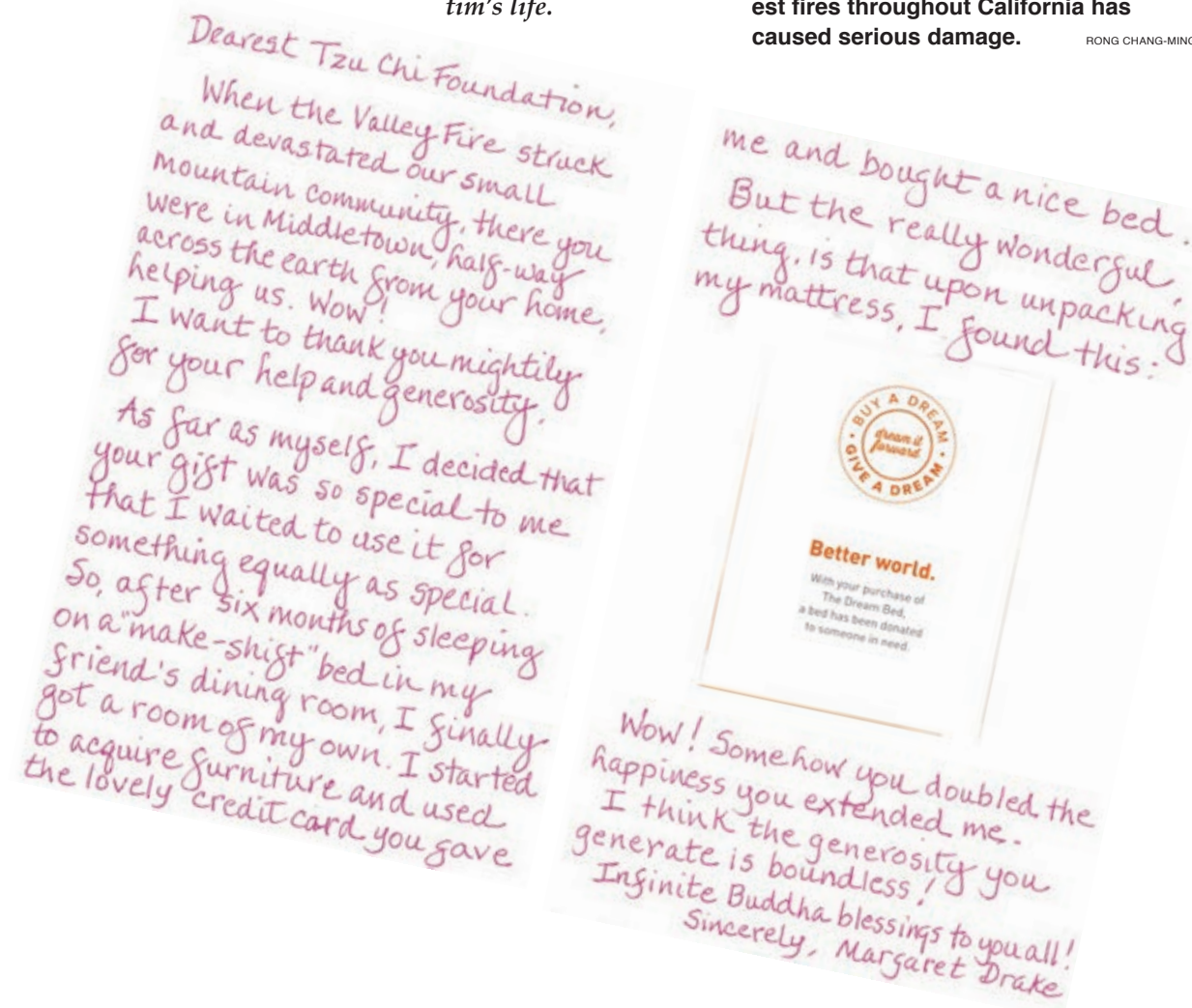
She moved on to her next stop, smiling. Looking at her walk away, I came to realize once more that as Tzu Chi volunteers, we hope to provide not only material aid, but more importantly love, comfort, hope, and strength. ❀

A Ripple of Goodness

Devastation from the rapidly moving Valley Fire of September 2015 hit especially hard in the small community of Middletown, California, where residents had to flee for their lives overnight. But after all the tragedy, a ripple of goodness surfaced in one victim's life.



Wildfire victims in Middletown helplessly look at burned homes. A series of forest fires throughout California has caused serious damage. RONG CHANG-MING



Stay Strong in Your Faith

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Translated by Teresa Chang

Typhoon Nepartak was the first typhoon to hit Taiwan this summer. On July 8, it landed in Taimali, Taitung County, southeast Taiwan. It was the strongest storm to ravage Taitung in 60 years. Strong winds and rain lashed the area for hours, blowing away roofs and toppling houses. People were terrified.

In the aftermath of the storm, Tzu Chi volunteers rushed from across Taiwan to offer aid. For nine days they visited affected families in Taitung to extend care, hand out emergency cash, and assess the need for further assistance.

Lin Jin-hua (林金花) is a Tzu Chi commissioner living in Taitung. She had had a serious traffic accident last year and had not yet completely recovered. Even so, she led volunteers from other areas to assess the damage. Dr. Wing-Him Poon (潘永謙), superintendent of Guanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, took hospital staff members to two schools to help clear the damage and debris. They used chainsaws to cut fallen trees into smaller pieces that would be easier to remove. Drs. Li Sen-jia (李森佳) and Li Jin-san (李晉三), two brothers serving at Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital, also pitched in to help. They joined volunteers in carrying out visits to affected families.

Dr. Li Sen-jia, 80, was diagnosed with cancer a few years back, but he did not let the illness get the better of him. He took very good care of his body and mind, and he continued to offer his patients his warm care. He gave this same love to victims of the typhoon. What a beautiful life he leads! He is truly making the best of his life.

This article is excerpted from a series of speeches delivered by Master Cheng Yen from July 1 to 19, 2016.

He is like the ferryman in the *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings*, who despite being seriously ill is still able to help people cross over to the other shore because he has a solid boat.

Love from many places throughout Taiwan streamed into the disaster area. Taiwan Railway provided additional trains for free to people heading to Taitung to help with the relief work, local guesthouses offered free accommodations for visiting volunteers, and governments of areas not affected by the typhoon dispatched workers and heavy machinery to help with the cleanup.

Real-life bodhisattvas poured forth in the aftermath of the disaster to render aid; they fully demonstrated the power of love and kindness. When a disaster strikes, those of us who emerge unscathed ought to be grateful for our safety and provide a helping hand to those who need it. Everyone can give. We all have unlimited potential as long as we have the heart to contribute.

When one person helps another, when a neighborhood helps another neighborhood, a county another county, and a city another city, recovery will speed up.

Extreme weather

After leaving Taiwan, Typhoon Nepartak made landfall in China. Mingqing and Yongtai Counties in Fujian Province were among the hardest hit. Many mud-brick buildings collapsed after days of flooding, forcing people into temporary shelters set up in schools. Desks served as their beds; some people even had to sleep on hard floors.

Tzu Chi volunteers provided folding beds and blankets to help out. They also cooked hot

meals for victims, who had been eating dry food every day since the disaster. Such thoughtful gestures moved Mr. Liu, a local resident, to donate 90 bags of rice to Tzu Chi to help out.

This is how love can be inspired. When people give sincerely out of love, they often move those around them to do the same, thus setting into motion ever-widening ripples of love.

The power unleashed by nature can be truly astounding. On June 23, just a couple of weeks before Typhoon Nepartak hit Fujian Province, a tornado and hailstorm struck Yancheng in the eastern Chinese province of Jiangsu. Many factories and houses were leveled. Ninety-nine people were killed and more than 800 injured; families were tragically torn asunder in an instant.

The local government quickly provided shelter for those rendered homeless. Tzu Chi volunteers also rushed in to help. They visited hospitalized victims and delivered over 800 folding beds and blankets to shelter residents to make

their stay more comfortable. Volunteers even rolled up their sleeves and cleaned up shelter restrooms, while local people delivered water to the restrooms to make the cleanup easier. The volunteers recognized how hard medical professionals were working to treat the injured, so they also brought fruit to a hospital to thank the doctors and nurses.

Following the storm, an elderly man and his grandson were rescued from under the rubble. However, the grandfather was not a bit happy to be alive. He told volunteers through tears that he was the sole breadwinner in the family, but that he was getting too old to shoulder the responsibility. He felt utterly powerless. Volunteers hugged the man and told him not to worry. They spent days with the man and his grandson, providing care and support. In the end, the old man finally came around and smiled with hope.

Natural disasters have hit other places in the world. India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka have all experienced severe flooding recently. Due to El Niño and La Niña, some places around the world have received so much

A Tzu Chi volunteer expresses her care for a shelter resident displaced by a tornado in Yancheng, Jiangsu, eastern China.



Dr. Wing-Him Poon, superintendent of Guanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, helps clear away damage at a school ravaged by Typhoon Nepartak.

rainfall this year that there has been severe flooding. Other places have not had a drop of rain. Such extreme weather has led to crop failures. The United Nations estimates that resulting food shortages will affect over one hundred million people.

It begins with you and me

Such extreme climatic conditions are closely intertwined with the lifestyles of human beings. Humans consume a lot of natural resources to satisfy their endless desires. Inordinate consumption of resources to sustain wasteful lifestyles is wreaking havoc on the Earth. To protect the environment, to reduce global warming, people must change their attitudes and behavior. They must curb their desires and cherish what they have to help conserve resources.

One thing everyone can do is to save water and electricity. Nowadays, most buildings are fitted with air-conditioners. Accustomed to the cool air indoors, many people cannot stand the high temperatures outside. However, a heart at ease cools a person down. Don't become a burden on the environment by turning on the air conditioner full force as soon as you feel hot. In addition to conserving electricity, we must not waste food. A saying goes, "A grain of rice, 24 drops of sweat." Farming is hard work. We should cherish every grain of rice and not be wasteful. When we learn to appreciate other people's hard work, we will naturally treasure all things.

No matter how rich we are, we cannot own everything in the world, but a contented person will never feel in need. I hope everyone can learn to be content, live simply, love the Earth, and contribute to the well-being of man-

kind. When everyone can live with sincere piety and give without asking for anything in return, nature will fall into balance, and disasters will decrease.

Be grounded in faith

A natural disaster can bring damage that breaks people's hearts, but man-made disasters, such as war, are often even more horrifying. Human beings constantly create strife and discord, which disturb the world's peace. We cannot bring peace to the world without first transforming people's minds. I hope everyone can respect and love one another, be sincere in all dealings, and never act willfully. Furthermore, let's all reach out to the needy. The power



GUO MING-JUAN

Dr. Antonio Say talks with a patient at a free eye clinic held by Tzu Chi on Bohol Island.



LUI JIA-MEI

The Buddha said that he was that man and Cinca the woman. Such was the karmic law of cause and effect. He said he was willing to accept the retribution.

The Buddha vowed to deliver all people, good or bad, from suffering. Because of that, he encountered a lot of adversity. Even in his assembly of disciples there were people who harbored evil intentions against him. They badmouthed

of our combined love will be great when we all nurture kindness and create good karma together. This is how we will help peace to reign in the world.

With torrents of spiritual turbidity roiling in the world today, with the forces of goodness in a tough tug-of-war with the forces of evil, we must adhere all the more closely to an upright religion and stay strong in our faith.

There is a story in a Buddhist scripture:

The Buddha accepted King Prasenajit's invitation and led a thousand of his disciples to the king's palace. Pious people lined the way from the Jetavana monastery to the palace. The sight made the eight classes of Dharma-protectors, including heavenly beings and dragons, joyful. Just when the procession was about to reach the palace, a bhikkhuni named Cinca suddenly appeared. Her belly noticeably round, she tugged at the Buddha's robe and declared that she was pregnant with his child.

Her statement astonished everyone and created quite a stir. Just then, a mouse materialized out of nowhere. It crawled under Cinca's robe and chewed through a cord holding a round water scoop, which landed hard on the ground. The king was outraged when he saw all this, and he ordered that Cinca be buried alive.

The Buddha asked the king to put off the execution, and he told everyone a story: A long time ago in a marketplace, a woman was getting ready to buy a bowl of pearls when a man offered to pay double for them. He got them in the end. The woman was furious, and resentment took hold of her heart. Lifetime after lifetime she slandered the man.

him and spread lies about him. They tried everything they could to blacken the reputation of the Enlightened One, the Dharma (the Buddha's teachings), and the *sangha* (the assembly of monks and nuns). But their actions were like kicking sand into the wind. In the end, the sand was blown backward in their direction and never touched the Buddha. Their unwholesome deeds did not detract from the Buddha's merits one little bit. On the contrary, the slanderers suffered the backlash of their own actions. By vilifying the One who spoke about the Truth and by hindering him from spreading the Dharma and bringing good to people, the slanderers brought great damage onto themselves.

The Buddha's teachings are an antidote to the many ills we see in the world today, but it is not an easy feat to promulgate the Dharma in this treacherous, difficult world. People's minds go through ups and downs. When they feel happy and positive, they aspire to diligently practice the Dharma. Yet when the wind of ignorance blows, it very easily stirs up doubt and distrust in their minds and causes them to slacken in their way and forget their aspirations.

Knowing this, the Buddha tirelessly reminded us in the *Lotus Sutra* that once we pledge to walk the Bodhisattva Path, we must build a strong faith and hold firm to our aspirations so that we can withstand whatever challenges life throws at us and not be easily carried away by the currents of ignorance.

The Dharma isn't a set of abstract principles—it is totally applicable to our everyday life. Practicing Buddhism means to break our bad habits and transform the bad in us into good. If

A doctor operates on a patient at the free eye clinic.

you used to speak harshly to others, be soft-spoken, kind and helpful now. In addition, do more than just tap into the good in yourself—inspire others to do the same and help safeguard their kindness. By eliminating all that is bad and encouraging all that is good, we will help bring about a good world.

The world needs living bodhisattvas

The world may be full of all kinds of disturbances, but there is hope as long as there are living bodhisattvas among us.

On October 15, 2013, a magnitude 7.2 earthquake rocked Bohol Island in the Philippines, killing more than 200 people and damaging many schools. After extending emergency aid to victims, Tzu Chi volunteers helped erect 150 prefabricated classrooms.

In June 2016, volunteers from Manila traveled to the island again to hold a free eye clinic. When they arrived at the venue to set it up, they saw people sleeping on the ground nearby. It turned out that those people, who lived 80 kilometers (50 miles) away, were afraid of missing the free clinic, so they pooled their money and hired a vehicle to take them to the site one day early. Hearing their story, our volunteers felt for them. Most of them suffered from cataracts, which can be treated with an easy operation. But in Bohol there is a shortage of ophthalmologists, and most people are too poor to afford the treatment anyway, so a free eye clinic is their only chance.

One man, Jose, used to be the breadwinner of his family, but a year ago cataracts had blinded him and rendered him unable to work. He thought he was doomed to spend the rest of his life in darkness. Dr. Antonio Say screened his eyes before the free clinic and assured him that there was a fair chance he would regain his vision. The doctor was right. After surgery on one of his eyes at the free clinic, Jose walked out of the operating room on his own. His future is no longer swathed in darkness.

Four children in one family were all afflicted with congenital cataracts. Dr. Say arranged to have four surgeons operate on them at the same time. Afterwards, when the four siblings were able to see each other, they were overjoyed. Their joy spread to other patients at the clinic.

The free clinic restored the vision of nearly 200 people.



LI JIANMEI

Tzu Chi volunteers have always given unwaveringly to the less fortunate; neither praise nor criticism can shake their determination to serve. They forge ahead, undaunted by the distances they have to travel to reach the needy, undaunted by the large number of people out there who need help. They stay true to their commitment and work hard with one another to disseminate seeds of love.

Oftentimes when people face adversities, they pray to the bodhisattvas for help and blessings. But can those bodhisattvas truly help them? Real-life bodhisattvas can. We have seen our volunteers willingly clear all obstacles to get to places where people are suffering. They treat the less fortunate as they would their own family members, give them warm hugs, soothe them with gentle words, and offer them a shoulder to lean on. They visit places of suffering to find out how they can be of help, and then they deliver whatever aid is needed. They are bodhisattvas in real life!

It is my wish that all Buddhists will embark on the Bodhisattva Path and give to the suffering and needy. Please be ever more mindful. ☸

An Unexpected Bodhisattva

To Tzu Chi volunteers, he is more like a true, benevolent friend who has a lot to teach them than a cancer patient who needs help from others.



Text and photo by Wu Yan-ni Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

In the vicinity of a park in Hemei, Zhanghu, central Taiwan, there stood a small, squat house. Mr. Wang, wearing a surgical mask, looked out expectantly in front of his house while A-hui, a woman who lived with him, swept up fallen leaves from an old banyan tree nearby. Wang broke into a big smile as soon as he saw a small party of Tzu Chi volunteers approaching his home. He said, "I knew you were coming today, so I waited for you here." Before he had even finished his sentence, he went into his house and moved out some chairs for the volunteers.

Wang and the visitors sat down in the yard and struck up an easy conversation. It had been raining on and off for several days, and the humidity drew the mosquitoes out. Wang said apologetically, "Sorry I can't invite you in. My house is too small to accommodate you all. I

apologize for letting you sit outside and be exposed to the sun and mosquitoes."

Volunteer Shi Qiao-xin (施喬馨) immediately said, "It feels good to be out in the sun. There's been so much rain lately, I feel like I'm growing mold."

"How have you been feeling?" volunteer Wang Zhen-xiong (王振雄) asked as he moved closer to Wang.

Wang took Zhen-xiong's hand, guided it to feel his abdomen, and remarked with a smile, "My belly is hard and a little swollen, and there are sores in my mouth because I just had a chemo session. Other than that, I'm fine. I exercise at the park in the morning and evening, walking or riding a bike. And I keep regular hours."

Wang has throat and liver cancer. His oldest daughter has a chronic illness and his second

daughter suffers from a mental disease. Both of them live out of town and need other people's care. They are in no position to look after their own father. Luckily, Wang's companion, A-hui, has stood by him like a rock through his difficulties. Her daughter also treats Wang like her own father and often comes to check on them and bring them things.

Zhen-xiong asked, "When is your next hospital visit?"

"One and a half months from now," he replied.

Wang then went on to tell the volunteers that during his last chemo treatment at the hospital, he ran into a depressed woman suffering from terminal cancer. "I said to her, 'Since we can't change the reality of our illnesses, we must try to accept it and live in peace with the cancer cells. Life goes on whether we're happy or not, so we might as well enjoy it.' I also told her husband, 'People who are sick tend to be more emotionally unstable. Make allowances for your wife. There is no storm that doesn't pass.'"

Shi gave him a big thumbs-up. "You're really something. You're a patient yourself and yet instead of looking to others to comfort you, you cheer others up and encourage them to go on. Here's a 'like' for you!"

A good example

Zhen-xiong recalled the first time he met Wang. In September 2015, he went with other volunteers to Changhua Christian Hospital to visit Wang, who had been referred to Tzu Chi as a potential care recipient, and make an assessment of his situation. The volunteers could not find him in his ward, so they asked a nurse where he was. Following her directions, they found him in a rest area. Pushing an IV pole, he was going around consoling and cheering up other patients and encouraging them to make the best of every day.

Wang recognized the Tzu Chi uniform of the volunteers, who had also brought him some fruit. "You must be looking for me. Please come to my room."

Zhen-xiong talked about his first impression of Wang. "He struck me as very optimistic and upbeat. He didn't look like a terminal cancer patient in need of help."

Following their assessment, Tzu Chi decided to give Wang long-term aid. Zhen-xiong got to know Wang better in the process of visiting and caring for him, and the two men became good

friends. "He's such a good influence on me," Zhen-xiong observed. "He faces the ravages of illness with optimism. He lives in earnest knowing that his days are probably numbered. He helps me realize that cancer doesn't have to be a nightmare. It all depends on how you look at it."

Zhen-xiong needed some optimism in his own life, since he had had his fair share of challenges to face. His father died of lung cancer in 2013. After Zhen-xiong took care of his father's funeral, his only son was diagnosed with brain cancer. Despite surgery and chemotherapy, his beloved son passed away just four months later. A senior in college at the time, he did not even get to finish his last semester in school.

"Both my wife and I worked," Zhen-xiong recalled, his voice choked with emotion. "To make it easier for us, our son would get up early to fix breakfast for our entire family and then take his two younger sisters to school. In winter he'd even warm our bed by lying in it so that we could fall asleep snug and warm." When Zhen-xiong's wife had a car accident and was hospitalized, their son got up early as usual, prepared breakfast, took his sisters to school, and then went to the hospital to take care of his mom.

He had always been a mature, endearing son. That made it doubly hard for the couple to come to terms with his passing. Zhen-xiong and his wife cried for a whole month. One of their daughters was a member of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association. Her heart went out to her parents when she saw them engulfed by such sadness, so she asked some volunteers to bring them into Tzu Chi, hoping that volunteer work would take their minds off their grief.

Through his involvement with the foundation over the past three years, Zhen-xiong has come to better understand the karmic law of cause and effect. "Our son came to this life to repay a debt of gratitude to us. He did what he was here to do, so he left. We should all let him go in peace and give him our blessings." Zhen-xiong thanks his son for leading him to Buddhism. He also thanks Master Cheng Yen for her guidance and his fellow volunteers for learning and practicing the Buddha's teachings with him. He is grateful to Wang, too, for inspiring him with his optimistic and upbeat outlook on life. "Life is impermanent. Nothing lasts forever. Every person, every living creature in the world can be our teacher. [Mr. Wang] is like a bodhisattva who, through the way he deals with his affliction, has taught us so much." ❀

The Illustrated JING SI Aphorisms



The Buddha says:

"Right Speech" means that you don't tell lies, don't say things that hurt others, and don't use obscenity. My fellow monks! This is "Right Speech."



Many of our members drop out of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association after a while. How can we keep them from quitting?

The most important thing in the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association is to care for and encourage one another. You need to be good students and not waste time on hedonistic pleasures. The current generation of young people focuses too much on fancy entertainment. Appropriate extracurricular activities can help young people spend their free time meaningfully.

Translated by E E Ho and W.L. Rathje; drawings by Tsai Chih-chung; coloring by May E. Gu

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



A volunteer holds the hands of an aid recipient during a relief distribution for flood victims in Elkview, West Virginia.

USA

On June 23, 2016, thunderstorms brought torrential rain to West Virginia, resulting in such severe flooding that the U.S. weather service called it a “one in a thousand year event.” In the wake of the floods, West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin declared a state of emergency in 44 of the state’s 55 counties.

To tackle the large-scale disaster, over 130 Tzu Chi volunteers from New Jersey, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. joined forces to deliver aid to victims. Elkview was one of the worst-hit areas, so the volunteers held a distribution there first, at the Elkview Baptist Church, on July 16.

The distribution was set to start at 9:30 a.m., but some victims started to arrive as early as 6:30. By nine, the plaza outside the church was crowded with people. The local Red Cross had done a good job spreading the word.

The distribution began with Sister Guo Lu Yue (郭慮悅) thanking Elkview residents for giving Tzu Chi volunteers the chance to serve them.

Then the song “God Bless America” was played, accompanied by a sign language performance by Tzu Chi volunteers.

Erica Mani, chief executive officer of the Red Cross West Virginia region, spoke to the gathering. She thanked Tzu Chi for its assistance. She pointed out that the collaboration between Red Cross and Tzu Chi allowed for the best assistance to be delivered to the victims. She also mentioned that the way the two organizations complimented each other could allow her organization to achieve goals that had been difficult to achieve in the past.

Some mothers came with their children, so volunteers helped look after the children, freeing the mothers to line up, fill out information, and receive debit cards from the foundation.

One elderly couple came to the distribution together. Morris Dean, 85, and his wife had just celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary the day before the floods. Mrs. Dean could not walk very well, so Morris carefully guided her



Despite damage to their houses, many people were still willing to help others. Many flood victims in Elkview took home coin banks in which they could save money to help the needy.

victims took home coin banks in which they could save money to help the needy. Some even joined the “Power of Five” program whereby they would donate five dollars a month to Tzu Chi to help the needy in countries such as South Africa and Haiti.

By the end of the day, volunteers had given out \$166,900 to 377 families. They also gave their best wishes to the vic-

times, hoping that they would soon get back on their feet.

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Indonesia

H. Harnojoyo is the mayor of Palembang, the second largest city on the island of Sumatra. He visited Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall in Jakarta in November 2015. His purpose was to ask Tzu Chi to help rebuild houses in his city for needy families living in deplorable conditions. Tzu Chi agreed to help rebuild a hundred homes. The first phase of the project consisted of building 17 houses in 13 Ilir, a neighborhood in the city where many people lived in rundown houses.

Their house was near the Elk River. All the other houses nearby were submerged too, forcing

many people to abandon their homes. Many of those people were not financially able to rebuild their homes, so they moved away. Seeing many neighbors they had known for years leave the place, Lora Mullins was rather upset.

Despite going through a difficult time, many aid recipients still hoped to help others. After learning from Tzu Chi volunteers how the foundation had started with small donations from housewives, many

Yulianawati on the small plot of land where her family’s old house used to stand before it burned down.



Sister Like Hermansyah (王惠嬌) led a team of volunteers to the neighborhood to explain to residents Tzu Chi's reconstruction plans. Interested residents were advised to have the title documents for their land and homes ready so they could sign up for the project. After the meeting, the volunteers went with local officials to see homes in the neighborhood.

On April 26, 2016, residents selected for the project signed contracts with Tzu Chi to participate.

M. Marham's old house burned down in 2012. After that, he and his family could only rent a shabby, tiny house across from his old house. The rented house, about two by six meters (130 square feet), did not have enough space for his family of five. "The house was so small that even moving about was an inconvenience," said Marham. They really wished for a better, bigger house in which to live.

Marham is a carpenter, making about 125,000 rupiah (US\$9) a day. His wages could barely cover daily expenses, tuition for three children, and the rent, let alone allow them to save for their dream of a better house. Fortunately, he was one of the 17 recipients selected for the first phase of the rebuilding. He volunteered to help build his home, and in just 30 days his new house was completed. He and his family could now move into their new house before Eid-al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. Marham's wife, Yulianawati, repeated what their children had kept yelling: "Mom, we can celebrate Eid-al-Fitr in our new home!"

Tzu Chi held a turnover ceremony for the 17 houses on July 4. Marham expressed his gratitude to Tzu Chi on behalf of his family. By helping out during the construction of his home, he had learned the beauty of mutual assistance.

From his experience with Tzu Chi, Marham realized that it was not difficult to help other people. Although he was not rich, he was still able to help. He poured out the coins from his coin bank to donate to the foundation, saying that he hoped his modest donation could help someone realize his dream, just as Tzu Chi had helped him.

Great Britain

On July 9, Tzu Chi volunteers from Manchester visited the Abbotsford Nursing Home to spend time with the residents, celebrate a birthday, and cook lunch for them. Tzu



Tzu Chi volunteers amuse elderly residents at the Abbotsford Nursing Home in Manchester.

Chi volunteers Chen Chiou Hwa (陳秋華) and Hana Sabat from Jordan happened to be on a business trip to Manchester, so they joined the other volunteers and offered their help at the nursing home.

Despite a heavy downpour in the morning, the volunteers' enthusiasm was not dampened. They arrived at the nursing home at 10:00 and split into two teams to carry out their tasks.

One team went to the kitchen to prepare a hot lunch. The other team went to chat with the elderly and to lead group activities. There were many elderly Chinese people in the nursing home, and they all loved to hear old songs, so the volunteers sang favorite oldies for them. They also sang English folk songs and nursery rhymes for the European seniors in another section of the home.

The volunteers also brought a cake for the birthday of a resident. He was surprised and delighted to see it. Smiling, he read out loud from the birthday card containing the volunteers' best wishes for him.

At lunchtime, the volunteers served lunch for the residents and the staff of the nursing home. Everyone had an enjoyable meal. The residents were all getting on in years, so the volunteers cherished every chance to spend time with them.

Brazil

The Brazil Tzu Chi office held a free clinic on July 17 to celebrate its 24th anniversary. Health talks were given at that time to help people learn how to take better care of their health.

The office began bustling early in the morning with all the people who were there to receive treatment and the extra volunteers to serve them. Volunteers first took attendees' blood pressure and blood sugar and then passed them on to see doctors. Services offered included ophthalmology, dentistry, dermatology, gynecology, ENT, internal medicine, and Chinese medicine.

Dr. Lin Yu-zhuang (林育壯) gave a lecture on Alzheimer's disease and its prevention. He suggested that people keep learning new things, exercise, interact with other people, and listen to light music to help stimulate their brains. There were also talks on the prevention of cardiovascular and urological diseases. Dr. Zhou Guo-ji (周國驥) used a lot of slides to explain the serious consequences of blood vessel blockages and ruptures, and he urged everyone to watch their diet for the sake of their hearts.

Lin Ji Xing (林濟幸), CEO of Tzu Chi Brazil, thanked the local Chinese community for making donations or getting personally involved

with Tzu Chi to help the needy in Brazil. One service Tzu Chi provides, for example, is distributing glasses to people who cannot afford them. Because of this service, many people have been able to see clearly again, which has improved the quality of their lives.

Su Ju-chu (蘇鉅初) donated on behalf of Rotary International a notebook computer, an electrocardiography monitor, three blood pressure gauges, two blood glucose meters, and two boxes of blood glucose test strips to the Tzu Chi office. He commended Tzu Chi volunteers for their unselfish dedication to those in need.

Seventeen physicians served 595 patient visits that day. Tzu Chi Brazil started its free clinic service in 1995. Its medical team has since served 165,800 patient visits in more than 20 towns.

Guatemala

On July 2, eight Tzu Chi volunteers left Guatemala City, the national capital, at seven in the morning and traveled for two hours to San

People line up to register at a free clinic sponsored by the Tzu Chi office in Brazil in honor of its 24th anniversary.





Guatemalan children line up to receive backpacks and other supplies.

Agustin Acasaguastlán, a municipality in the El Progreso department. The purpose of the trip was to hold two distributions.

Their first stop was the Centro de Atención Nacional al Adulto Mayor “Mi Dulce Refugio,” a nursing home for the elderly. Volunteers first gave out modeling balloons to the residents, hoping to bring some cheer to the elderly people there and remind them of happy times from their childhoods.

When the volunteers had lined up the relief supplies, a short ceremony followed. Sulma Ramirez, a nursing home representative, introduced Tzu Chi to the residents. Then volunteers performed a Tzu Chi song accompanied by hand gestures. Their performance drew warm applause from the residents and livened up the occasion.

The volunteers donated black beans, oat-

meal, sugar, cooking oil, laundry detergent, toilet paper, and diapers. They also brought small gifts for the residents.

After visiting the nursing home, the volunteers traveled to the Tzu Chi Community Children’s Center, which was built with money raised by the local Chinese community and donated to the local government in 2003. Currently the center has two teachers, four nannies, and 40 children from needy families.

Twenty-six parents came for the event, so the activity was held outdoors to accommodate so many people. After a simple ceremony, the volunteers presented backpacks, crayons, coloring books, and potato chips to the children. They also donated black beans, oatmeal, sugar, cooking oil, rice, and laundry detergent to the center. The teaching staff and parents also received goods from the volunteers. ☸

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If we work with a joyful heart, no matter how tiring and demanding the task is, we will be rewarded with a sense of bliss and joy.

—Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY LI BAI-SHI