

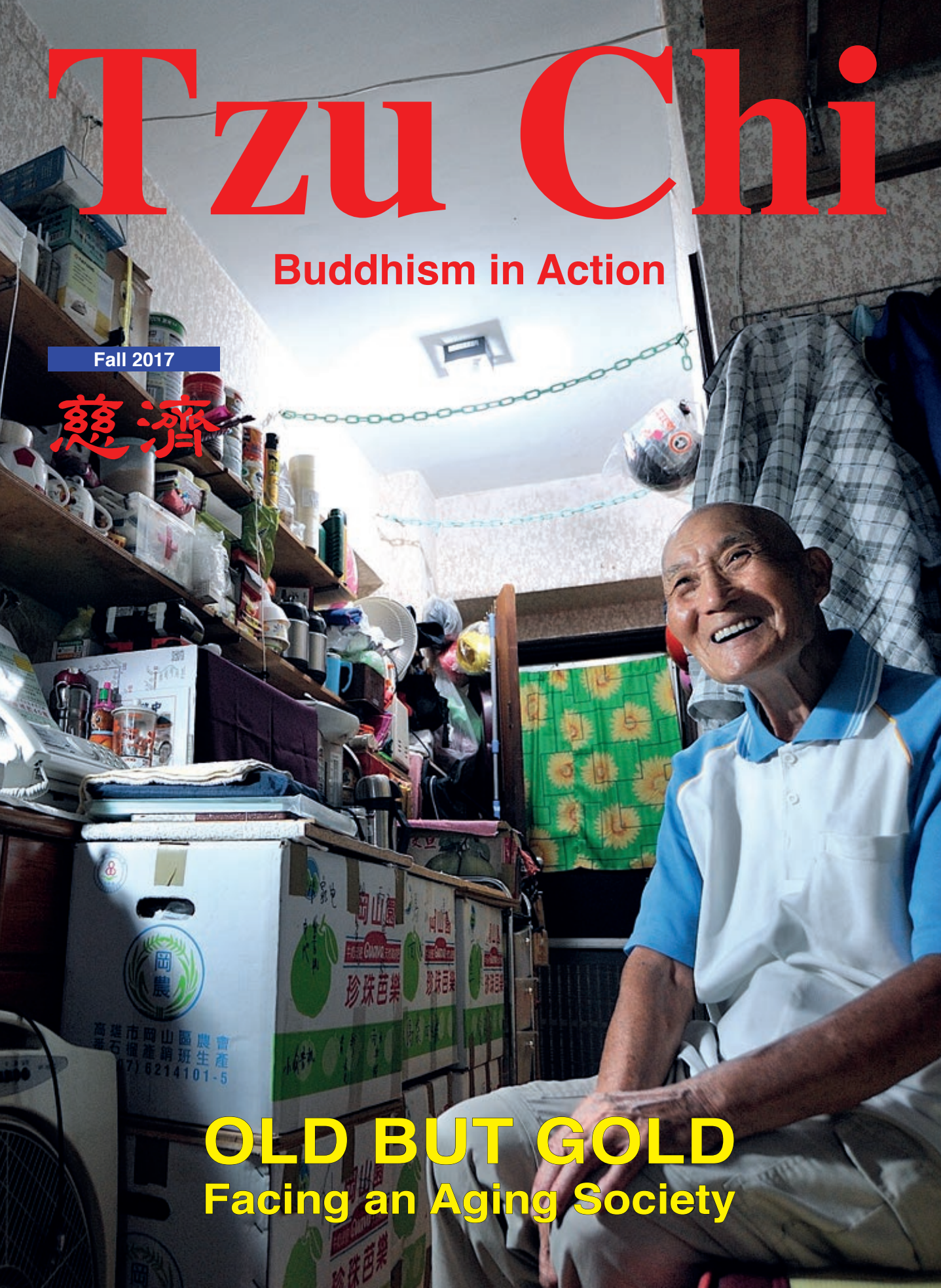
Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Fall 2017

慈濟

OLD BUT GOLD
Facing an Aging Society





The compound of Miaotong Temple
Liugui, Kaohsiung City, Taiwan

On Karmic Effects

Text and photo by Liu King-pong

Our shadows are upright when we stand in an upright position, whereas they are crooked when we bend down. We normally believe that our blessings have a direct connection with our behavior, just like the link between our physical bodies and shadows—i.e., we will eventually reap sweet fruits after doing good deeds, but we will suffer unfavorable consequences after doing evil things.

However, people's lives and fates do not always unfold according to this seemingly well-founded tenet. As we can observe, many malicious people possess tremendous power and lead quite enjoyable lives, while the lives of many kind and benevolent people are full of suffering and hardship. My neighbor Mrs. Wang was a devout Buddhist who always urged others to adopt a vegetarian diet. She believed that we humans should not hurt any animals. She also never missed a chance to help the needy. To our surprise, this kind, compassionate woman was recently killed in a car accident. Shocked and bewildered, many of her friends while lamenting her death also expressed skepticism toward her belief in "doing good." "Why wasn't she blessed and protected by her karma?" they asked.

As a practitioner of Buddhism for over two decades, I believe that the good karmic effects one reaps may not have been sown solely in one's current life. By the same token, one may wait until a future life to face the retribution for bad deeds committed in one's present life. The rice we eat today was actually grown and harvested last year. If the good karma that a person created in his previous lives is ripe, he may, regardless of the bad acts he commits in his current life, still enjoy those blessings and rewards in this life. It is like a farmer who can tide his family over during a bad year if he has stored enough grain and food from previous years. That same farmer will probably run into big trouble next year if his farm is unproductive this year.

Furthermore, people change their minds quickly. A good person's determination to do good deeds might not last forever. Conversely, a malevolent person might be inspired by someone he admires and subsequently repent for his sins and become a new man. All these inter-

twined transformations can be difficult to scrutinize.

As bystanders, we can hardly judge a person according to his good deeds because many people deliberately do good deeds discreetly so other people will not know about them. This is called an accumulation of unknown merit. We can only see the tip of an iceberg, unaware that over 90 percent of the ice is below the surface of the water. Likewise, karmic effects, similar to icebergs floating aimlessly at sea, can be truly hard to examine and describe.

The law of karmic effects helps resolve a basic question: Why should we need to do good deeds and refrain from doing bad things? Instructors from social, educational, and religious organizations both in the East and West exhort their followers to do good deeds because this doctrine universally conforms to both public interests and to God's will. We are inclined to consider our own personal interests before we do something, and we make sure that what we do will benefit not only ourselves but also our friends and families. The core meaning of the law of cause and effect fits this frame of mind perfectly. Good has its reward and evil has its recompense. We reap what we sow. Those who live according to this law are accountable for their own behavior, and they actually do not need to be stimulated or prompted by the teachings of any religious mentors or schoolteachers. They can choose for themselves a decent or an unfavorable future. They are the true masters of their own destiny.

We Buddhists firmly believe we can take nothing but the karma we have created, good or bad, with us when we die. According to the *Earth Treasury Sutra*, we can accumulate a lot of karmic merits by doing good deeds in this life, and we will consequently be greatly blessed in a future life. In the same way, we will surely encounter a lot of calamities, misfortunes, and disturbances in the future if we keep doing wrong or committing crimes in this life. We might even be reborn into the Three Lower Realms of animals, hungry ghosts, and hell.

This brings to mind one of Master Cheng Yen's teachings: "Work willingly and receive the results joyfully." ❁

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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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Hong Kong, My Home

But Where Is My Home?

Hordes of tourists flock to see the light show at Victoria Harbor in Hong Kong. But the lights, however bright, do not point out a path for people who have no place to call home.



By Qiu Ru-lian Translated by Tang Yau-yang Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Hong Kong is for shopping.

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A homeless man dozes off in front of advertisements of properties for rent and for sale.

Mr. Wong, 73, lives in a subdivided flat about 70 square feet in area. Many low-income people in Hong Kong live in such miniature flats.



Housing Scarcity Up Close

For seven years in a row, Hong Kong has reigned as the least affordable city in the world. Housing prices soared 33 percent in 2016 alone. Renters typically spend 40 percent of their income on rent, which has priced some people right out onto the street. These are Hong Kong's homeless.



A wall in the Kwun Tong Industrial Area is blanketed by slips of paper announcing properties for rent. Many old factories in the area no longer in operation have been partitioned into subdivided flats for rent.

Sky-high housing prices make it very difficult to live in Hong Kong, where, according to a 2015 report, one fifth of the population—about 1,340,000 people—live in poverty. Without any other viable options, some people have chosen to live in subdivided flats, miniature rental properties not quite 70 square feet in size. Sometimes more than one person may be squeezed into a single unit. About 190,000 people in Hong Kong live in this kind of rental space. To be fair, the Hong Kong government has built public housing for residents of modest means to rent at substantial discounts, some-

times as much as 89 percent off prevailing market rates. However, statistics as of March 2017 show that 270,000 families are still waiting to rent from the government. The typical wait time before an apartment becomes available is about five years. In more ways than one, it is really quite a challenge for people to afford a place to live in the Pearl of the Orient. **Mr. Wong** The sun peeks through the window. With a slight hunch, Mr. Wong, 73, sits on the edge of

his bed. The bed itself seems to contribute to the clutter of his miniscule home, which measures smaller than six by twelve feet. The room is so small because the apartments in this building have been divided into smaller rental units. Outside the room is a long, dark, narrow hallway that ends in a kitchen and bathroom, which all the tenants in this apartment must share. Besides Mr. Wong, five other families live there. When he was young, Wong made a modest living as a school janitor, and he was never able to buy a home. Now that he has retired, he lives on a government stipend for seniors. He had originally

rented a small room on the top of the building in which he now lives. The room, which was constructed largely with galvanized metal sheets, was an addition to the rooftop of the building. Sheet metal provides hardly any insulation, so his room was cold in the winter and hot in the summer. He tried to stay out during the day, collecting recyclable garbage to supplement his income, and he only went back to his room at night to sleep. It was not the most comfortable place to live, but he had no other choice. He applied for public housing, and after some waiting he was finally permitted to move

Construction laborers work high above an up-scale neighborhood. The labor market in Hong Kong is highly competitive. People who have little formal education can only settle for lower paying and sometimes risky physical labor.

into one of the units. But then he married a Chinese woman, and she and her children moved from China to live with him. His new place was not big enough for the expanded family, and he was forced to move out alone. He went back to rent a room in his old building for 1,050 Hong Kong dollars (US\$135) a month. This time his room was on the ninth floor. That was where my photographer and I met him.

A look from the top of his building showed one building after another, packed closely together. All of them had rooftop additions similar to the one in which he used to live.

Down below, countless freestanding umbrellas provided shade for street vendors, customers, and pedestrians. Umbrellas, stalls, pedestrians, merchandise, peddlers, and customers made the roads and alleyways—not all that wide to begin with—extremely crowded.

As new buildings become available elsewhere, people with the financial resources move away, leaving this area, Sham Shui Po, to the less affluent.

Why so pricy?

A place of little land and many people, Hong Kong has always been crowded. Housing demand has always outstripped supply, but the shortage has been exacerbated by the infusion of money from China since it took Hong Kong back from Great Britain in 1997. Housing costs have gone up to levels that have priced even middle-class residents out of the market. As a result, many people seek public housing to rent as their second choice.

According to the Hong Kong Housing Authority, at the end of March 2017, more than 270,000 applications for public housing were still awaiting approval. “About 30,000 new applications are submitted each year. On average, they’ll wait four to six years before approval,” said Ng Man Li (吳萬里), who once worked at the authority and is now a Tzu Chi volunteer.

The strength of demand has spurred enterprising landlords to contrive ways to maximize their revenue. Many have partitioned or altered the layout of their properties into smaller units to rent out. With more units to collect rents on,



they come out ahead. This practice is conducted without government approval.

These small rental units—subdivided flats—are illegal and a public hazard. They invariably pack more residents and their belongings into buildings, potentially to the point of going beyond the safe weight capacity for which the structures were originally designed. Sometimes such subdivisions alter the very structure of the buildings,

for example by removing a load-bearing wall. Such encroachments compromise the structural integrity of the buildings, making them more susceptible to structural instability.

There is another dark cloud that hangs over buildings in which space has been thus subdivided. Public space is often converted into living quarters, thus leaving less room for public passage. In case of a fire, residents may not be able

to evacuate the buildings quickly enough to escape danger.

The Hong Kong news media has surveyed and pegged the size of these small rental units at about 46 square feet each. Though that is not much space for living quarters, such units are not even the smallest available. Still tinier units have popped up in recent years. These miniature accommodations are like pods in a capsule

hotel, but not nearly as neat or as comfortable. They resemble coffins, which has earned them the nickname “coffin rooms.” These tiny places to sleep command a rent of about a thousand Hong Kong dollars (US\$130) a month.

Nobody wants to live in such uncomfortable and unsafe places, but they have no choice. According to a census report, 84,000 families in Hong Kong live in subdivided flats. This statistic clearly illustrates the severity of the problem, but as dark as that picture may seem, it is not even the worst of the problem. Some people can’t even afford to rent subdivided flats or coffin rooms. For them, the only choice is to live on the streets.

Too costly to rent

Ah Yun (not his real name) dressed neatly and acted appropriately. If he had not told us, we would never have known that he actually spent his nights in a park in Kowloon.

With very few belongings, he needs only a little space to sleep. By day, he works at a restaurant doing miscellaneous tasks and making deliveries. Occasionally, he hands out flyers before he starts his day at the restaurant. Assuming he makes the

minimum hourly wage, he earns about 8,000 Hong Kong dollars (US\$1,026) a month. A subdivided flat goes for at least 3,500 dollars, about 40 percent of his income.

“I’ve worked hard for my money,” Ah Yun observed. “If I rented, the rent and the utilities would eat up a large chunk of what I’ve earned and leave me with little to use. That’s too high a price to pay for just a place to sleep at night.” Therefore, he decided against renting. He would rather keep the money so he can afford food and clothing, and still put some money away for the future.

Ah Yun’s situation is better than that of many other homeless people. Some of the men who sleep in the same park cannot find even temporary work because they are sick or physically disabled. They live on a monthly welfare allowance of 1,000 (US\$130) to 3,000 HK dollars.

They stroll the streets during the day when street people cannot stay in the park, and they depend on charity organizations for their meals. When they cannot get a meal, they just do without it. Such is their life.

Five universities and four NGOs in Hong Kong conducted a study in October 2015. They

estimated that 1,600 street people lived in Hong Kong. That was four times as many as ten years before.

These people can be found at parks, underpasses, overpasses, or just about anywhere they can find a reasonable place to sleep. Some of them even venture into 24-hour McDonald’s restaurants. With bathrooms and tap water, these are convenient and safe places for the homeless to spend the night—if restaurant workers let them stay. Hong Kongers refer to this cohort as McDonald’s refugees.

But homeless people are homeless regardless of whether they spend the night under a bridge or inside a McDonald’s. Public shelters, sometimes available during heat waves or cold snaps, are temporary. It is hard for them to have any sense of belonging, and they must always endure the looks from passersby.

Where they live

Near the end of 2011, in the cold of winter, Tzu Chi volunteers delivered blankets to the residents of some cage homes in Sham Shui Po District. Large enough for only one bunk bed, each unit was surrounded by a metal cage, from which these “homes” derived their name. They once housed the destitute but have now been largely abolished.

Even though these people lived indoors and were sheltered from the elements, the volunteers knew that they still badly needed the blankets to keep warm. But after the volunteers had left the building, it dawned on them that street people, living outdoors, were in even more need of blankets to stay warm or stay alive.

The volunteers walked to an overpass nearby, and sure enough they saw people who had wrapped themselves in paper to keep warm. But paper is a poor insulator, and they were shivering in the damp, cold air. The volunteers promptly gave them blankets to help them have warmer, more comfortable nights.

On another night, a light drizzle was falling and the temperature was below freezing. They went back to the same overpass and passed out some more blankets. Then they visited Yau Ma Tei and the cultural center at Tsim Sha Tsui, places

where street people were often found camping out at night, and distributed blankets there.

The homeless people who received the blankets all seemed to share one trait: Their living conditions were poor, and many seemed to be in poor health. They needed far more help than a couple of blanket distributions. That realization planted the seed for a long-term care project for the homeless.

In 2013, Tzu Chi volunteer Wong Chong Kin (王長堅) took part in an activity sponsored by another organization to care for the less fortunate. During the activity, he saw many dark corners that he had not realized existed in Sheung Wan and Central District, known for their prosperous financial districts. In response, he organized a group of his fellow volunteers on Hong Kong Island, in the southern part of Hong Kong, where Sheung Wan and Central District are located. Together, they set out to provide ongoing care to homeless people.

The homeless in Hong Kong often do not show up or become noticeable until after nine o’clock at night. Out of a concern for safety, only male volunteers participated in the project at first. After a while, when volunteers and the homeless had become more comfortable with each other, female volunteers began to join the care effort. They have added a sense of family and warmth to the visits.

Tongsui (“sugar water”)—any sweet, warm soup or custard served as a dessert in Cantonese cuisine—is a welcome treat among Hong Kongers. It requires some work to make, so without the use of a kitchen it is impossible for homeless people to make it for themselves. Therefore, volunteers make tongsui at home ahead of time. Then they visit the homeless, distribute needed supplies, provide meals, and serve tongsui as dessert. Because of these caring actions, they have gotten to know the homeless, have listened to their stories, and have learned how some of them ended up on the streets. Knowing their backstories has helped the volunteers learn how to help them better.

The project has since been expanded from Hong Kong Island to Kowloon and the New Territories. Now volunteers serve the homeless at 20 locations throughout Hong Kong. Though volunteers at each location may work differently to accommodate the specific needs of the people they care for, they all do it with a sincere desire to help these disadvantaged people get through their low points in life.

Ng Man Li, center, and a fellow volunteer check on a man sleeping near the Mong Kok subway station. “If you’re scared, you can’t really care for them,” Wu said of the fear that some people may have towards homeless strangers.



Riverside Dens

The water's edge in Sha Tin District, Hong Kong, offers a front-row seat to the spectacular sight across the Shing Mun River. When visitors leave for the night, some people remain behind, hidden among inconspicuous nooks under a bridge. This is where they spend their nights.



Hong Kong consists of, in order of development, Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories. When the first two regions became overcrowded, development and population overflowed into the New Territories, which is much bigger than the first two combined but also much farther from the city center. According to the 2011 census, more than half of Hong Kongers live in the New Territories.

The Shing Mun River, wide and smooth, adds an open space and a sense of serenity to Sha Tin District, in the New Territories. It reflects the high-rises that tower on either side. People can relax or unwind along the riverside paths or open spaces. One stretch has even been used to hold rowing competitions during the Dragon Boat Festival. But the river hides a darker aspect of society that often goes unnoticed.

A corner under a bridge

On Gok, in his 50s, sat on the bank of the river. He looked at the river and at the buildings and the skyline on the far side, just as many people often do during an after-dinner walk. But he is different from those who take in the sights as they stroll: He will remain here long after the others have gone home. He does not “go home,” because he is already there—he lives on the riverside, in a corner by a pillar under a bridge. All of his belongings are in that little corner, not quite the size of a single bed. He has lived in that very spot for ten years.

He once rented a flat in public housing. When his younger sister divorced, she and her two small children moved in with him. The place became quite a bit more crowded, but it wasn't anything that they couldn't handle.

The good times did not last long, though. Soon after his sister moved in, whispers began to spread among his neighbors about him, a single man, suddenly taking in a woman with two young kids. He ignored all the gossip at first, but as time went by, his sense of guilt grew for putting his sister through the shame from the innuendo. “It's all because of me,” he thought.

One night he packed a few things and quietly left the flat. He went to the bank of the Shing Mun River to find a place to settle down. He stayed away from the footpaths so as not to get in pedestrians' way. He kept looking until he finally found a place beside a pillar under a bridge. The space was quite tiny, about half as big as a single bed, and there was a light that remained on throughout the night. Though the space was small, the light made him feel a bit

safer. He decided the spot would work, and he put down his things.

From his tiny nook, he looked out at the high-rises nearby and imagined families having dinners together. That first night in what would become his new home, On Gok could not sleep a wink.

Living outdoors

Tzu Chi volunteers in the New Territories started caring for the homeless in 2014. They sought them out at overpasses, underpasses, parks, and other public places where the homeless were more likely to stay. One day they found On Gok in his small corner. That was in the seventh year that he had lived outdoors. By that time, Ah Poon and Ah Choi had “moved in” with him, each with his own little space half the size of a single bed.

Their living quarters were hardly comfortable. They slept on an uneven surface of the concrete structure that was part of the bridge. They could not turn much in bed without falling down to the pedestrian passage below. The surface of the bridge above them thundered with traffic. In summer, the river smelled bad, and mosquitoes and other insects would run rampant. On rainy days, their bedcovers would always get wet. To make matters even worse, the streetlights for the pedestrian passage shone throughout the night.

It pained the volunteers to see the trio's living quarters. They gave them food and asked if they needed any daily necessities. The three men responded politely but minimally, keeping the volunteers at arm's length. Having been homeless for a long time, they had met their share of bad people and had even lost their belongings to thieves. Therefore, it was understandable that they had their guard up when the volunteers visited. Ah Choi predicted that the volunteers would probably be gone soon, never to be seen again. He knew from experience that charitable groups came and went, and he had no reason to think the volunteers in front of them would be any different.

Therefore, the three men were surprised to see the volunteers in their uniforms of blue shirts and white trousers show up at their place again the following month, again with food for them. The volunteers invited the men to a place nearby where they could all sit down and eat together. The three of them obliged.

But they did not eat much. “Not to your lik-

ing?” the volunteers asked. They told the volunteers that they had worked during the day and had eaten after work before coming home. They were laborers, working whatever jobs that they could find, no matter whether it was hard labor or menial tasks. To save money, they usually skipped breakfast and ate only lunch and dinner. Sometimes their employers provided dinner. It was not easy to get water to drink where they lived, so they usually drank extra fluids with their meals.

These conversations helped the volunteers visualize their days and helped them chart a way to give them the help that they might need the most. On their next visit, the volunteers brought bread for breakfast. They also gave the men bottled water, fruit, and tongsui, a popular dessert in Hong Kong.

Volunteer Leung Lai Kun (梁麗君) is an expert in making this treat. It was she who made the tongsui for their visits. Iced or warm, her treats were always very well received by On Gok, Ah Poon, and Ah Choi.

Perhaps it was the sweets that loosened the men up. Gradually, they dropped their guard and opened themselves up to the volunteers and began to talk about what was troubling them.

Illness

Living under a bridge was hardly conducive to getting a good night’s sleep. To help themselves sleep better, they would have a few beers to numb themselves. Though the volunteers understood why they drank and though it was hard to argue with the three of them about it, the volunteers could not help urging them to go easy on the booze.

Ah Poon was thin and appeared to be the most infirm of the three. Every time the volunteers visited, he complained to them about his aches and pains. His legs were weak, his joints hurt, and he often had loose bowels. “Even hospitals can’t solve my problems,” he moaned.

One time he had a fall. A doctor treated his wounds and diagnosed him with osteoporosis. The doctor recommended that he walk with a stick to stave off future falls.

One September night in 2016, volunteer Leung Wing Kam (梁榮錦) received a phone call from another volunteer who told him, “Ah Poon says he’s going to kill himself!” Leung was at work at the time but he promptly called Ah Poon. As soon as the call went through, Ah Poon said, “Brother Leung, it’s very hard for me to

Volunteers visit On Gok, Ah Poon, and Ah Choi. They chat while eating tongsui and fruit. Ah Poon had returned from the hospital the day before. The doctor advised him to use a walking stick to prevent falls, but he was worried about the cost of the stick. The volunteers promised to take care of that for him.

live. I want to jump into the river and end my misery. But before I do, can I see you and Sister Lee Yu Ying [李月英] one last time?”

“Don’t be silly. Let us take you to the doctor [so that you can have your illnesses treated],” Leung said.

“Don’t bother,” Ah Poon replied. “I don’t want to bother people anymore. I give others nothing but trouble. All these troubles will vanish when I die.”

As Leung listened, he could almost see the homeless man shaking his head on the other end of the line as he declined his offer to take him to the doctor. Leung said gently, “Stop talking like that. We’ve known each other for a long while. If you die, we’ll all be very sad.” He told Ah Poon to go to the doctor and not to worry about the cost. “Though I don’t know for sure whether this doctor we’re taking you to can relieve your pains, please give us a chance,” Leung pleaded.

Finally, Ah Poon agreed to see the doctor. Leung made an appointment for him to see a Chinese medicine doctor that other volunteers had recommended. He then asked Lee Yu Ying and Wong Kun Wing (黃君榮) to pick Ah Poon up and take him to his appointment on that day. But when the two of them went to get him, he was nowhere to be found. Calls to him only went to his voice mail.

When informed of Ah Poon’s disappearance, Leung was dumbfounded. “But he promised me he would see the doctor!” Leung exclaimed. He could not believe that Ah Poon had just disappeared, but he could not reach him on the phone either. He called On Gok, but he too was clueless about his friend’s whereabouts.

Leung worried that Ah Poon might have done the unimaginable, so he kept calling him well into the night. Still, no sign of him.

Seeing the doctor

Two days later, Lee Yu Ying finally found Ah Poon. He had been in hiding. She gave him a good scolding as a mother would a naughty child: “Why did you go into hiding? Didn’t you know that we were worried sick about you?”



Feeling guilty, Ah Poon sheepishly said to Lee, “I promise that I’ll wait for you next time.” He had disappeared because he had not believed that the volunteers would really take him to the doctor and he was concerned they were just going to use him for publicity. He also didn’t expect that they would look for him high and low when they couldn’t find him.

Now he knew better. He called Leung that night to apologize. “I’m sorry, Brother Leung,” he said on the phone.

Leung first pretended to be mad, but he sensed Ah Poon’s regret, so he said, “I’ve made another appointment for you. Please give us a chance to help you, and give yourself a chance to help yourself.”

When Lee Yu Ying went to pick Ah Poon up for the new appointment, he was already waiting by the road for her.

The Chinese medicine doctor felt Ah Poon’s pulse. Then he looked at his face and said to him: “You need to quit drinking and smoking. If you don’t, whatever I do can’t help you.”

Ah Poon lived outdoors and could not cook herbs to make Chinese medicine, so the doctor prescribed him medicine that came in powder

form. Ah Poon just needed to mix the powder in warm water and drink it. Leung gave him a bottle to hold hot water.

Lee reminded Ah Poon several times to follow the doctor’s instructions, and the homeless man did his part to help himself. He quit drinking alcohol altogether, and he cut down on cigarette smoking.

When they met again for the next visit to the doctor, Lee noticed that Ah Poon—once a little stooped—was standing up straight. He said to her cheerfully, “My diarrhea is gone, and I’m sleeping well!”

After that second visit to the doctor, Ah Poon told the volunteers that in the future he could go to the doctor himself.

After each subsequent visit to the doctor, Ah Poon would call Leung to bring him up to date on what the doctor had said. He became healthier and healthier with each visit, and he even donated to the foundation the money that he had saved from smoking less.

Due to his illness, Ah Poon had not been able to work for a long time, and he had lived on public assistance all that time. He knew how hard it was to save even just a little money, and

now he, of all people, had donated money for a good cause. That really impressed the volunteers. Ah Poon even said, "When I'm well enough, I hope to volunteer, too."

The volunteers

Leung and Lee were both very comforted to see Ah Poon getting better.

"We don't know when they will find a home, but we'll give them care and support in the interim," said Leung.

Volunteers can only visit the homeless at night, and it is often midnight by the time they get back to their own homes. Even so, Leung rarely skips a visit. He cherishes the opportunity to care for the homeless.

Leung works at a toy company. Aside from calling on the homeless, he attends to various

One time on a visit, volunteers heard On Gok (holding cake) say, "Next month is my birthday." In response, they brought him a cake on their next visit and celebrated with him and the other homeless people. Surprised and happy, On Gok said, "This is the first time in my life that people have celebrated my birthday."

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HONG KONG

other volunteer duties as well. His devotion to volunteering has sometimes prompted his wife to remind him that he ought to pay a little more attention to their son.

Leung knows well the importance of keeping his family, his career, and his volunteering in a proper balance. With that perspective, he still believes that the time he spends with the homeless is time well spent. He knows that the homeless long for the warmth and companionship of family and friends, and if he can give them that, he is more than willing to do so. Besides, he visits them only once a month. He thinks nothing of sleeping a little less once in a while.

As for Lee, she has been like a mother to the street people, always dishing out reminders here and there. She says she is pretty strict with them. She treats them like she treats her own children—with discipline, with love.

Her children are grown and have their own families. If she is not with her family, she is volunteering. She feels for the homeless, and out of love she reminds them to do what is good for themselves. "Don't smoke and don't drink," she often tells them. Such apparent nagging from a mother cannot overshadow what is inherent in



her messages: warmth that can be found only in a family.

See you next time

One night, Ah Choi had just returned from work and was about to crack open a beer when the volunteers arrived at the site under the bridge. He smiled, a little embarrassed. The volunteers smiled knowingly and offered him tongsui.

They sat in their usual spot, ate tongsui, and chatted. Ah Choi said to Leung, "Have you noticed that I've talked more recently? To tell you the truth, I didn't trust you guys before."

Leung had always thought that Ah Choi was quiet because he was more of an introvert. He didn't realize that he didn't say much because he was on guard. Leung said to him, "Thank you for trusting us now."

Ah Poon developed a bad case of asthma recently. The Chinese medicine doctor suggested that he should see a doctor of Western medicine for treatment. When Lee saw Ah Poon, she couldn't help saying to him again, "You must cut down on smoking."

On Gok told the volunteers that as the Dragon Boat Festival was drawing near, the gov-

On May 3, 2017, Ah Poon, second from right, attended a Buddha Day ceremony held by Tzu Chi volunteers in the New Territories.

ernment would probably be cleaning up the riverbanks where spectators would gather to watch dragon boat races. If that happened, they would move to other spots for the duration. As to where they would go, they would figure it out when the time came. They were veterans and would have no problem in adapting to whatever was thrown their way.

On Gok reminded the volunteers to be sure to call before their next visit. He did not want them to waste a trip. On Gok's concern was very encouraging to the volunteers. It meant their efforts in caring for the three of them over the previous two years had won them over.

The volunteers know that what they can give to the homeless is not much, but they want to let the street people know that, in an age in which profit alone seems to matter, society has not forgotten about them. Hopefully with their care and help, the homeless will one day get back on their feet, be reunited with their families, and find homes of their own.



Is Kowloon Home?

Some street people work and do not rely on social welfare. It's not easy to get by, but they do what they can to support themselves. Making a living is difficult, but what they are more afraid of is scorn and prejudice from society and from those around them.

Many passersby shun them, if not disdain them outright. But Tzu Chi volunteers look beyond the surface and come back again and again for them.



A homeless person eats at his makeshift home in a corner of a pier.

It was night. Ah Wai walked into a 24-hour McDonald's in Kowloon. He limped straight to an inconspicuous seat, sat down, and started playing games on his cell phone. He ordered no food or drink because he wasn't there to eat. Instead, he was there to sleep—not for a short nap, but for the night. Though he wasn't sleepy yet, others nearby, in their seats or on the floor, were already fast asleep.

The employees at this 24-hour McDonald's were fully aware of the homeless spending the night in their store, but most of them just looked the other way. Likely getting paid a minimum

wage themselves, they knew firsthand just how hard it was to live in Hong Kong.

Ah Wai once lived with seven other people in a room, paying more than a thousand Hong Kong dollars (US\$130) a month for the use of a bed. Though it was a very small place, he had put up with it because it was a place to spend the night. However, the landlady kept more than a dozen dogs which relieved themselves everywhere and bit people. They drove him half crazy. One day Ah Wai had had enough and moved out.

He scoured the streets for a place to sleep, and finally he found a McDonald's that was

open 24 hours a day. It was well-lit, had clean hot drinking water and restrooms, and was safe. The place worked out so nicely for him that he lived there for five years.

Ah Wai summed up the benefits of his sleeping arrangement: "It was free, I was at ease there, and I didn't have to worry about bad weather."

The McDonald's

Kwun Tong, the largest administrative district in Kowloon, contains more people living in poverty than any other district in Hong Kong.

Volunteer Ng Man Li has lived in this area for many years. He knows how difficult life is for people who do hard labor for little pay. Some are even forced to live on the street because they cannot afford to rent a place.

Actually, some homeless people work regular jobs or even multiple jobs to support themselves. They do not rely on government welfare. Even so, society at large regards them with contempt. "Most people look down on the homeless," Ng said. "Some parents warn their children that if they don't study hard, they may one day end up being street people."

At 11:30 at night, homeless people arrive one after another at a McDonald's restaurant on Hong Kong Island for a night's sleep.

When Tzu Chi Hong Kong started its program to care for the homeless, the first thought that came to Ng's mind was that this group of people really needed care. In early 2014, he started to seek out homeless people to help. He and a few fellow volunteers took some food to a temporary shelter for the homeless that the government had opened during a cold snap. That's where they met Ah Wai.

Ng invited Ah Wai to join them for dinner, but he declined and went right back to playing a game on his cell phone. Ng was not disheartened though. He figured that since Ah Wai was sheltering there, he must live close by, and he would probably run into him again.

Just as he had expected, he saw Ah Wai again a few weeks later. One night, Ng went into a McDonald's to invite the homeless people there to a distribution of boxed meals Tzu Chi was holding nearby. Ah Wai was in the restaurant at the time, so he was invited as well. But like before, he brushed Ng aside.

"I had no interest at all in going to that distribution," Ah Wai recalled. "I was worried they'd ask me to join their religion or volunteer. I didn't want to do either one."

Ah Wai worked in a restaurant during the day, earning 8,000 HK dollars (US\$1,026) a month. Unencumbered by family, he lived a carefree life. He spent most of his hard-earned money on games and cell phones. Not only did he not have any savings in the bank, he owed money to a cell phone store.

When it came to cell phones, only the latest model would do for Ah Wai. He wasted no time in upgrading his phone. The store had agreed to sell him phones on credit, and he would pay the money back after each payday. He was content to live like that, and he thought that he would always be able to keep on living like that.

A stroke

One night in 2014, Ah Wai slept in a government shelter during a hot spell. The next morning, as he was getting ready to check out of the facility, he felt weakness in one of his legs. He continued to feel unwell the following day, so he took that day off work and went back to rest at the McDonald's. By the time the third day rolled around, even the owner of the



McDonald's could see that something was wrong and urged him to see the doctor.

Ah Wai took a taxi to the hospital. Just as he stepped out of the taxi in front of the hospital, his legs gave out and he fell. The doctor that attended to him diagnosed him with a stroke, based on his elevated blood pressure and the weakness on one side of his body. Ah Wai had no choice but to check into the hospital for treatment.

The hospital stay ran up a huge medical bill that he had no way of paying off. To make mat-

ters worse, the hospitalization also cost him his job. Fortunately his social worker helped him find ways to lower the bill.

Ah Wai was eventually released from the hospital, but his mobility and speech had been impaired. He was truly limping—in his stride and in his life. He loitered on the streets during the day and slept at the McDonald's at night. When he received his social welfare allowance, he used half of it to repay his debts. He could not always be sure how or where he might find

his next meal. During this difficult time, he ran into volunteer Ng Man Li again.

Whenever Ng had time, he went to the McDonald's to spend time with Ah Wai. At first, Ah Wai felt that Ng was quite a nuisance because Ng kept inviting him to volunteer at Tzu Chi meal distributions or to take up recycling work. He even nagged him to get a haircut.

But Ng's persistence eventually paid off. He finally convinced Ah Wai to serve as a recycling volunteer.

But Ng did not stop at that. “We’ve set up a monthly dinner,” he said to Ah Wai. “Can you help me round up your fellow residents at the McDonald’s for these get-togethers?” Just like that, Ah Wai became the contact person between his fellow street people and the volunteers.

Monthly dinner

On one such dinner day, Tzu Chi volunteers from different places made their way to the venue in Ngau Tau Kok. Li Kin Ping (李健平), a police officer, got off work at 3:45 p.m., went home to get dinner ready for his own family, changed into his Tzu Chi uniform, and went to Ngau Tau Kok to gather with other volunteers. Volunteer Lee Kwok Fu (李國富) took a bus from the island of Tsing Yi to Ngau Tau Kok.

Some volunteers lived near the venue, which was provided by a local community. They set up the tables with placemats, plates, and cups to give it an air of dining at a restaurant.

At the invitation of Ng Man Li, front left, Ah Wai, front right, joined the Tzu Chi recycling effort at Ngau Tau Kok. He volunteers every Friday.



Cheng Yi Chiu (鄭以超), who ran a vegetarian restaurant, was to make the dishes for the dinner. He did not start preparing until five. “Food tastes good only if it’s served piping hot,” he said.

By seven, the McDonald’s-based people had arrived at the venue. Ng shared with the diners what Tzu Chi volunteers had done to help Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan. He hoped to help them stop feeling sorry for themselves by showing that they, though homeless, were not the most unfortunate people in the world.

Then the volunteers turned into dinner servers. They served the food and waited on the tables. One of the dishes was fried rice noodles, which the homeless people rarely had a chance to eat. They looked content and happy as they ate second or even third helpings.

After the dinner, some volunteers prepared boxed meals and took them to a nearby wharf, where a few homeless people lived. The volunteers arrived at an area encircled by wood planks at the end of a footpath. That was where some laborers working in the area called home.

Lee, 67, who worked as a cleaner, had lived there for many years. His income, though not

As a Tzu Chi volunteer, Li Kin Ping serves homeless people at a dinner gathering.

much, was not low enough for him to qualify for government welfare. He had applied for public housing so that he could bring his wife from her native China to live with him, but his case was still pending approval.

Lee kept thanking the volunteers when he received his boxed meal. It turned out that, in order to cut down on spending, he rarely ate dinner. When he was hungry, he just went to bed. When he fell asleep, he’d forget his hunger.

Volunteer Li Kin Ping felt so sorry looking at Lee, who was old enough to be his father. He imagined how hungry the old man must be at nine o’clock, after a long day of hard work with no dinner.

As a police officer, Li used to take a dim view of the homeless. “My occupation led me to view street people as parasites in society,” Li said. “Only later did I gradually realize that in many respects they can’t really help themselves.”

After visiting with the homeless near the pier, the volunteers made their way to the McDonald’s. Ah Wai and his friends had already returned, ready to hit the sack. The volunteers offered boxed food to the street people at the restaurant who hadn’t attended the dinner gathering.

By now, it was close to midnight. Li Kin Ping had left home for work at six o’clock in the morning, about 18 hours earlier. Now he was exhausted, his eyes bloodshot. When asked if he was tired, he replied, “Of course I’m physically fatigued, but that gives me a better appreciation of how bad the homeless must feel for not being able to have a good night’s sleep every night.”

Another district

In Kowloon, volunteers have cared for street people not only in Kwun Tong, but also in the Yau Tsim Mong District, which is home to many laborers. The huge gaps that separate the haves and have-nots are clearly visible here.

At around seven one evening, volunteer Cheng Yi Chiu delivered some food he had freshly cooked to volunteers for them to put in meal boxes and deliver to homeless people. After packing the food, the volunteers split up and deliv-



ered it to street people at locations near the Yau Ma Tei Police Station, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, a pedestrian overpass over Waterloo Road, and other places.

One group of volunteers went to Temple Street, known for its night market. After passing several stalls of fortunetellers, they came to a little space where a few people were sleeping on the ground. A customer was showing off his full-throated singing at a nearby karaoke stall.

Lee Kwok Fu handed over some boxed meals to the street people and asked, “How on earth can you sleep in such a noisy place?” One of them answered, “They’ll all quit at 11. We feel that with government offices just across the street, this place should be relatively safe for us.”

Next, the volunteers came to an overpass on Public Square Street. Under the overpass were a few wooden structures. Nima, a 45-year-old construction worker from Nepal, lived in a small space there with five other people.

When he could find work, Nima made over a thousand HK dollars (US\$130) working eight to ten hours a day. He saved almost all of what he earned so he could support his daughter, who was studying in the United States. He did not want to spend money on rent, so he had been living with friends on the street. He would have much preferred to live with his family in the U.S., but he was afraid that he would not be able to find work there. “Only in Hong Kong can I make some money,” he lamented, his voice low and his brows knitted. Ng gave Nima some adzuki bean soup that he had cooked for the mission. He



A street person in an underground walkway beneath Ching Ping Street devours food offered by a volunteer. It is likely the first meal he has had in a long while.

time he met Ah Cheung, his face and legs were badly bruised. He told Lee that the bruises were a result of stumbling down a stairwell. Though not entirely convinced by his explanation, Lee did not press the issue. He just continued to visit Ah Cheung.

After a while, Ah Cheung owned up to his past. He told Lee that he had been a chef at a restaurant. He had been able to support himself because he had lived simply. But then he had fallen into bad company. He began using drugs and getting into fights. It got so bad that his own family turned their backs on him. He subsequently lost his job and was forced to live on the street.

"It must be very uncomfortable living on the street," Lee said to Ah Cheung. "I really hope that you stay away from bad influences and try to get back on your feet again."

Ah Cheung has since resumed working as a chef and has moved off the street into a subdivided flat. Even so, Lee has continued to visit him. He said, "I hope that by working with him, we can help strengthen him to fend off bad influences and stay on his path of righteous pursuits."

As the volunteers stepped off the overpass, the repulsive and unmistakable smell of ammonia greeted them. The stink emanated from a spot nearby that the residents on the overpass were using as a toilet. The street people have long been used to their disorderly living environment, but no pedestrians ever cross the overpass now.

●

In May, Ah Wai moved out of the McDonald's. He had received a subsidy from an association for the homeless that enabled him to rent a place to live for just 2,000 dollars (US\$255) a month.

Though the situations of Ah Cheung and Ah Wai have improved, many more people have not fared as well. They continue to live on the streets or in places like McDonald's. Where are their homes?

At this question, Ng Man Li said, "We have no answer for now. We can only continue to care for them the best we can and try to help relieve their loneliness." ❦

could only hope that the sweet dessert might lift his spirits a little.

Another team of volunteers approached a pedestrian overpass on Waterloo Road. They took the stairs up to the overpass, where about 30 small wooden huts spanned the distance from one end of the passage to the other. They entered one of the huts, which was about 100 square feet. It was furnished with a sofa bed, a

chest of drawers, and even an induction stove for its two residents.

The volunteers knocked on the doors of the other units one by one. Though it was already 11, many residents had not returned. The volunteers only gave out three meals there that night, one of them to Ah Chong Bak, who worked as a cleaner.

He was glad to see the volunteers. He had lost contact with his family long before, and he

hadn't felt any care and warmth from other people in a long time. He was very thin. His shoulder bones, clearly visible, attested to a life of inadequate nourishment.

Ng pointed out that the ecosystem atop the overpass was quite complicated. People of all backgrounds could be living there.

Ah Cheung, 30-something, once lived up there too. Lee Kwok Fu recalled that the first

I'm Old and Live Alone, But I'm Not Lonely

In Taiwan, the rapid aging of our society has been accompanied by a rapid increase in the number of people living alone. How to live alone well has become an issue which many people in Taiwan are facing today.

Wu Da-you, 92, lives alone in a rented studio apartment in Taipei. People living alone in Taiwan, one fifth of whom are elderly, have grown rapidly in number.

Taiwan is projected to become a super-aged society by the year 2025, which means that in just eight years, one fifth of the population will be at least 65 years of age.

Early this year, the number of people aged 65 and above in Taiwan exceeded that of people under 14 for the first time. Because people are living longer and having fewer children, the island's population is aging at a speed unequaled by any other country in the world. In less than a decade, younger people will find themselves surrounded by more and more older people.

One third of the households in Taiwan now consist of just a single occupant. If we correlate the above two phenomena, we can conclude that old people who live alone now comprise one fifth of the one-person households in Taiwan. In other words, one out of every five people who live alone is 65 or above.

As Taiwanese society ages, and as the number of people living alone also grows rapidly, how to live alone well has become an issue that many people are having to face.

Staying socially connected

An increasing number of middle-aged and older people are living alone because of various factors: a decision to stay single, the loss of one's spouse, divorce, or the inability of children to live with and support their parents. While young people living alone might conjure up positive images of being free and independent, older people living on their own seems another matter. Lonely and desolate are often the words that come to mind for this group of people.

However, this is purely a stereotype. Being an older person living alone doesn't necessarily mean being lonely and desolate.

Japanese author Takanori Fujita encourages people to save up money and strengthen their social networks to secure a better old age. His opinion is that while money is indispensable if you want to get by in this world, staying socially connected is even more conducive to a happy old age.



People who are old and live alone
don't have to live lonely lives.

Studies have shown that good relationships help us to be healthier and happier and that loneliness leads to opposite outcomes. “We human beings are social creatures with an emotional need for relationships and positive connections to others,” said Robyn Skiff, a medical home self-management program coordinator at the Community Health Improvement department at the University of Vermont Medical Center. “We’re not meant to survive, let alone thrive, in isolation. Social connections not only give us pleasure, they also influence our wellbeing.”

Living alone or not, an old person can join a volunteer group, a religious group, or even a class to keep their social connections alive, thus adding new stimulation to their lives and reacting

Life can become difficult for older people living alone, especially those who are not healthy. Tzu Chi volunteers provide help for these people.

ating their passion for life. It’s like becoming a member of a big family.

There are many older people among Tzu Chi volunteers, including many older people who live alone. They are not all healthy or financially well-off, but by joining a volunteer group and giving their time to serve others, they stay socially active and connected. As a result, their lives take on new meaning, purpose, and vitality. Instead of hanging around the house all day long wondering how they are going to fill the long hours stretching ahead of them, they try to contribute what they can while engaging in meaningful, lasting relationships with others.

In the following articles, we look at three older people who live alone but who are far from lonely. They share with us how they make their latter years as fulfilling as they can, and thus help us rethink old age. They demonstrate to us that they haven’t really grown old—they’ve just ripened.



“I feel I’m doing very well,” says nonagenarian Wu Da-you. He is upbeat and optimistic. The calendar on the wall is filled with his social service engagements.

A Small Home, But a Big Heart

Wu Da-you gets up at 4:30 every morning. If the weather is fine, he goes out to volunteer or do odd jobs. If not, he stays home and reads the newspaper, listens to music, or tidies up his living space. He goes to bed every night before nine and falls asleep in five minutes. He advises older people to avoid thinking too much or stressing over aging, as it will get them nowhere.

Even though it is only 250 square feet, everything in this studio apartment has its place. Winter coats are hung in an orderly fashion on the wall beside the bed; nearby are various bags, also hung up in a neat row. Every desk drawer is neatly organized. On another wall are several shelves the owner built himself. He knows exactly where everything is, including a box on one shelf in which he keeps used plastic bags, all folded precisely. He recycles them to be reused, an environmentally friendly gesture. Almost every space in the room has been utilized, yet the room does not look messy at all.

If you look closely, you will find that the owner has affixed wheels to a few storage racks in the room, making them easier to move. There are several easily accessible electric outlets that he installed himself. Besides keeping his own place well-organized, he sometimes also fixes broken screen doors for other residents in the building. He is a very skilled handyman.

Right in front of us, he climbed nimbly onto his bed and began to look for things placed on a top shelf. This is especially surprising, considering he is over 90 years old. Instead of needing others to care for him, he lives on his own and gets along very well.

Mentally and physically active

Although Wu Da-you (吳大友) is 92 years old, he still gets around on a motor scooter. He is also smartphone-savvy and a heavy user of the Internet. He chats with his friends via a messaging app on his cell phone, and he makes hospital appointments, buys tickets, reads the news, and listens to music online. He definitely keeps up with the times.

Huang Min-yan (黃敏燕), a Tzu Chi volunteer who visits Wu regularly, was amazed when she found out how tech-savvy Wu was. At 76 Huang is a good 16 years younger than Wu, but she is far less adept at using technology.

Wu reads two newspapers every day, besides browsing the news online. That keeps him up to date with current events. As a result, he is well aware of this new regulation: Starting this year, people 75 or older in Taiwan must pass medical reviews and cognitive tests to qualify for short-period driving licenses, valid for three years.

Wu gets up at 4:30 every morning—a habit of many years. Weather permitting, he goes out for a walk, volunteers, or does odd jobs; otherwise he stays home and reads the newspaper, listens to music, or tidies up his living space. He is never at loose ends for something to do.

He doesn't take afternoon naps. He goes to bed every night before nine and falls asleep in five minutes. He attributes his sleeping well to a mind uncluttered by unnecessary thoughts or worries. When volunteer Huang Min-yan, herself a poor sleeper, heard him say how well he slept, she was duly impressed.

Wu Da-you, 92, still has good eyes and ears. He often reads the news or listens to music online. Until a few years ago, he worked as a human billboard to make spending money.

Living in a rapidly aging society, Wu advises older people not to think too much about aging, or feel too much stress over it. "If you keep obsessing over your age, you will just get upset, which can affect your health." A negative mindset, he believes, produces nothing but miserable days.

Angels in life

For over 20 years, Wu did odd jobs for an advertising company, handing out flyers or holding signs on streets, to earn spending money.

After he turned 90, his employer, considering his age, stopped letting him hold signs on streets. However, Wu is still hired to check on the company's human billboards stationed on different streets on the weekends. He rides a scooter around doing the inspections and gets paid 800 Taiwanese dollars (US\$25) a day.

Wu lives simply and frugally. Plain noodles and an egg pass for a meal; a loaf of bread is enough for several meals. Even when he goes out to work, he takes his own lunch. He doesn't have many expenses.

He was certified as a Tzu Chi volunteer eight years ago. Aside from volunteering for the foundation, he helps with document filing in the Traffic Division of the Taipei City Police Department. If that were still not enough, his many friends help keep him busy too. The calendar that hangs on a wall in his room is often packed. He lives at a tempo far from typical of people his age. Fortunately, his good health allows him to continue at this pace. Though he takes medicine for his heart, kidneys, and urinary tract, he is healthier than most older people.



Two years ago, in 2015, he finally obtained approval for low-income status. This allows him to receive from the government a low-income subsidy and a housing stipend of 19,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$630) a month. With that extra income, he no longer has to worry about not being able to afford his rent, utilities, and other expenses, and he can even save some money and help friends who are in financial straits.

Even though Wu was married once and has kids, they are rarely in touch. They are not in a position to support him anyway. But it's just because he has kids that his application for low-income status took years to be approved.

For ten years before he started receiving the low-income support from the government, his major source of income was a monthly subsidy provided by Tzu Chi.

Over ten years ago, Wu passed out due to malnutrition and heat stress while working as a human billboard on the street. He was living in a tiny rented attic at the time, and he was in very poor financial shape. His low-income status had not yet been approved, so the social welfare department of the Taipei city government referred his case to Tzu Chi for help. After assessment, the foundation decided to provide him with financial aid. Volunteers also began visiting him regularly and giving him daily supplies.

Not long after that, Wu was hospitalized for tuberculosis. Huang Fu-mei (黃富美) and other volunteers accompanied him through the hospital stay, giving him what help he needed for over a month. "Without Tzu Chi volunteers, I don't know how I would have pulled through that period. I'll never forget what they did for me." He joined Tzu Chi's recycling work and began taking part in Tzu Chi events. He became a donating member and even trained to be a certified volunteer.

Volunteer Liu Xiu-jiao (劉秀嬌) remembered that Wu was nothing but skin and bones when he came down with tuberculosis. He weighed just under 50 kilograms (110 pounds), a far cry from what he is today, a healthy 70 kilograms. She was glad to see him fill out and become healthier under the volunteers' care.

Part of a family

Wu has nothing but gratitude for where he is now. The social welfare department installed an emergency phone in his room, so should anything happen, all he has to do is press a button

Wu said that his tuberculosis years ago didn't scare away Tzu Chi volunteers but actually drew them to him. He joined Tzu Chi out of a heart of gratitude.

and help will be automatically summoned. He feels he is being very well cared for. Fortunately, he has had no need to press the button yet.

Volunteer Liu Xiu-jiao often phones Wu to check on him. One time she called several times without answer. She became very worried and went to the concierge at Wu's building to inquire. The concierge couldn't tell her anything, so she went straight to Wu's apartment and knocked on the door. She discovered that he was sick and weak and hadn't eaten properly in some time.

Wu said that he has no fear for the future. He has already signed up to be a body donor. When the time comes, he will be well taken care of. "My landlord or the neighborhood head will be spared the trouble of taking care of my body." Death is nothing to fear, he says; it is something everyone has to face sooner or later.

He added that he had left some Tzu Chi volunteers' phone numbers with the concierge. He told him the volunteers will handle his affairs when he passes. "They're family," he said.

Wu, who came to Taiwan from China all alone many, many years ago, feels lucky that he ended up having so many people who care for him. He was born in Jiangsu Province, China, in 1925. His parents were in fabric and food-and-beverage businesses and did very well financially. Sadly, his father was later killed in a war, and Wu was forced to quit school. He joined the army along with the entire staff and student body at his school.

Before he and his teachers and schoolmates boarded a boat for Shanghai, Wu's mother sewed some gold nuggets into his cotton-padded coat and pants. Not long after that, he arrived in Taiwan. That was in 1948, when he was 23 years old. He never saw his mother again. In his memory, she has always remained a woman in her 50s.

He retired from military service a few years later. After working in northern and eastern Taiwan for many years, he opened an advertising company in Taipei. He also purchased some land in northern Taiwan with some friends and had houses built for sale. He even served as a township representative once. He was quite successful during that period in his life.



But then he was caught violating the negotiable instruments law. In order to avoid liability, he divorced his wife and transferred ownership of his assets and property to her. Unexpectedly he grew more and more distant from his wife and eventually lost everything he had.

Not knowing what else to do, he started doing odd jobs to support himself. Later, he opened an eatery. At night he slept in a tiny rented attic.

Wu has lived through ups and downs, through good and bad times in life. Reflecting on his life, he said, "When you come right down to it, nothing is really secure in life." He is thankful he has been able to live to his old age, having even survived a bullet which hit his helmet when he was a young soldier in action.

Life is truly impermanent. For one thing, he never expected that his family would not be

around him in his old age. He now realizes that if you want to have a happy family life, you need to build relationships with your family with care.

Having seen a lot, he has developed a philosophical attitude to living and to dying. He feels that nothing is really that big a deal or worth losing sleep over. "Being physically and emotionally healthy is the most important thing," he said. If you don't have health, what use is wealth to you?

Now, the few possessions in his rented apartment, his fellow Tzu Chi volunteers, and a number of friends are all he has in his old age. Despite not having much, Wu feels happy and blessed. Though he can't have his own flesh and blood around him, he is still a member of a big happy family.

My Children Are Blessed

She expresses herself freely through drawing, having found a creative outlet in her old age that makes her happy. She shares her passion by holding exhibitions and teaching others to draw. She is always busy, but she takes good care of herself, which is a blessing for her offspring.

People in Huang's drawings smile brightly, just like Huang herself.



Her colors are bold and bright. The sun blazes red, yellow, and green, the trees and flowers are in full bloom, and the people she creates all wear joyful smiles. She gives her imagination free rein as her hand, holding a crayon, moves quickly across the paper. Drawing is her outlet, where her emotions and thoughts find meaning and life. Her simple, unsophisticated lines and shapes

reflect her character and subconscious outlook on life.

Huang Mei-yu (黄美玉), 75, has been through many ups and downs in life. She has lived and experienced the beauty and ugliness that life brings. What she has learned along the way unfolds in her art, one drawing after another. She tells her life story through her art, using drawing to cultivate her mind and heal her inner

wounds. She has been drawing for six years, has exhibited her art publicly, and even teaches other elderly people to draw.

Huang has lived alone for many years and she enjoys it. She believes that colors can stimulate creativity and improve some of the negative symptoms associated with aging. She is a happy person today, perfectly able to laugh at the rough patches she has experienced in her

life. Even her nicknames, “Sister Sunny” and “Granny Happiness,” reflect her positive disposition.

Be a mature old person

Huang’s mother is 92 years old, and she often laments to Huang about the pain of being a doddering, useless old-timer. Huang always tries to cheer her up. “Your daughter—me—has grown

Huang (front row, center) has made many friends who like to draw.

old too. Let's learn to be happy old people together."

Huang's mother is currently hospitalized for spinal surgery. Huang's sister looks after her during the day, and Huang takes over at night. The experience has taught Huang how powerless one can be when one is old and ill. It has also taught her that children are blessed when their aged parents are healthy and happy.

As a daughter helping to care for an ailing mother, she knows that if she ever gets sick, her own children will have to take care of her. Since aging is inevitable and illnesses are likely, how does one best prepare for them?

Huang believes that sound guiding principles in life are necessary to have the inner peace and stability that will provide support through illness and old age. If people have core beliefs that support and empower them, they will be less likely to become lonely or fearful when they get old. Having such core beliefs bolsters one's attitude and provides true consolation through difficult days.

Huang is perfectly comfortable with the fact that she is old. She often tells her "old friends" that it's nice being old. People make allowances for you when you speak slowly, eat slowly, or walk slowly. You even get free rides on buses, and younger people give up their seats to you on public transportation. Being old comes with many benefits. "So we should all be happy we are old!" she exclaims.

Short and petite, Huang has lively, animated facial expressions and gestures when she talks. Give her any topic and she can go deep or humorous with it. She projects a vitality that indicates a bustling life force within her. We were amazed as she shared with us the challenges she has overcome in life. We were equally impressed with how those challenges did not knock her down but made her stronger and wiser.

Becoming tougher through impermanence

Huang's mother was married at 16 and gave birth to her less than a year later. To support the family, Huang's father went to Japan to work when Huang was just four. He rarely returned to Taiwan to visit. Huang had a materially deprived childhood. She didn't have even a desk in her room. Because of her family's poverty, she was forced to drop out of high school.



After that, her grandmother taught her how to make clothes to earn money.

Huang married a man who ran a publishing company. They lived a stable life until he cosigned a loan for a friend and ended up deep in debt. Worry and stress led to poor health, and he died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Their youngest daughter was just six when he passed away. Huang, 43 at the time, cried for three days and nights at the hospital morgue. She was a full-

time homemaker, and if it hadn't been for their friends' help, she wouldn't have been able to hold a funeral for her husband.

Huang was raised to be religious. She had followed her parents and become a devout member of Yiguandao, a Chinese folk religious sect. She even became an "initiator" (similar to a preacher) in her religion. Because of her background, she was familiar with Confucian and Taoist ideas, as well as the impermanence of life

emphasized in Buddhism. Even so, recalling her husband's passing, she said, "When impermanence strikes you, it is still very hard to take." Within a month of his death, Huang's hair had turned completely gray, partly out of grief and partly because she was being hounded by her husband's debtors.

She cut her long hair short and began working as a cleaning lady to support her family and repay her husband's debts. Some time later, she

switched to making vegetarian sushi and *zongzi* (a traditional Chinese food made of glutinous rice stuffed with different fillings and wrapped in bamboo leaves) to make money. She first sold her food at traditional retail markets and then switched to bulk sales. During that time, Huang supplied almost all the vegetarian sushi sold at the markets and vegetarian restaurants in Taichung City, where she lived.

Huang worked day and night to meet the demand for her food. For several years she worked so hard she suffered from sleep deprivation. "I told myself I had to hang in there for my mother and children and that all this was temporary. After all, we wouldn't be down in the dumps forever." Fortunately she had a strong will. To keep her family fed and clothed and to repay her husband's debts, she went all out to make money, never wasting a second.

Later, she and her daughters took up direct marketing for health products. She did so well that she often received the top salesperson award. A thunderous round of applause greeted her every time she stepped on stage to be recognized. These boosted not only her income, but her confidence as well. She was in direct marketing for 15 years, from ages 50 to 65. When her company eventually folded, her highly successful career also came to an end. She went back to an ordinary life.

Live each day to the fullest

She felt lost at first, but it turned out that all the ups and downs in her life had their purpose. It was around that time that she encountered Tzu Chi. She clicked with the philanthropic philosophy of the foundation, which, like her own religion, also embraced Confucian ideals and values. She began to actively take part in foundation events and started training to be a certified volunteer. Her daughters were very happy to see her smiling more and more after she joined Tzu Chi. They could see that she had found something to which she could devote her heart.

Huang's volunteer work allows her to see the suffering of the needy, which has taught her to be more appreciative of what she has. There used to be something missing in her life, but volunteering her time to serve others helped fill that void. She began to embrace life with a passion that made people envious.

Huang has lived alone for years, and she tries to avoid bothering her children for anything, but she doesn't think people should live their old

Huang likes drawing the most when she is home. Her experiences in life provide her with an endless source of inspiration.

age in seclusion. "Moping around at home is more likely to lead to ill health," she says.

After she joined Tzu Chi, she felt a sense of belonging and comfort. "Tzu Chi is my home now!" she declared. She uses herself as an example and advises people not to get married just for a sense of security. Doing so can make it especially hard should their spouse die unexpectedly.

Huang keeps herself busy every day. She believes that an old person without a purpose will become a worry to his or her children. Some people may think she should take it easy and not be such a "workaholic" in her old age, but what they don't understand is how happy she is being busy.

"It's a great blessing that I'm still fit enough to give of myself." She emphasizes that it is better for an older person to keep busier than become idle. Keeping busy means that you are needed, in relatively good health, passionate about life, and enjoy making yourself useful and being of service to others. She often has such a full schedule that her children cannot just drop by to visit her at their whim; they first have to phone her to be sure that she is home. Holding exhibitions, teaching drawing, volunteering, writing, and taking photos—her life is richer and more varied than many people much younger.

No fear

As an old person living alone, doesn't she ever experience fear or anxiety? "One fears because one needs love," she said.

Experience has taught her that living every day fully, as if it were your last, eliminates fear or anxiety. "If you focus your energies on living each day to the fullest, how will you ever have time to fear or worry about the future?"

Her advice to other old people is to accept the fact that they are old and learn to enjoy their old age. "Be kind to yourself. When anything happens, look on the bright side. Don't read too much into others' words. Don't let a worry stay



with you for longer than three seconds, or else you're just giving yourself a hard time."

Unlike many people, she doesn't consider death a taboo topic. She is completely at ease talking about it. "After I die, just cremate my body and spread the ashes anywhere. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." She has an inner confidence which she says is wrought from the tribulations she has endured in life. She feels that she hasn't owned anything in this life. "My inner confidence is all I have."

She had to drop out of high school due to poverty, but in her latter years she learned to draw and she now busies herself with volunteering.

She has learned so much more from the school of life than she could have learned in an ordinary school. She uses her art to share her story, using colors to show what has touched and inspired her. She has filled more than 20 painting albums. Taking her drawings with her, she sometimes visits schools and tells stories to children, and sometimes visits communities and gives talks to housewives. She greatly enjoys these activities.

Her life is fulfilling as she plays her various roles with zest: a Tzu Chi volunteer, an amateur artist, an initiator for her religion, and—her childhood dream—a storyteller! She personifies the saying "Life begins at 70."

Seeing Beauty Everywhere

A Fountain of Youth

Zhang Yuan-zhen is sensitive to the beauty of life, no matter how small. She is quick to appreciate the loveliness of a small flower or the warble of a bird. Though the passing of her beloved family members has brought her pain, she knows that nothing is truly lost with love.



Zhang talks to her deceased husband every morning as she nurses a cup of coffee or tea in a room all her own. The lotus flowers on her skirt were painted by herself.

Zhang Yuan-zhen (張遠鎮), 75, lives in a 360-square-foot room on the top floor of a building in Taipei. The room is elegantly decorated with potted plants, oil paintings, and other delightful ornaments. She lives here alone, in a world all her own.

She has lived alone since her husband passed away five years ago. One of her sons and his wife live just downstairs. They have invited her many times to move in with them, but she insists on living independently. “Friction is less likely to happen with a little space between us,” she says.

Every morning in this private space of hers, she nurses a cup of coffee over breakfast and talks to a photo of her husband. “I feel especially blissful during that hour,” she says. This daily morning monologue is her favorite time alone.

Alive to beautiful little things in life

Zhang, like her mother before her, was a music teacher. Her daughter is a musician too, living in Vienna. Zhang is now teaching a granddaughter to play the piano. “Four generations of our family have studied music.” She added with a smile that her younger brother is

a painter, and her maternal grandfather was a sculptor. Five generations of her family have studied and loved artistic expression in music or the visual arts.

Zhang took up painting when she was 55. With her artistic family background, decades of exposure to music, and her relatively recent interest in painting, she says that the thing she cares about the most in her life is beauty. Such beauty for her is more than mastering musical or painting skills. Rather, it lies in a sensitive mind and the ability to appreciate the good things life can offer.

She uses a potted plant on her balcony as an example. “Maybe a strawberry will begin to grow tomorrow,” she says. “One day it will be orange in color, and the next day it will be red.” She finds delight in such small things; she is alive and present to the beauty of life, to the beauty of the world. Sadly, she feels most people are blind to this gentle beauty.

She knows that one doesn’t need analytical power to appreciate beauty—all you need to do is look, listen, and feel mindfully, with your heart. For example, it isn’t necessary to understand the technical aspects of Picasso’s paint-

Zhang has practiced qigong for more than 30 years and is in good health. She is often invited to share with people her health regimen and her successful experience in fighting cancer.

ings to appreciate their beauty. Likewise, you don't have to understand a bird's song to enjoy its melodiousness.

After Zhang had finished her formal musical training, she served at a junior high school, teaching a class for students who wanted to pursue music as a career. She threw herself into her work, and she helped cultivate many professional musicians over the course of her career. In fact, many of the established musicians in Taiwan today around 50 years of age were among her students. She remembers taking her students abroad to perform. "It was like leading soldiers off to war—everyone was nervous and on edge," she said. There were all kinds of problems to solve. Some of her students would run a fever right before a performance, and some would misplace their sheet music. In addition to her students' performances, she herself once held 28 concerts a year. She was often under a lot of pressure, which might have affected her health.

When she was 43, she was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer. "The expressions on the faces of my family as they talked with my doctor told me I probably didn't have long to live," she recalled. When she was pushed into the operating room, she felt as if she was being led to a guillotine. Her mind was in turmoil when she thought of her children, the youngest of whom was just in ninth grade. Ten years later, after having beat her breast cancer, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

Having suffered two major bouts with cancer, Zhang is fortunately in good health today. Even though she is 75 years old, she doesn't have the usual problems that afflict many older people, such as lower back pain, knee pain, or sore neck and shoulders.

She is very grateful that she has lived to an old age. "I feel I've lived a bonus 32 years. Every day that I've lived since my first cancer scare has been another day gained." She attributes her good health in part to studying and practicing qigong, and to her attitude. She has discovered that you are less likely to experience anxiety or worry when you live every day of your life with gratitude. In fact, she is often invited to talk about her health regimen at Tzu Chi activities.



Relaxation is good for health

Zhang's voice is sonorous when she speaks to audiences on stage, and she can speak for a long time without her voice becoming hoarse. Her expressions and gestures are animated, and she often bursts into loud, cheerful laughter. People often say to her, "You don't look like a person in her 70s at all." Without missing a beat, she replies, "What do you think a person in her 70s should look like?"

Zhang often scours the internet for pictures and music to make her computer presentations more engaging when she gives talks. That's just

an example of how her volunteer work has prompted her to continue learning. Almost none of her elderly friends use computers or the internet. Zhang feels that continuing to learn and grow is very important, even when one is aged and retired. It stimulates the brain cells, and it has worked wonders with her.

Despite her age, she doesn't feel old at all. She believes that how one feels is just a matter of mindset. As Mark Twain once said, "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." Age is not a problem, nor are wrinkles. You are young as long as you have a

healthy mindset, and you can do just about anything you have an interest in doing as long as you have your health.

Zheng encourages other older people to stay active and to go out and meet people. People age more quickly if they don't interact with others, she says, and their bodies deteriorate more easily if they stay indoors and are physically inactive. Volunteering has brought her in contact with many people and helped her stay physically active, making her feel healthy and blessed.

Though her schedule is often packed due to her volunteer duties, she remains mentally

relaxed. She says that qigong has taught her the importance of relaxation. Refraining from being uptight and learning to relax, both physically and mentally, are conducive to a good old age.

She recalls how uptight she used to be when she took her students to compete in a contest. Eager to do well in everything, she was keen on their capturing first prize. Now she is much more laid-back. When her granddaughter scored 70 percent on a test, she praised her wholeheartedly for doing very well.

Love that transcends religion

In 1946, during the Chinese Civil War, Zhang's father, a high-ranking government official, took his wife and children and moved from China to Taiwan. Zhang was just four at the time. Most people in Taiwan were poor back then, but Zhang and her family lived a comfortable life because of her father. When she visited a classmate and ate for the first time the staple food of poor people during that era—porridge made of dried, grated sweet potatoes—she felt it was so delicious she envied her classmate for being able to eat it every day. Ignorant of the hardships of everyday people, she complained to her mother when she went home about not having this delicacy in their home.

Because her life was otherwise a smooth ride, the passing of her beloved family members were the most painful experiences in her life. When she was 20 and still in school, her family lost their most important support when her father, not yet 50, died of cancer. With four younger brothers under her, Zhang felt for the first time in her life that life wasn't always going to be a bed of roses.

When she was 53, her mother began showing symptoms of dementia, so Zhang decided to retire early from school to take care of her. Her mother died in her arms 15 years later. Then, five years ago, when Zhang was 70, her mother-in-law and husband died within two months of each other.

Zhang began living alone after her husband departed the world. Every day after the sun set, she would begin to shiver uncontrollably. "I lived in a sort of daze, not knowing how to carry on," she recalled. Things went on like this for half a year until one day, on her way to the market, she glimpsed a tall building. "When did such a big building pop up here?" she asked herself.

The building was a Jing Si Hall, a Tzu Chi activity center. She entered the building out of

Zhang walks through the entrance gate to her home. She herself wrote the calligraphy on the door. Roughly translated, it means: "Several old friends, an enjoyable afternoon together." The words bear witness to her hospitality.

curiosity, and was invited to attend a class for Tzu Chi volunteer moms. (Tzu Chi volunteer moms visit schools to share Master Cheng Yen's teachings with students via storytelling and drama.) Zheng was amazed by the number of mothers so eager to learn. She also found the ambience in the building very comfortable, and she was even moved to tears by the positive energy she felt flowing throughout the building.

She was a devout Christian, having been baptized when she was in elementary school, so she wasn't sure if she would be welcome in this Buddhist group. She expressed her concerns to the volunteers she met, but they reassured her and told her Tzu Chi welcomes everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation. Impressed with the open-mindedness of the group, she joined Tzu Chi that very day and began taking part in many social service activities.

She grew up attending a Christian church with her mom and didn't know much about Buddhism, but she found Master Cheng Yen's teachings very accessible, wise, and applicable in life. She was surprised by how much they resonated with her. Now she often goes with other volunteers to schools to share the Master's teachings with students. She told her pastor, "I admire this group. I'm happy doing social services with them."

She continues to attend a Christian church while volunteering for Tzu Chi. "It's as if my husband's soul had guided me into that Jing Si Hall." She appreciates being able to put herself to good use in her old age, after she had lost her husband. "Living my old age like this is very satisfying."

Christian gatherings and volunteer work fill her life, leaving her no time to feel lonely or experience anxiety. She couldn't even celebrate



this past Mother's Day with her children because it was Buddha Day and she had promised other Tzu Chi volunteers to attend a related event.

Zhang is thankful for all that she has gone through in life, even those painful experiences, because they have helped her to cherish even more what she has and deepened her appreciation of beauty and love.

When she was younger, she could never have enough material possessions, but now that she is older, she feels she just needs enough to get by. "It's all because I have fewer needs now."

She emphasizes that one's life cannot be bad if one knows how to appreciate beauty and how to love. Likewise, one cannot be happy if one finds nothing beautiful or loves nothing, even if one is loaded with money. "You have to find your own happiness."

To her, what one needs is taste, not designer clothes. "Even if it's just a ten-dollar dress, you can wear it in a way that's classy and stylish." The 75-year-old Zhang certainly has class and style in spades, and she lives with more verve and passion than many young people. ❀

Just Call Huang

A Design Ace

A licensed A-grade electrician, Huang Jin-shou has been an invaluable asset when Tzu Chi free clinics need things made or fixed, be it a mobile water heater, a mobile dental chair, a mobile dental lamp, or a mobile shower. Whatever the doctors need, they just tell Huang, and he will come up with a reliable solution.



By Gao Yu-mei

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Huang Jin-shou fixes a piece of malfunctioning dental equipment at a free clinic on Kinmen, an offshore island of Taiwan.

YOU XI-ZHANG

The multitude of tools and parts in front of the house hinted strongly that the owner inside was probably a master technician. The tools, however, seemed to have gathered dust from inactivity. “I’m sort of semi-retired, and I only do jobs for my acquaintances,” explained Huang Jin-shou (黃金受), the first Tzu Chi volunteer in Keelung, northern Taiwan.

He has been a widower for many years. His only child, a daughter, lives in Puli, central Taiwan. Huang, almost 70, lives alone in Baifu, Keelung. Though his hair is all salt-and-pepper, he is healthy and spirited. Having devoted himself to volunteering and serving others, he is not at all lonely.

Among his other duties, Huang is a support volunteer for Tzu Chi free clinics. Members of

the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) often provide free medical treatment in far-off places where medical facilities and services are scarce. Since these clinics are mobile by nature, the things and tools that the medical professionals need to treat patients must also be mobile. The challenge is that commercial equipment is not always mobile or easy to move. Trying to move a dental chair quickly makes that plain. Consequently, TIMA teams must adapt their equipment to their ever-changing venues. Huang has done a fair number of such adaptations since he started working with TIMA teams about two decades ago. He has been one of the go-to guys who excel at modifying or inventing equipment or tools to suit the needs of a free clinic.

Mobile shower

On January 18, 1998, a TIMA team gave their inaugural free clinic for homeless people at Longshan Temple in Taipei. Chinese New Year was just around the corner, so volunteers also offered free haircuts alongside the medical services.

Huang was a support volunteer at that free clinic. He noticed that because there was no hot water on-site, those receiving free haircuts could not get a rinse afterwards. There were therefore hair trimmings on their faces and necks when they saw the TIMA doctors afterwards.

Seeing a need, Huang quickly sought to address it. He broached the idea of bringing hot water to serve the needy and make their visits more comfortable to Lu Fang-chuan (呂芳川). Lu, then the director of the TIMA Northern Taiwan chapter, was all in favor, but he wondered how that could be done. “If it’s okay with you, just leave it to me,” Huang said.

That marked the beginning of Huang’s new role—a handyman, a jack of all trades, a problem solver, the go-to guy—in providing TIMA personnel what they needed to care for patients during their free clinics.

He scavenged a recycled wall-mounted instant water heater and gathered all the pipes and hardware that he would need to assemble a portable water heater. Then he put that unit to use at the next free clinic event for the homeless. He hung the heater on a wall, hooked up the water and gas, and turned it on. Hot water flowed out into a pail. The hairdressers then scooped up water from the pail to rinse hair.

Though that was just a makeshift water heater, it allowed the street people who received haircuts to also get a rinse afterwards, so that they could go on to see their doctors feeling comfortable and looking dignified. But Huang was not satisfied. He wanted something better. He bought a generator, a pressure booster pump, and a water tank. Then he and a few other volunteers set to work converting a used van into a shower van. To prevent rusting, they put a stainless steel floor in the van’s interior, which they partitioned into two stalls. They installed shower heads and put in drains. When they were finished, they had a mobile shower unit. Now volunteers could offer the homeless a place to take hot showers.

The shower van was put to good use at many free clinics. Huang fondly remembered this brainchild that he had had many years ago. “I’m truly glad I can serve others by applying my

electricity and plumbing skills for TIMA activities. I feel that I’m making the best use of my skills this way.”

A better way

Huang’s role is greatly appreciated.

Because some TIMA free clinics are held at locations that do not have a ready supply of water or electricity, Tzu Chi volunteers need to set up supplies onsite. Expertise in plumbing and electricity has therefore come in very handy for the clinics. In fact, the frequent need for people with such expertise prompted Huang to assemble a group of volunteer technicians.

These technicians ensure that clinic equipment is functional so that medical volunteers can focus their attention on taking care of patients instead of being distracted by non-medical challenges. Huang and his fellow technicians are unsung heroes who help the free clinics run smoothly.

As the ranks of TIMA medical volunteers expanded, so too did the range of medical specialties offered at the free clinics. More specialties have invariably resulted in more diverse physical requirements for the venues.

Of all the medical specialties offered at TIMA free clinics, dentistry has turned out to be the most equipment-intensive, and it needs more physical space than others. Because of their bulk and weight, dental chairs cannot be transported to free clinics, so folding beach chairs were once used for patients at TIMA clinics. Dentists had to stand or bend down to treat patients—a tiring, unsustainable, and unproductive posture for the doctors, who were probably quite sore before they had finished their third patient.

To make their work easier, Huang set out to make a dental chair that would be easy to transport and safe and comfortable for both the patients and the dentists. He visited a dental clinic near his house several times to observe its chairs up close, and he lay on one to feel it for himself. Then with parts and tools available at his home, he made his first prototype.

After several modifications, he finished his version of a mobile dental chair. It looked like a folding beach chair, but it could be completely disassembled to fit into its own carrying case and be taken to wherever it would be needed. Once there, volunteers just followed the directions to put the chair back together again.

“There’s no telling how much a patient might weigh, so I used sturdy stainless steel to

Huang designed these racks with slots for herbal medicine bottles. They have helped reduce clutter at a free clinic Chinese medicine pharmacy.

make the main frame,” Huang said. The back and height of the chair were adjustable. Dentists could manually adjust the height and inclination as they saw fit.

That took care of another issue for the TIMA clinics, but Huang soon noticed something else to which he could apply his skills. He noticed that each dentist needed an assistant whose job it was to hold a flashlight and adjust its angle from time to time so that the dentist could see clearly in the patient’s mouth. As Huang looked at the scene, a picture formed in his mind of a lighting device that would fit the purpose.

He looked in his tool room at home for things that he would need to make a dental spotlight for TIMA clinics. He gathered some flexible conduits, wires, switches, and clips. Then he assembled those components with a flashlight and came up with an illuminating device similar to a gooseneck lamp.

At the next clinic, he attached the lamp to a dental chair. Everything worked fine initially, but after a short while the gooseneck lost its rigidity and drooped, no longer able to hold the flashlight in the desired position.

Huang considered how to fix the problem. After much thought, fiddling, and rework, he completed a second version of the product. He used a sturdier gooseneck and replaced the flashlight with an LED light bulb. On top of these and other improvements, he added a convex lens in front of the light bulb to focus its light onto a desired point. The light could thus be more precisely directed to where the dentist needed it and not make the patient’s eyes uncomfortable.

After Huang had solved the lighting problem, he found another issue to fix. Water is indispensable at any dental clinic. At the Tzu Chi free clinics, they used to put a bottle of water beside the dental chair for the dentist to use. Volunteers needed to replace the water bottle frequently, especially if the patient’s treatment was more water-intensive.



CHEN LI SHAOJIAN

Huang wanted to give them something better. “I needed a big container that could withstand high pressure,” he explained. “A ruptured water container was the last thing that we wanted to see at a clinic.” He set his sights on the five-gallon soft-drink containers used in restaurants. He drilled two holes in such a container, one for air pressure to go in and the other for water to flow out. Then he hooked the container up to an air pump to complete a mobile water supply system. A dentist just needed to gently press a foot pedal and water would flow out of the container. Huang received accolades from TIMA dentists who used his handiwork.

Observant of the needs of TIMA members, Huang strives to do whatever he can to help physicians spend their time on caring for patients rather than on anything else.

Xie Jin-long (謝金龍), a TIMA dentist, said that when it comes to equipment for free clinics, Huang has been a wonderful help. “He not only sets up equipment for a clinic and puts it away afterwards, but he also keeps thinking about ways to improve our tools or equipment. He is our staunchest supporter.”

Huang recalled his career as an electrician and plumber. When he was just starting out, he signed up for government vocational training courses. He never expected that what he learned there would make him a great enabler for TIMA clinics. “He’s most fortunate who finds a task that he loves to do and does well,” Huang said. “I’ve found that task at TIMA clinics.”

Old in Age, But Young in Spirit

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Translated by Teresa Chang

There is a group of elderly volunteers who serve at the Jing Si Hall in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. They help clean the hall and keep it in shape. They nicknamed themselves “the Seven Fairies”—not because there are seven of them but because “seven” is a homophone for “cleaning” in Taiwanese. The oldest among the group is 90-year-old Ke Wang Bao-mei (柯王寶美). She goes to the Jing Si Hall every day before dawn to mop the floors and do other cleaning work. When she is done, she returns home and begins to do recycling work. She certainly makes good use of her time by giving of herself the best she can. She and her fellow volunteers may be old but they are still in good health. Even if they are injured physically, they still go to the Hall to volunteer—they use cleaning as a form of rehabilitation. They are truly living their lives to the fullest.

Chen Xu Jin-tu (陳許金土), 91, has been a recycling volunteer in Chiayi, southern Taiwan, for 25 years. In addition to picking up recyclable garbage around her village, she places four large bags at four locations in her village every day for people to put their recyclables in; when the bags are full, she pushes a wheelbarrow to collect them. Even though she is advanced in age, she pushes the wheelbarrow steadily. Her fellow villagers have commended her as the treasure of their village for her dedication to recycling work and her determination to serve despite her age.

This article is excerpted from a series of speeches delivered by Master Cheng Yen from July 1 to 20, 2017.

Cai Kuan (蔡寬), of Zhanghua, central Taiwan, turned 100 this year. She joined Tzu Chi at 70 years of age and has volunteered for three decades. Despite being a centenarian, she visits the needy with other volunteers. She cheers up those who are despondent and encourages them to get out and about more. She is a role model for her children and grandchildren, and they all follow her example in doing good.

These volunteers may be old, but they remain young in spirit. They do their best to give of themselves. Second by second, time rapidly slips by. We should learn from their example and make the best use of our time. If we are focused on consuming the resources of the world and pursuing comfort and pleasure, we are simply feeding and pampering our material desires and squandering our lives meaninglessly.

There are many elderly people in Tzu Chi who are fit in body and mind. When they were young, they worked hard for their families. As they aged, they passed on their businesses or their family responsibilities to the younger generations so they could devote their time to caring for the Earth and helping less fortunate people. Now they live with dignity and provide good examples of how to realize the value of life. They are truly the treasures of our world and worthy of our emulation.

Believe in yourself

During June and July, I traveled all the way from northern Taiwan to the south. I visited Tzu



CHEN YOUNG-FENG



CHU XIANG-SHAN

Cai Kuan, 100, sorts newspapers at a Tzu Chi recycling station. There are many elderly volunteers like her in Tzu Chi who, despite their age, still give of themselves wholeheartedly.

Chi offices along the way. I heard many stories of our volunteers taking care of their old or sick fellow volunteers as they would their own family members. Their care and companionship was not just for a few days, but often extended for years. When all is fine and well, our volunteers work together to contribute to the welfare of the world, but when impermanence or misfortune strikes, they are there for each other. The genuine care they show for their fellow volunteers is so touching and comforting. Such love and care are the most precious things in life. No money can buy the unity and harmony they demonstrate.

I was touched by what I saw, but my heart was also heavy. I've seen in recent years more and more senior volunteers growing feeble with age, falling ill, or passing away. I can only tell myself that such is the natural course of life. The Great Conduct Bodhisattva says, "With another day gone, our lives become shorter." Time marches relentlessly on. It is vitally important

for us to make good use of every moment, to persevere in our aspirations and do what we need to do.

Volunteer Zhang Wu Xiu (張吳秀) from Taoyuan is doing exactly that. At age 88, she still shoulders the responsibility of a team leader. Every time I visit the Taoyuan office, she shows up to let me know that she is still there, still serving as the team leader and sticking to her post. Never once has she told me that she is too old or wants to pass the baton to a younger volunteer. She feels that though she is advanced in years, she is physically fit enough to help with various volunteer tasks, such as cooking and recycling. Her team members respect and love her, and, upholding their shared ideals, they work alongside her in a spirit of unity.

Lin Wang Yue-e (林王月娥), from New Taipei City, is 95 years old and has been doing recycling for over two decades. She is also training to be a Tzu Chi commissioner. When we met recently,

she told me she was very happy because she will complete her training and be certified by me as a commissioner this year.

She also said that since she was already on a very good path, she should just keep going. She has faith in me, in Tzu Chi, and in herself. For her, age is not an issue. She is confident that she is still capable of shouldering responsibilities.

It takes two to three years for a person to become a certified commissioner. I hope everyone who has completed the training, who understands the philosophy and ideals of Tzu Chi, and who is convinced that the organization is worth their dedication, believes in their choice and has faith in their ability to serve. If you don't believe even in yourself, how will you have the courage to dedicate yourself to the welfare of mankind?

What our society today needs the most is unity of hearts, harmony, mutual love, and concerted effort. Many people's minds today are unbalanced, and the world is muddled by a thick spiritual turbidity. To counter this, we need

the help of living bodhisattvas willing to go into the world and take on the responsibility to transform people's hearts and minds. What is a living bodhisattva? It is anyone who vows and works to free people from suffering instead of seeking his or her own comfort or pleasure.

To realize the bodhisattva spirit in the world, we must bravely overcome all kinds of challenges. We must harbor loving-kindness and compassion, be gentle and forbearing, and realize the emptiness of all things so that we may not be attached to anything. With broad, compassionate hearts and firm resolution, we commit ourselves to caring for all suffering people in the world. With gentleness and forbearance, we work to make the world a better place.

If we take the Buddha's teachings to heart and live them out, we will remain calm and at peace when we encounter obstacles. We will be able to tell right from wrong and do what we need to do. With our conduct upright, we will have a clear conscience and experience no fear.

A Tzu Chi volunteer (right) expresses care for a patient at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. Tzu Chi hospitals are noted for their volunteer system.



LIN YAN-HUANG

Life is like a dream, an illusion. What is there to quibble about? We should all see through life's impermanence and the emptiness of all phenomena and just focus on playing our roles well.

I encourage everyone to give wholeheartedly, without asking for anything in return. That's how we can best help ourselves cultivate wisdom and blessings.

For love, not for profit

When I stopped at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, southern Taiwan, during my trip, I listened to reports from our medical team there. Young doctors shared with me the aspirations that led them to join the medical field; senior doctors talked not about how to make a profit but how to nurture good doctors. I also learned how personnel from different departments treat each other with love and help each other grow.

It's not easy to be a doctor or a nurse. They often cannot get off work on time because patients may suddenly need their help and care. Besides treating illnesses, they need to soothe patients' emotional anguish as well. Their work can be so demanding that it's easy to imagine how tired they must often feel. Nevertheless, many of them hold firm to the initial aspirations that brought them to enter this profession. They stick to their posts and work hard to save lives.

The mission of our Tzu Chi medical system is one of love. Making profits is not our priority.

Our mission is to "safeguard life, health, and love." Since we know we are going in the right direction, what everyone needs to do is play their role the best they can.

Employees at our Dalin Hospital look upon the hospital as one big family, and they work together to safeguard it. Chen Yan-ru (陳彥如), an ICU nurse, has served at the hospital for nine years. Her mother, Yang Cui-yun (楊粹雲), is a cleaner at the hospital. Besides working there, Yang volunteers at the hospital during her days off. She rests only two or three days a month. She greatly enjoys serving at the hospital because she feels it is not only a job for her, but it also provides her with a convenient venue to do good. She finds her work to be very meaningful. Her attitude has inspired her daughter to work even harder.

Yang is a lay disciple of mine. She helps keep Dalin Hospital spotless and helps me realize my mission. As both a volunteer and an employee of Tzu Chi, she goes about her work with dedication. She is one of those who make Tzu Chi possible.

An important feature of Tzu Chi hospitals is the volunteer system. There are volunteers at every Tzu Chi hospital to care for the spiritual and psychological needs of patients. They visit with them and their families and serve as a bridge between the patients and the medical staff. Thus, they enable our doctors and nurses to focus their attention on saving lives and nursing them back to health. The volunteers and the medical staff form a united team tending to the needs of the patients.

Life is priceless. For the good of our patients, we must constantly improve the quality of our medical care and strive to upgrade our equipment. But we must not forget that though good medical skills and equipment are essential, the most important thing is invisible and intangible: love. I hope the staff and volunteers at our hospitals continue to work together in unison for the well-being of all patients.

Tzu Chi Canada offered free Chinese medicine treatments to wildfire victims.



WU QUN-FANG

Caring for the Earth

A strong earthquake jolted the province of Leyte in the Philippines on July 6. There were many aftershocks, and people were too scared to return to their homes. The city of Ormoc and the nearby town of Kananga were among the areas hit the hardest. Tzu Chi volunteers in Ormoc immediately mobilized to aid victims.

Four years ago, when Typhoon Haiyan devastated Ormoc, Tzu Chi volunteers rushed to the area to help. In addition to rendering emergency aid, they provided long-term care and built houses for people who had lost their homes. They also encouraged local residents to join Tzu Chi and train to become certified volunteers.

In the aftermath of the July 6 earthquake, these newer, local volunteers jumped into action. They surveyed damage in disaster areas, comforted victims, and planned relief distributions. By the time volunteers from Manila arrived at Kananga on July 10 to help distribute aid to survivors, they found that the distribution venue had already been well set up and everything arranged in an orderly fashion.

We saw landslides, badly damaged roads, and collapsed buildings in the footage taken by our volunteers of the disaster areas. Heavy rains after the quake only made life harder for people who had been made homeless by the temblor. Tzu Chi volunteers will continue to care for them.

A spate of wildfires broke out in British Columbia, Canada, on July 7. Many firefighters and helicopters have been mobilized to put out the fires, but the conflagrations proved difficult to contain. Tens of thousands of people have been evacuated from their homes. Tzu Chi volunteers have mobilized to assess the damage and helped the affected. [The fires continue to burn as of mid-August.]

The Earth is ill. The Four Elements of earth, water, fire, and air are out of balance. The quake that struck the Philippines and the wildfires ravaging British Columbia remind us to live with sincere piety and vigilant care. Natural disasters are actually closely connected to the human mind and behavior. When people indulge themselves in pursuing pleasures and satisfying their material desires, it leads to an overexploitation of the planet's natural resources and causes various forms of destruction to the Earth. To make the Earth healthier, we must therefore start by purifying people's hearts and minds. We must do our best to sow seeds of goodness. One seed

of kindness can give rise to countless others and transform the world.

Just as doctors care for patients, our recycling volunteers guard the health of the planet. They do more than reclaim reusable resources—they also promote environmental education. They teach people how to correctly classify garbage so that reusable resources can be salvaged and made useful again.

I remember that in 2014 I stopped by a recycling station in Kaohsiung during one of my regular trips around Taiwan. Dusk had fallen and it was raining, but some volunteers hadn't gone home yet and were still working there. A truck had just returned to the station with a full load of recyclables, and the volunteers were unloading the truck and sorting the garbage. I took a look at the unloaded stuff and found that a myriad of objects were in there, including meal boxes with food scraps inside.

I asked the volunteers right then to politely decline when people gave them unsorted garbage in which both unrecyclable and recyclable trash were mixed. I asked them to do that because I was thinking of the sanitation of the station and I wanted to protect the health of the volunteers. Some of them told me that they were worried that if they rejected unsorted garbage from people, they might stop bringing recyclables. But I reasserted the importance of asking the public to form the habit of sorting their garbage and cleaning their recyclables at home before bringing it to us. This is for the good of everyone. Tzu Chi volunteers take up recycling to protect the Earth. We hope people will work together with us to do the Earth a good turn.

Besides recycling to conserve resources, everyone should cherish what they have and not easily throw out things that are still useful. Many people nowadays buy things at whim, and once they get tired of an object they discard it even though it is still pretty new. These objects might end up in landfills and not decompose even decades later. Taiwan is not very large; it can't take such thoughtless production of garbage.

Let us motivate and inspire every household to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Never underestimate what everyone can do to contribute to the welfare of the Earth. If we can all rein in our desires and conserve resources, if we can combine everyone's efforts, we will bring a lot of blessings to the world.

Please be ever more mindful.





Let Guan Yin Smile Again

By Huang Xiao-zhe and Cai Yu-xuan
Compiled and translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

A handful of non-profit organizations in Taiwan, including Tzu Chi, worked together in April and May to clean up a heavily littered area near Yinghan Peak, on Mount Guanyin, northern Taiwan. About 750 people worked on April 23, 2017, the day after Earth Day, in a large-scale attempt to tackle the garbage there. The task turned out to be more than a day's work, so a follow-up cleanup was conducted on May 21 when about 250 people gave it another go.

THE PLACE

Yinghan Peak, at 616 meters (2,020 feet) above sea level, is the highest summit of Mount Guanyin. The peak used to be a training site for military police, from which its name is derived: Yinghan means "tough guy." Mount Guanyin was named after the Bodhisattva of Compassion because the shape of the mountain is said to look like the reclining bodhisattva. Below the mountain, the Keelung River empties into the Tamsui River, which flows northwestward before emptying into the Taiwan Strait.

The panoramic views of the greater Taipei area afforded by Yinghan Peak have long made it a popular hiking destination—perhaps too popular.





THE PROBLEM

With people comes commerce, and with commerce comes garbage.

There used to be vendors' stands on Mount Guanyin selling food and beverages to hikers. Public environmental awareness back then was not as high as it is today. Some vendors and consumers did not properly dispose of their garbage. They simply tossed it down the slopes from Yinghan Peak. Week after week, year after year, new rubbish was dumped on top of old garbage. After a few decades, a particularly large dumping ground grew to be called "the garbage cascade." Before we visited the mountain to report on the cleanup event, we had heard that infamous name, but we had never actually seen the reality.

Though we had been warned beforehand about that horrendous dump, nothing could have prepared us for the shock of the sight. It was just unbelievable.

The site was completely covered by garbage of all kinds, the soil buried under layers upon layers of rubbish so deep that no grass could grow. The garbage had even interfered with tree roots, hindering their absorption of nutrients from the soil and stunting the normal growth of the trees.

A very large percentage of garbage in the area consisted of disposable bowls and eating utensils, beverage containers, and plastic bags. Not only were these things an eyesore, but they were not biodegradable. If not removed, they would be there to damage the environment for many years to come.



THE TASK

The cleanup event was sponsored by the North Coast and Guanyinshan National Scenic Area Administration. A number of non-profit organizations in Taiwan, including Tzu Chi, took part. About 750 people pitched in on April 23, 2017, the day after Earth Day. The garbage to be cleaned up turned out to be more than a day's work for them, so over 250 people tackled the site again at another cleanup event on May 21.

The work would have been much easier if volunteers could have had a level field to stand on, but they didn't. The garbage had been thrown down slopes, some rather steep. If this were not bad enough, it had rained for several days before the event, making the slopes slippery and even more difficult for the workers to navigate. The utmost care was required to ensure that one did not lose one's balance, slide, or fall. Some volunteers secured themselves with ropes to avoid falling.

That was not the only challenge the participants faced. A lot of old garbage was mixed with damp, sticky dirt, which had to be shaken off or removed before the garbage could be bagged. Furthermore, the place was engulfed by a foul smell that only trash could produce.

All the challenges notwithstanding, the volunteers kept working, and they even picked out recyclables to lower the volume of garbage.



CARRYING THE WEIGHT OF THE YEARS

Removing the garbage from the area was an effort in and of itself. Yinghan Peak is accessible only by foot, so all the garbage that had been collected had to be carried down by the volunteers. It was about a 30-minute walk down from the summit.

Each bag of garbage weighed between three and five kilograms (6.6–11 pounds). Some people formed a line and passed the bags from person to person down the mountain trails. Some made the entire trip down the mountain alone; they either held one bag in each hand, or carried bags on their backs, or used bamboo poles to carry the loads. No matter their method, everyone helped move the garbage down the mountain.

The participants ranged in age from ten to over 90. Some hikers saw what the volunteers were doing and joined their effort on the spot. Together, they filled and removed 4,000 garbage bags.

The mountain is much cleaner now, and the soil can finally see the light of day again. We salute those who helped in the event. But what is more important is for people not to litter—on the mountain or anywhere. Working together, we can keep the mountain and our whole environment clean and beautiful. ♣

Starting Over

Xu Zhi-cheng's days as a patient in the hematological oncology ward were marked by anxiety, fear, and tears. But now that he has recovered following a stem cell transplant, he continues to spend time there—as a volunteer. His presence cheers up patients and other volunteers alike.

By Qiu Ru-lian • Translated by Tang Yau-yang • Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe



“**X**u Zhi-cheng [許志成], please come to the exam room to receive your vaccination,” a nurse called out, loud enough for everyone in the pediatric clinic waiting room to clearly hear. “Not so loud, please. I’m Xu Zhi-cheng,” he replied, pleading with the nurse not to call more attention to him. He was already feeling like a square peg in a round hole in the waiting room. As a 61-year-old man, he felt utterly out of place getting immunization shots in a pediatric clinic, of all places. He quickly slipped into the exam room.

Despite his feeling awkward, he wasn’t complaining. In fact, he was glad to be there at all. He had worked very, very hard to even live to this day. He had spent countless days and nights in a hospital, swallowed more pills than he could count, and endured an untold number of injections just to see this day. So today he gladly accepted the injection—a shot normally reserved for children.

In a very true sense, Xu was nearly like an infant, at least in terms of his immune system, or the lack thereof. The immunity that he once had as an adult had been totally wiped out about three years before by his doctors in a necessary step to prepare him to receive a stem cell transplant.

Xu Zhi-cheng (center) visits a patient to cheer him on.

Why me?

Xu was a construction worker when it all started. Heavy labor and working outdoors in the sun had made him physically fit. Getting sick had been the furthest thing from his mind. But then three years ago, he noticed his gums starting to bleed for no apparent reason. He would wake up at night with the smell and feel of blood in his mouth. He would get up, gargle, clean his teeth with Q-tips, and then go back to sleep only to be soon awakened again. After five restless nights of this, coupled with the emergence of purplish spots that resembled mosquito bites on his legs, he went to the emergency room.

The ER doctor held him overnight for tests and observation. The next day he advised him to immediately transfer to a larger hospital for treatment. He told Xu his diagnosis: blood cancer. Xu lost no time in seeking help at Taichung Veterans General (TVG) Hospital, where the doctors started him on chemotherapy and a slew of other procedures.

“Your only hope for a cure rests on a stem cell transplant,” his doctor told him. The doctor made a request on his behalf to the Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center to search for potential donors.

Questions such as “Why me?” and “Will I ever recover?” occupied his mind as he worried whether he could make it through this ordeal. He could not sleep well or eat much; pills and IV

Because of age or health reasons, Xu's siblings could not donate their stem cells to him. Thankfully, an unrelated donor saved his life.



drips consumed his days and nights at the hospital. He longed every day for the good news that a matching donor had been found.

Allies

For years, Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center volunteers have worked with the hematological oncology department at TVG Hospital, where they visit every Friday to provide support for patients. They bring patients fruit and nutritional supplements, listen to them, and give them encouragement. They want to let them know that they are not alone during their tough cancer treatment.

Xu, fighting his illness alone at the hospital, was glad to see these volunteers. They were good listeners when he opened himself up to them about his worries. Soon afterwards, his doctor also brought him good tidings: A donor had been identified for him. Xu was most grateful when he learned later that this person had quickly agreed to donate his stem cells. He was greatly relieved because he knew that some people change their minds after they sign up to be donors. Finding a willing donor was "as if a large rock had been lifted from my shoulders," he said.

It had been a custom of Tzu Chi volunteers to visit the hospital on Christmas Day every year, with one of them dressed as Santa to bring some holiday warmth and joy to patients. That year, when Santa gave Xu his best wishes, Xu said to him, "If I ever get well from this, I'm going to be Santa."

He's back

After Xu underwent his stem cell transplant, he became noticeably weaker—his stamina sagged. Just taking the few steps from his home to the street was enough to make him gasp for air. Even so, he did not forget his Santa promise.

Eventually his strength returned, and he no longer became so easily short of breath. He was able to walk normally on the streets, where people hurried past and cars rushed by as they always had. Though nothing seemed to have changed, Xu now saw things differently. He cherished the fact that he was again able to walk on the street like any other healthy person. He was thankful.

When he felt up to volunteering at the hospital, he began to fulfill his promise. Every week he traveled from his home in Zhanghua to the

neighboring city of Taichung, where he joined other volunteers at TVG Hospital.

Xu was back at the hospital, but this time not as a patient. In his new role as a volunteer, he shared his experience with patients who were in the thick of their cancer treatments. He hoped he could help them in some way.

During his weekly visits, Xu would remind patients of the dos and don'ts for cancer patients, such as: "I know it's very rough on you and you probably feel disheartened, but you must eat and sleep well so you'll have the stamina to fight the disease." "Watch what you eat. Be sure your food is sterilized." "You went back to work on the sly, didn't you? You must rest more to prevent a relapse."

Though it might have seemed that he was nagging, nitpicking, or even being strict, he did it to help. He really hoped he could do the patients some good.

After visiting the hospital for some time, he said to other volunteers, "One day a week doesn't seem enough." He expressed his wish to bring together other former patients who were in remission and together they could make weekly visits to the hospital, but on different days. He wanted to do and help more.

He explained why he wanted to visit more frequently. He pointed out that when people get sick they tend to think too much and worry about the worst-case scenario for their diseases. He wanted to reduce the time they could sit around worrying.

"When I was a patient and volunteers visited me, I always became hopeful and I felt that I had the power to fight my disease," Xu said. "So I thought that if I could spend one additional day a week with patients, they'd have less time to worry or get caught up in negative thinking."

Some patients in remission may try to forget their struggles during their treatments, and they would probably avoid going to the hospital so as not to be reminded of those painful days. But Xu was not one of those ex-patients. Quite the contrary. "Though looking back at those days is painful, I don't mind doing it. I hope sharing my experience can help them. I tell them my days as a patient were very painful to me, just as theirs are to them now. But I can show them that I've now recovered, and I encourage them to stay hopeful. Those who believe are blessed in that they'll have an easier time in their battles against their diseases."

Gratitude to the donors

Besides providing emotional support to patients, Xu also spends time with stem cell donors. He goes with other volunteers to accompany donors through the apheresis process during which whole blood is collected from one arm of the donor, stem cells are extracted from the blood, and the rest of the blood is returned to the donor through the other arm.

This process may take six or even eight hours during which the donor must remain as still as possible. It is no easy task. Xu feels grateful to all the stem cell donors for going through the process. "If donors are willing to go through all this trouble for us, who are complete strangers to them, we should at least fight harder and not easily give up," Xu says to current or prospective recipients to cheer them on.

Other volunteers have noticed Xu's enthusiasm to help, and they have been heartened by his transformation from a gloomy blood cancer patient to an eager, positive force in the welfare of other blood cancer patients. Volunteer Wang Meng-zhuan (王孟專) said, "I still remember the determined expression in his eyes when he promised us he'd be Santa if he recovered."

Xu's giving makes them feel warm. He does not just encourage patients to be strong and remain hopeful. As a former blood cancer victim who has regained his health, he also shows potential donors how important their donations are, and he helps other volunteers realize that their efforts for stem cell donation are every bit as worthwhile as they could ever possibly hope.

On Christmas Day, Xu slipped on a pair of red pants, donned a red coat, put on a black belt, and pasted on a white beard before he showed up in front of cancer patients. He was fulfilling his promise to play Santa.

The outside world and celebrations of holidays can seem far away to patients cooped up in a hospital for treatment. Xu and the other volunteers hoped that their visit could brighten the day a little for the patients and help them feel a little more hopeful in their hard and emotionally draining fights to reclaim their health.

Xu appreciates his second lease on life, and he is determined to continue being a cheerleader for patients fighting for their lives. "This is tough, but to keep going is the way to go." ❀

I'm My Daddy's Eyes

They uprooted their lives, fled Syria, and entered Turkey illegally so that their children could have a brighter future.

Text and photos by Yu Zi-cheng
Translated by Tang Yau-yang



At 6:00 p.m. on June 23, 2017, some fellow Tzu Chi volunteers and I arrived in a 9-seat van at the Arnavutköy Merkez Bus Station in Istanbul, Turkey. We were there to pick up Alaaddin and his son, Ali. They had just gotten off work. We were visiting their family that day.

A Syrian volunteer helped Ali, 7, into the van. "Wait. Where's my dad?" Ali asked anxiously. "I must sit by him. He can't see!" Volunteers helped Alaaddin, who was blind,

board the van and made sure father and son sat together.

When we reached their home, Ali put his hand on his father's head to protect him from bumping it as they got out of the vehicle. Then he took his father's hand in his and led him up the stairs of an old apartment building.

The stairwell was small, the steps were uneven and rough, and the walls were damp. It was also quite dark, so dark that Osama, one of my fellow volunteers, said he

A Syrian Tzu Chi volunteer chats with Alaaddin's children.



could barely see where he was going. He wondered how Ali and Alaaddin managed this difficult task every day.

They lived on the top floor. After sitting his father in the living room, Ali went into a bedroom and picked up his sister, barely one year old, from his mother. Ali carried his sister to the living room to meet the visitors.

As was customary in the Muslim world, Ali's mother stayed in her bedroom during our visit so she would not be seen by the male strangers. That's why we could not visit the family until Alaaddin, the man of the house, had gotten off work. Male volunteers could not visit unless the man of the house was at home.

Alaaddin and his family are one of the 732 households that Tzu Chi volunteers in Turkey provide aid to every month.

The family smuggled themselves into Turkey from Syria in 2014. Alaaddin had wanted to leave Syria so that his children could have a shot at a better future. He was grateful to many people who had helped

them along the way, including a Turkish military police officer who looked the other way so he and his family would not be taken into custody.

Now in Turkey, Ali accompanies his dad every day to peddle bottled water and tissues on the streets. By his actions, Alaaddin is showing Ali how not to be defeated by poverty and how to do their best to make an honest living.

As I listened to Alaaddin tell us his story, my tears wetted the viewfinder of my camera. Who in his right mind would put the lives of his family on the line to attempt to flee his hometown and settle in a strange nation? Nobody would—unless the alternative would have been much harder to swallow.

We have heard many sad stories from Syrian refugees. Their experiences bring to mind life's impermanence. But their stories also remind us that we are fellow citizens in this global village, and that we should do everything we can to help them through their difficult time. ❀

A doctor from the Tzu Chi International Medical Association tends to A-yuan's wounds in his home. JIANG PEI-RU



Good Medicine

By Gao Yu-mei

Condensed and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The combined efforts of many people healed his physical wounds and despairing heart.

Scleroderma, a long-term autoimmune disease that results in hardening of the skin, made A-yuan's hands stiff and deformed. Furthermore, he could not walk. He moved around in a chair with wheels, using what little strength was left in his feet to propel himself forward or sideways.

His condition caused him to fall to the floor often. One day, he was slowly scooting around in his room when he fell again. It was a hard fall—his body was injured in several places, and he was in so much pain he couldn't even crawl.

He yelled for help with all his might, but no one responded. It was winter, so most of his neighbors had their doors and windows closed to shut out the chill. They probably couldn't even hear his cries for help.

A-yuan eventually mustered all the strength he had left and was able to crawl to the phone and call the police. The chief of the local police station hurried over and helped him get up from the chilly floor.

A-yuan had another visitor that day—Tzu Chi volunteer Lin Yu-jin (林玉錦). She said to

him, "A-yuan, you'd better go to the hospital for treatment and a thorough checkup." A-yuan knew that Lin was concerned about him and for that he was very thankful. But he didn't want to see a doctor. He had always been passive and reluctant about seeking medical help. He felt he would be better off dead, and he had in fact attempted suicide several times.

A sad past

A-yuan lived in Liujiao, a quiet, remote town in Chiayi County, southern Taiwan. One summer evening in 2011, Tzu Chi volunteers held a prayer service at a temple in Liujiao. It was there that Lin first met A-yuan. Noticing his deformed hands, she approached him and struck up a conversation.

"Doctors have said I have scleroderma and that it is incurable," said A-yuan, as he explained his condition to Lin. She pulled up a chair, sat down, and began listening to him relate his story.

A-yuan used to work at an ironworks factory in Taipei when he was younger. One day at work, a heavy object fell on him and badly injured his legs. Even though he eventually recovered from those injuries, he noticed he wasn't as agile as he had been before. In fact, he found his body growing stiffer day after day. He had no choice but to move back in with his parents so they could care for him.

Sadly, his parents passed away one after the other a few years later. With no one around to care for him and with his mobility becoming more and more restricted, he found it really hard to get by. Deprived of both physical and emotional support, he felt completely alone and helpless. He became depressed and saw no reason to go on living. When police officers at the local station learned of his situation, they worried about him and began keeping an eye on him.

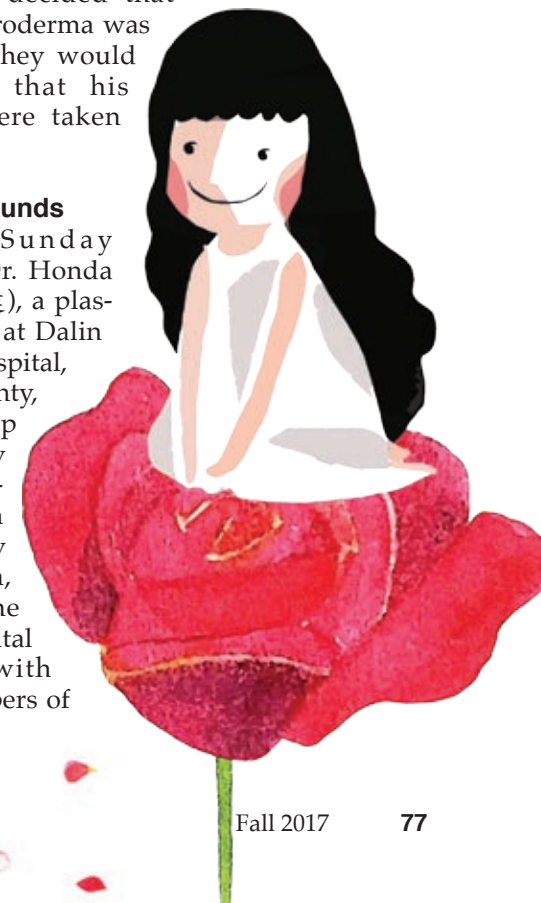
Scleroderma led to the hardening and atrophy of A-yuan's skin and muscles. His joints became stiff too. As a result, he often fell and sustained injuries. Such injuries were especially hard on A-yuan. With his limited range of motion, it was a real challenge for him to tend to his own wounds.

While telling Lin his story, A-yuan lifted up his long pants. Lin was shocked to see his legs covered with pitted scars and sores; some sores were so deep the bones were visible. "Have you ever seen the doctor?" she asked. A-yuan just sighed and complained more about his miserable life.

A few days later, Lin and other Tzu Chi volunteers had a meeting in which they reviewed some cases of care recipients. Lin brought up A-yuan's situation, and the volunteers decided that even if scleroderma was incurable, they would see to it that his wounds were taken care of.

Difficult wounds

One Sunday morning, Dr. Honda Hsu (許宏達), a plastic surgeon at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, Chiayi County, showed up in the lobby of the hospital. Though it was a day off for him, he had come to the hospital to meet with other members of



the Tzu Chi International Medical Association. Together they were going to visit some needy patients in remote regions.

Dr. Hsu emigrated from Taiwan to South Africa with his family when he was little. When he had grown up, he followed in his grandfather's footsteps and became a doctor. As a child, he had seen his grandfather treating impoverished patients free of charge, sometimes even giving them money to pay for their transportation home. His grandpa's kindness made an impact on him. After he became a physician, Hsu volunteered at Tzu Chi free clinic events in Johannesburg.

In 2000, Hsu returned to Taiwan and worked at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, in eastern Taiwan. He later transferred to Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. It was the most natural thing for him to volunteer his time to help care for needy patients in remote areas. It was what he was about to do on this particular Sunday.

On the way to

the patients' homes, Hsu learned from volunteer Lin Yu-jin that there would be a particularly difficult case that day.

A terrible stench assailed Hsu and the other volunteers when they stepped into A-yuan's home. Hsu did not cringe or hold back though. He walked right toward A-yuan, bent down, and checked the big and small wounds and sores on his legs. He gently pressed a cotton swab on a festered sore and some pus immediately spurted out.

"Sir, your wounds are too far advanced," Hsu said to A-yuan. "Just cleaning and dressing them won't make them heal. You need to check into a hospital for more thorough treatment." While he was speaking, Hsu continued to press on the sore to release more pus, which he then dabbed away with tissues.

Lin added, "Right, right, you must listen to the doctor. He has your best interests at heart." But A-yuan seemed unmoved, and he didn't say a word.

On another day, Dr. Chien Jui-teng (簡瑞騰), vice superintendent of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, called on A-yuan personally. He had learned about his reluctance to go to a hospital. Squatting before him, he saw spots on his pants that had been soaked wet with pus and blood.

He cleaned his wounds and sores and explained to him how far they had deteriorated. He said that even those that didn't look so bad had festered with pus. When he was done tending to the lesions, Chien stood up and said to A-yuan, "You must receive further treatment. I'll arrange hospitalization for you."

A-yuan didn't say a word. A volunteer piped up: "A-yuan, we're really worried about you. Don't let us down and let our efforts go down the drain."

Dr. Chien continued, "You don't need to worry about money. We'll take care of that for you. Just go to our hospital. Only after



Tzu Chi volunteers visit A-yuan in his home. With help from many people, A-yuan now has a better life.

LIU LI-MEI

your wounds have been treated and healed can we rest at peace."

Money had been a big concern to A-yuan, and that was the main reason why he had refused to seek medical help. After hearing Chien say that they would take care of the money issue for him, he hung his head in thought for a moment and then nodded. "I'm sorry to put you through so much trouble. I guess I'll thank you in advance for your help then," he said.

The volunteers left A-yuan's place, and some of them set to work arranging for his hospitalization.

Combined efforts

Back at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, Dr. Chien assembled doctors from various departments and together they consulted on how to treat A-yuan.

Dr. Hsu would be A-yuan's attending physician. After looking at his test reports, Hsu said that although his condition looked like cellulitis, it was in fact necrotizing fasciitis (NF), commonly known as flesh-eating disease, which is caused by bacteria. It had to be treated as soon as possible, before it led to a fatal case of sepsis.

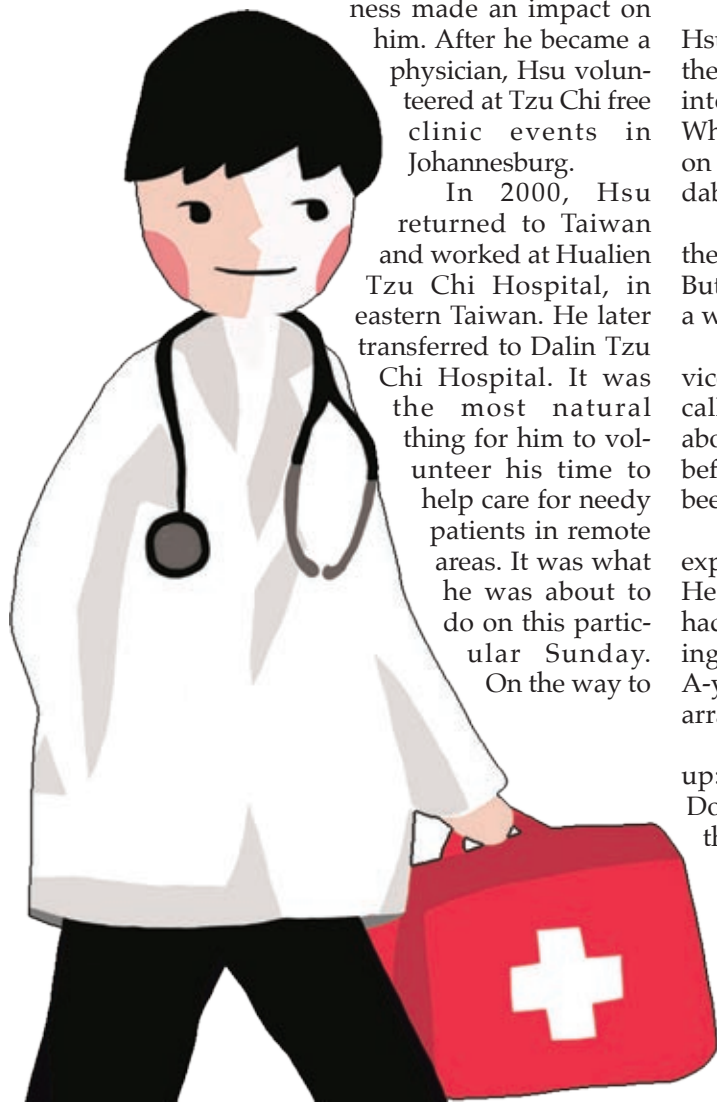
Dr. Huang Kuang-yung (黃光永), from the department of immunology and rheumatology,

then reported that A-yuan had been diagnosed with scleroderma, a condition that causes the hardening and tightening of the skin and connective tissues. The disease can also harm blood vessels and internal organs. With the hardening of the skin and muscles, mobility and motor control are affected. That's why A-yuan fell a lot, leading to his various wounds. With his hands deformed and stiff, he could not properly care for his wounds, and so he eventually developed NF.

The first major surgery A-yuan underwent lasted two hours. "Debridement [the surgical removal of dead or contaminated tissue] is not a difficult procedure," Hsu explained. "But the areas on A-yuan that were afflicted with NF were large and deep, all of which added to the difficulty of the surgery."

The scleroderma made it hard for A-yuan's tissue to become attached to artificial skin, so the medical team could not use it on him to speed up the recovery of his wounds. Instead they could only help the tissue grow back by continually cleaning and dressing his wounds.

After A-yuan was discharged, Tzu Chi volunteers worked with the village office and applied to the social welfare department of the Chiayi County government for home care services. May, who had been an in-home care pro-



When your mind shifts into a positive mode, you begin to see a different world.

vider for many years, began visiting A-yuan twice a day to clean up his place, feed him, and change his dressings.

May was good at caring for bedridden patients, but it was not easy to care for A-yuan. "The infections have gone deep into his sores. Often when I feel that I've made some progress, the bacteria invade tissue surrounding an old sore and a new sore emerges. It's a real challenge tending to him." Every time a sore was not healing well, May would take a picture of it and send it to Hsu via a messaging app on her cell phone so that the doctor could decide whether A-yuan needed further attention.

In the company of love

One Saturday evening, Dr. Hsu returned home after work and saw his two little daughters doing their homework at their desks. He was visiting A-yuan the next day, and he invited the two of them along. Back when they were still in kindergarten, Hsu had started taking them with him when he visited needy patients at home. He hoped that such experiences would help his daughters learn to give to others, care for the underserved, and appreciate their own blessings.

The following day, a party of people including Hsu and his daughters arrived at A-yuan's home. The two little girls did not show even a hint of fear at seeing A-yuan's unhealed wounds,

from which pus and blood were still occasionally oozing. Instead, they said to their father, "Daddy, be gentle so that you don't hurt Uncle A-yuan." Their sweet words were like a stream of warmth flowing through A-yuan's heart.

The love and care from Tzu Chi volunteers, the medical help from doctors, the assistance of the in-home care provider, and the sweet compassion from the two little girls.... With so many people caring for him, A-yuan no longer felt all alone in this world. He was receiving so much from others. In addition to Tzu Chi, staffers from the social welfare department checked on him on a regular basis, and the Eden Social Welfare Foundation subsidized his living expenses and home care service expenses.

With time, more hospitalizations, and care at home, A-yuan's wounds gradually got better. Even more noteworthy was that his mind and attitude improved too. That was manifested in how much more often he smiled. He said to Dr. Hsu, "Thank you for taking such good care of me, both physically and emotionally."

Hsu was really heartened by the progress he saw in A-yuan. "We have a lot to be thankful for—Tzu Chi volunteers, the in-home care provider, and the government's social policy. As a medical care provider, I feel I have so much support behind me."

One day, Tzu Chi volunteers visited A-yuan again and pushed him out of his home for a little stroll. Looking at the setting sun, A-yuan exclaimed, "I never knew a setting sun could be so beautiful!"

When your mind shifts into a positive mode, you begin to see a different world. You become more alive to the beautiful things life has to offer.

"I need to be grateful that I'm still alive today," said A-yuan. "I'll cherish what I have and treasure my life."

Love has led him out of the dark tunnel of his past. Gazing at the setting sun, A-yuan looked forward to the new dawn of tomorrow. ❀



Jiang Zhi-peng works on the red quinoa farm on the campus of TCUST in Hualien where he learned about the cultivation of this economic crop.

YAN LIN-ZHAO



A New Crop, A New Future Red Quinoa

By Ye Xiu-pin, Ye Zi-hao, and Wang Shang-qin
Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Under the sun, 6,000 red quinoa plants swayed in a light wind on the farm of the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology (TCUST) in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. After more than four months of hard work, three young farmers were ready to harvest.

They had learned how to cultivate this pseudocereal and process it for sale at TCUST. They had also taken online marketing courses. Once they had acquired the expertise needed, they started red quinoa farming in their hometown of Taimali, Taitung, eastern Taiwan.

The tenders

Jiang Zhi-peng (江志鵬) and his younger sister Jiang Yu-qian (江雨倩) hail from Taimali, where their parents had once farmed rice and orchids before switching to sugar apples for their higher profits. Their parents did well in the local farming circles and made a comfortable living for the family.

As the kids grew up, they came to realize that aside from farming, their hometown did not provide many job opportunities. They could not find meaningful work outside of agricul-





Zhang Feng-lan, influenced by her two children, has started growing organic red quinoa, without relying on chemicals like pesticides.

JIANG ZHI-PENG

In 2009, Typhoon Morakot devastated their parents' farm. They replanted the sugar apples and waited four years for them to produce the first batch of fruit. Things were going okay until they were hit hard by Typhoon Nepartak in 2016. The second destruction occurred only a few short years after their first recovery. Their parents once more faced the task of building up their farm

and crops from scratch. But this time something else happened. In the aftermath of Nepartak, Master Cheng Yen suggested to farmer victims during a visit that they consider growing red quinoa instead of crops such as sugar apples. She pointed out that TCUST was offering a teaching program for this crop.

ture, and farming was not their cup of tea. Therefore, the two siblings left their hometown. Zhi-peng ended up selling clothes out of a van, peddling them from town to town, but he would go home to help his parents when they harvested sugar apples. Yu-qian married a man in Kaohsiung, southwestern Taiwan, and started a family there.

Quinoa is a pseudocereal, a non-grassy plant used in much the same way as grains and cereals. Gluten-free, it contains calcium, iron, potassium, B-vitamins, magnesium, phosphorus, vitamin E, and fiber. It is one of only a few plant foods considered a complete protein source, containing all nine essential amino acids. Its low availability in Taiwan has enabled it to command prices several times higher than those of the highest-grade rice.

It is a fast-growing crop, usually ready to harvest just four months after planting. Farmers in Taiwan can expect to have two harvests a year if they avoid the typhoon and monsoon season. After the harvest, the land can be used to grow other crops. Red quinoa is an economically viable crop for farmers.

Zhang Feng-lan (張鳳蘭), a typhoon victim and a Tzu Chi volunteer, heard the red quinoa suggestion from Master Cheng Yen. Zhang is the Jiang siblings' mother. She was the one who urged her children to learn how to cultivate red quinoa at TCUST.

Jiang Zhi-peng was then mulling over whether to return home to farm, so he took his mother's advice and went to Hualien to attend the Tzu Chi training. His sister and Liu Qing-hong (劉清鴻), from the same village, went with him.

Organic cultivation

The three young people from Taimali joined students at the Research Center for Agricultural Biomedicine and the Marketing and Distribution Management Department at TCUST. There they learned to cultivate, process, and sell red quinoa under the tutelage of teachers Liu Wei-Chung (劉威忠), Keng Nien-Tzu (耿念慈), Kuo Yu-Ming (郭又銘), and Chen Hwang-Yeh (陳皇曄).

The trio, who had almost no farming experience, were assigned to tend a 1.6-acre tract. They learned from scratch how to cultivate seedlings, water the plants, and weed.

Red quinoa is quite hardy and drought-resistant. The plants are not hard to care for. But in due course they attracted insects. Such pests would have been easy to kill or expel with

chemical insecticides, but the school had abandoned the use of chemicals. As a result, the three young people had to rid their crops of insects another way—by hand. They often spent a whole day—rain or shine—squatting or kneeling to remove pests from their crops. Jiang would be quick to tell you that it was far and away harder work than selling clothes.

"Aphids can infest red quinoa, causing the leaves to curl, which interferes with photosynthesis," Jiang Yu-qian said. "We counter this pest with their natural nemeses, ladybugs. We attract ladybugs to the red quinoa tract by planting lavender, mint, and similar strongly-scented plants nearby."

Their teachers taught them the law of the natural food chain and how that law could be applied to naturally solve the aphid problem at hand. Yu-qian, with a small son at home, likes this way of farming that uses no chemicals in food production and enriches the biodiversity of the farm.

In the last three years, teams at the Research Center for Agricultural Biomedicine at TCUST have used red quinoa to make facial masks, enzymes, energy soups, energy bars, and quinoa tea bags. Even after the needed stuff has been extracted, the spent red quinoa plants are not discarded. The teams have given new life to what's left over, using it as filler for mushroom grow bags for the cultivation of fungi, or as fuel for specialized stoves.

"The Master asked us to do 'charitable agriculture,'" Lo Wen-jui (羅文瑞), the president of TCUST, said of the agricultural endeavors that his school is undertaking. "So we've tried to impart our knowledge and expertise to help farmers establish themselves and add to the agricultural capabilities of our nation." The expertise that Lo's school has attempted to share with farmers in eastern Taiwan has additionally included brand marketing, promotion, on-line marketing, and customer relations management.

"I hope that the three of them [Jiang Zhi-peng, Jiang Yu-qian, and Liu Qing-hong] can become our seed teachers," Lo continued, "to teach other farmers in their area to boost their income from farming."

Trying to Stay Afloat



Jiang Zhi-peng, right, and a TCUST student work with red quinoa in a lab. Inset: Their products: red quinoa powder and red quinoa tea bags. WANG SHANG-QIN



The harvest

In late January 2017, Jiang Zhi-peng and Jiang Yu-qian turned their red quinoa harvest at the university into products for sale. They made red quinoa powder and red quinoa tea. They tested the market with these two products. "Though we didn't harvest much, we made nice products and packaged them nicely to add value," Jiang Yu-qian said.

The Jiang siblings have since returned home to Taimali, where they raise red quinoa on a half-acre tract.

Liu Qing-hong majored in biotechnology in college. Now he is a red quinoa farmer, and in his spare time he experiments with the interactions between his crops and sugar apples. He is trying to isolate a microbial strain from sugar apples and ferment it with a liquid extracted from red quinoa. He hopes that the mixture will yield some surprise nutrients. He knows that

though he may try to his heart's content, there is no guarantee that his attempts will lead to anything worthwhile. But whether or not he will be successful, he, like the Jiang siblings, has taken a very big first step toward establishing a livelihood for himself. The three of them have stepped out of their comfort zones and bravely taken on new challenges in life.

Their zest has spilled over to their families. Liu Yao-tai (劉耀台), Liu Qing-hong's father, and Zhang Feng-lan, the Jiang siblings' mother, have both planted red quinoa for the first time, and, like their children, they do so without using chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Together they hope to do the Earth a good turn and help their livelihoods to be less dependent on a single crop. ❀

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, and hospitals there lack many necessities. People take advantage of any occasion to obtain medical care.



Honduran volunteers help a patient get around at a Tzu Chi free clinic held at a school in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras.

Instituto Técnico Nueva Suyapa is located in a suburb of Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. Even though it was still early on a Sunday morning, the school was bustling with people preparing for a Tzu Chi free clinic.

As the hot sun rose in the sky, the big crowds waiting outside to enter the clinic drew food vendors, but the aromas from their food made the people even hungrier. Some people blocked the sun with umbrellas or fanned themselves to keep cool as they inched toward the entrance to the clinic, where volunteers carefully checked in only the permitted people. Inside the school, 69 medical volunteers treated patients as fast as they could, but still the line of waiting people extended a long way outside the school. Armed soldiers stood guard to ensure that the event would proceed in an orderly fashion.

This was the seventh free clinic that the foundation has provided in Honduras since 2011.

By Zheng Ru-jing
Translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photos courtesy of Zheng Ru-jing

A nation stressed

Honduras has struggled for economic prosperity. It has been besieged on several fronts, including a trade deficit, natural disasters, and political unrest.

For too many years, Honduras has imported far more goods and services than it has exported. It has also run up a huge pile of foreign debts. Despite repeated attempts, the national government has yet to identify or implement policies that result in economic growth. The nation is stuck in poverty.

Natural disasters have made it that much harder for the country to climb out of poverty. Hurricane Mitch in 1998 was among a seemingly unbroken chain of unrelenting violent weather conditions that devastated the nation and left it no chance to recover.

Honduras has been beset by military coups ever since it gained independence in 1821. The national treasury, paltry at best, has mostly been used to pay for military action, leaving the government with little or no funds to improve the infrastructure of the nation. Many rural areas are still without running water. Mosquitoes are ram-



People with gloomy faces wait in a long line for their turn to obtain free medical care. Falling ill is often a nightmare in Honduras, where medical resources are severely lacking.

pant, and outbreaks of dengue fever are an annual event. The country was hit by a Zika virus epidemic in 2016.

Health insurance

The Honduran government runs a medical insurance program for its citizens, but not all people can afford the premiums. The government automatically withholds medical insurance premiums from people's salaries, but as for the unemployed, no money can be obtained from them.

Generally speaking, residents in urban areas can obtain medical care at public hospitals, free for the insured or the unemployed, and US\$35 per visit for the uninsured. The problem is that pharmaceuticals are extremely hard to find. Many patients see doctors but then cannot obtain the medications necessary to treat their illnesses.

People in the countryside depend on public health centers for medical care. Again drugs are scarce, and even if they are available, many patients can't afford them. As a result, they must helplessly allow their illnesses to take their natural course.

As if the situation were not dire enough, the nation was hit in 2015 by a major corruption

scandal that involved the Social Security Institute. It was found that money had been embezzled from the public health system. With all the cards stacked against them, Hondurans seeking medical care could really use some relief.

Tzu Chi in Honduras

Tzu Chi volunteers first delivered aid to Honduras in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. The foundation has provided assistance to the nation ever since.

William Keh (葛濟捨), M.D., CEO of the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation in the United States, has led aid missions to Honduras for more than a decade. During this time, Tzu Chi has built housing, distributed relief goods, and conducted free clinics.

Keh is well aware of the needs of the local poor people. He traveled again to Honduras with other volunteers from the United States in May 2017, at the invitation of Jorge Chang (張鴻才), head of Tzu Chi Honduras. They conducted another free clinic, trained local volunteers, and discussed the feasibility of setting up a physical space in which to offer on-going medical care for the needy.

The free clinic, held on May 28, provided more than clinical care to the recipients. Local volunteers showed patients how to keep insect-borne communicable diseases at bay. Medical students walked about the venue promoting hygiene or health education. A nutrition team talked to people about improving their diets through healthy eating. Patients who were diabetic or allergic to certain foods were even escorted into a classroom for private consultations.

Parents were happy to see their children entertained by a female clown, which allowed them to see the doctors undistracted by their kids. The clown painted children's faces, gave out balloons, and led games.

On average, two volunteers escorted each patient in and out. Some patients needed special assistance. For example, volunteers needed to support or carry weak patients who had restrict-

ed mobility. The volunteers were physically close enough to the patients to smell their body odor—some patients did not always have water at home to wash themselves—but the volunteers paid no heed to the odor. They were happy to help, and the patients were happy to receive such thoughtful services.

The bathrooms at the Instituto Técnico Nueva Suyapa did not have water. In fact, many places in the nation do not have running water. Consequently, skin diseases are widespread.

The free clinic

The free clinic was scheduled to run from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon, but the large number of patients made it necessary for the clinic to stay open until 6:30. All told, 111 medical and support volunteers served 944 patient visits that day.

Dr. Shirley Chen (陳恂滿) from the United States, second from right, and other volunteers teach children oral hygiene. One hundred and twenty-eight patients received dental treatment during the free clinic.





Volunteers from Honduras and the United States made the May 28 free clinic possible.

Volunteers identified five individuals who needed further aid. One of them was a boy, 17, who was born disabled below the knees. He relied on braces and sticks to walk. His braces no longer fit, but he could not afford new ones. Tzu Chi volunteers decided to help him buy a new pair.

Glennallan Goryl, one of the volunteers in the free clinic, had worked in emergency medicine before he retired. He wrote down in his notebook what he saw that day: "This is the best organized and most efficient free clinic that I've ever been associated with. Every volunteer knew exactly what to do. Things just flew flawlessly, without bottlenecks. Volunteers accompanied patients with love. They gave the patients not just medical care but also sincere love."

Putting down roots in Honduras

Tzu Chi started offering volunteer training in Honduras in 2011. There are now four certified volunteers there and 445 more in training. They are mostly local Hondurans.

The head of Tzu Chi Honduras, Jorge Chang, hails from Taiwan. In 1987, his then employer, the Taiwan Power Company, assigned him to work in Honduras. Ten years later, he returned to Taiwan to retire from the company. As soon as the retirement procedure was completed, he returned to Honduras.

In 1998, he signed on with a Taiwanese project to build an industrial park in the northern part of Honduras, but Hurricane Mitch trounced the country before the project could be inaugurated. Roads were badly damaged and houses were destroyed. As a result, he was forced to sit idle at home.

Tzu Chi volunteers from the United States brought aid to the country after the hurricane.

Staffers at the Taiwanese embassy connected them with Chang. He guided the volunteers to disaster areas to survey the damage, and he helped clear aid supplies through customs. That was the first time that he worked with Tzu Chi personnel.

After that disaster relief mission, Chang started his post-retirement career in earnest, and he did well in his business. He even became the inaugural chairman of the local Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and he went on to serve a second term.

He had an on-and-off relationship with Tzu Chi during this time, during which he was able to observe the work and ideals of the foundation. A circumspect man, Chang was eventually convinced that Tzu Chi was a good organization to work for. He has been wholeheartedly devoted to it ever since.

Honduras has led the world in homicide rates for a number of years. "People live under a shadow on a long-term basis," said Chang. "Residents of the areas where public security is especially bad live with the fear that once they leave their homes, they may not return alive." Chang really feels for the people of the country.

Though he may not be able to do anything directly about the homicide rate, he has found other ways to help the local people. He had the option to return to Taiwan and lead a comfortable life, but he chose to stay in Honduras and live in a house with no air-conditioning. He is staying put so that he can carry out his mission there. He has worked with Honduran volunteers in distributing relief goods and building homes for the needy, and he is personally involved in volunteer training. Together, they hope to find a tomorrow that is brighter than today. ☸

His Love Lives On

By Li Ling-hui

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photo courtesy of Hsin Tien Senior High School



You-an, far left, eagerly did volunteer community service with his schoolmates.

I have been a principal for 18 years. One of the things that I do each year is confer diplomas at commencement ceremonies, congratulate the graduates, and wish them the best as they move on to the next phase of their lives.

Sadly, graduating students isn't always a joyful occasion. I have had to graduate students in hospital wards or, even worse,

This year, graduation day for my school fell on June 6, 2017. Chen You-an (陳宥安), who should have been one of the graduates, could not be there. The next morning, I went to him to hold a commencement ceremony specifically for him.

A considerate child

You-an was born many years after his two sisters came into the world and grew up with his whole family doting on him. Yet instead of becoming spoiled with the extra attention, he grew up to be considerate and caring. He also brought a lot of laughter to his family.

He was just as much a sweet boy at school. Perhaps taking after his mother, he

often helped classmates who were disabled or disadvantaged in other ways. He was warmhearted and liked to help others.

You-an's involvement with Tzu Chi started when he was young. When he was still in junior high, A-gui, a homeless man who had ulcers in his legs, was referred to Tzu Chi for help. The man was subsequently sent to Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital for treatment. You-an's aunt was a Tzu Chi volunteer, and she was among the volunteers assigned to care for him. Through his aunt, You-an came to make the acquaintance of the homeless man.

After A-gui was discharged from the hospital, You-an often helped him peddle magazines on the streets. That lasted until A-gui died in 2015.

After graduating from junior high school, You-an entered my school, Hsin Tien Senior High School. Our school places value and emphasis on fostering student character, and so students are encouraged to take part in volunteer work. You-an was active in volunteering both on and off campus.

I hope that You-an will return to be my student again.

Two years ago, in 2015, Typhoon Soudelor hit Taiwan. One of the areas hit hard was Wulai, northern Taiwan. Tzu Chi volunteers rushed in to help clean up the mud and debris left by the storm. When Master Cheng Yen learned that most of the volunteers who went to help were quite elderly, she called on young people to join them in the clean-up efforts.

Guishan Elementary School, located on the way to Wulai, had been badly flooded. Part of the school had been submerged in water one-story high. Since the summer vacation was almost over and the new school year was just around the corner, the school desperately needed help to have any chance of opening on schedule. After I learned of the Master's appeal and of the school's situation, I urged the teachers and students at my school to help clean up the elementary school. Many immediately responded. They rolled up their sleeves, set to work, and got the classrooms ready for the new semester. In a Da Ai TV report about the event, I saw You-an moving desks and chairs.

The unimaginable

Not only was You-an kind and compassionate, but he was quite athletic, too. He excelled at swimming and track events, often medaling in competitions.

Who would have known that a tumor would grow in the head of such a sunny boy?

You-an was diagnosed with a brain tumor when he was in grade 10. His condition stabilized after treatment. But just one year later, when he was in grade 11, he relapsed. After several surgeries, he needed to learn to regain his motor skills, starting with crawling and then walking.

Despite his challenges, he never complained about what he had to go through. Even when he was in pain, he quietly suffered through it. He didn't want to add to his family's worries about him.

He hoped he could one day return to school, but he was well aware that the chance was slim. His tumor was hard to cure. One day, his aunt told him a story about how in a past life the Buddha, as King Shibi, sacrificed himself to save a dove from a hawk. After hearing the story, You-an told his family that, in the event of his death, he would like to donate his organs. He subsequently signed the appropriate forms.

His condition took a very bad turn in May 2017, just a few weeks before his high school graduation. His schoolmates wrote cards to cheer him on, and the school prepared his diploma ahead of schedule and delivered it to him in his sickbed.

His struggle with cancer came to an end on May 22. His family, honoring his request, agreed to forgo life-sustaining treatments. His usable organs, including corneas and skin, were donated as he had wished.

It was a bright sunny day when I went to the funeral parlor where You-an's funeral would be held.

A life-size cardboard cutout of You-an stood there, smiling—a smile that I had gotten used to seeing at school.

When it was my turn to speak, I stood beside the cutout, mustered all my might to keep my composure, and read every word on his diploma. I then congratulated him as I would have any other graduate. This funeral had become his graduation—a graduation from school and from life. I wished him a pleasant journey and urged him to hurry back to this world to be my student again.

Then I bowed deeply to him, along with the teachers and students from my school. When he was alive, You-an made his life shine by giving to others. After he had passed on, he gave to others again by putting his body to good use and donating his organs. He truly taught us a precious life lesson. Thank you so much, You-an.

The Illustrated JING SI A PHORISMS



The Buddha says:

Our bodies and minds are formed from the causes from our previous lives. When the causes cease, our bodies vanish. Since everything comes and goes according to temporary causes, nothing will exist forever.

Nothing in life lasts forever. Everything in this world comes into being, exists, decays and vanishes. The human mind also goes through cycles of beginning, existence, change and ending.



If we can clearly see through the natural human cycles of birth, aging, illness and death, then we will no longer quarrel over every little thing. With nothing to argue about, we will automatically concentrate more on our spiritual path. The ups and downs of daily life will no longer affect us.



Master Cheng Yen, after you formally became Venerable Master Yin Shun's disciple, did you learn a lot from him?

When I formally became his disciple, I was immediately accepted to be initiated as a nun. The initiation lasted more than a month. Because Master Yin Shun did not have any facilities for female disciples, I went back to Hualien. We lived far apart and did not have many chances to meet directly. Nevertheless, I studied and benefited from everything he wrote.

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



CHEN PEIXUAN

Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan deliver blessings to new homes built for 14 families rendered homeless by Typhoon Soudelor.

Taiwan

In 2015, Typhoon Soudelor caused serious damage to the aboriginal Heliu village in Fuxing District, Taoyuan, northern Taiwan. Fourteen homes were destroyed by mudslides. Working with the Taoyuan city government and the Council of Indigenous Peoples, Tzu Chi built new homes for these families. The homes were turned over to them at an inauguration ceremony on the morning of August 19.

The houses built by Tzu Chi came in three sizes—555 square feet for households with one or two people, 1,000 square feet for three to five people, and 1,210 square feet for six to ten people. One family with more than ten members moved into two units. A total of 15 houses were built.

Tzu Chi volunteers went to the newly constructed homes the day before the inauguration ceremony to tie a red ribbon to each home to

wish the families good luck. They also left a house-warming gift of 12 items in every home.

Lin Bi-yu (林碧玉), vice president of the Tzu Chi Foundation, remarked at the ceremony that two years after the typhoon, Tzu Chi finally finished building permanent houses for the 14 families. She hoped that they would settle in and build up a nice community together. Another Tzu Chi volunteer read a letter from Master Cheng Yen, which conveyed her best wishes to the new residents.

Taoyuan Mayor Cheng Wen-tsan (鄭文燦) said that when Typhoon Soudelor struck in August 2015, residents of Heliu had already been evacuated by the city, so no one was injured by the storm. After the typhoon, the city government worked with the central government and Tzu Chi to complete permanent houses for those who had lost their homes. The mayor added that he had

met Master Cheng Yen three times to talk about the construction of the houses, and she had always reminded him to look after the lives and livelihoods of these villagers, especially the elderly people. Although Master Cheng Yen was not present at the ceremony, the mayor had confidence that the government had taken her reminders to heart when planning for the new homes. The new homes, for example, are in a convenient location and only one kilometer from the old Heliu village, so the resettled residents could retain their means of livelihood if they wanted. The mayor hoped this collaboration would serve as a model for other reconstruction efforts in the future.

Tzu Chi volunteers started caring for these 14 families when the foundation signed a memorandum of understanding with the Taoyuan city government. Now that they have moved into their new homes, volunteers will continue to care for them.

Malaysia

A heavy downpour on August 11 caused severe flooding in some low-lying areas in the Malaysian state of Melaka. After the rain eased up, Tzu Chi volunteers immediately mobilized to assess damage and deliver hot meals to victims.

The following day, August 12, volunteers reached out again to donate emergency cash directly to victims. Upon seeing the volunteers, Tan Jee Wa (陳玉花) thanked them for twice bringing her family hot food and water the day before. Advanced in years, she suffered from Parkinson's disease, so she could neither help her family clean up their house nor go out to buy boxed meals. As a result, she was very grateful to the volunteers for providing hot meals for them. Now the volunteers were visiting again to deliver emergency cash to her family. She couldn't stop praising the volunteers for their kind-heartedness.

Heavy rains on August 11 caused flash floods in some low-lying areas in Melaka. Tzu Chi volunteers delivered hot meals and emergency cash to victims to help them through their difficult time.

"The food you brought us yesterday was really delicious, thank you," said another victim, Yeo Tin Egh (楊善蘭). When she learned that they were visiting again to deliver a consolation letter from Master Cheng Yen and emergency cash, she continued to thank them. She said that she had to pay rent on her home and relied on welfare, so she had to tighten her belt, especially considering that she could not always find work. The emergency cash would make her life a little easier.

When volunteers were distributing hot meals the day before, they learned that an elderly couple, Tong Teck Lee (張德利) and his wife, Chin Kim Thoo (秦金珠), were stranded in their flooded home. They rushed to the couple's home to render assistance. When they arrived, they saw that the husband had suffered a wound on his foot that would not stop bleeding. Furthermore, the wounded foot had been soaking for a long time in dirty floodwater. A medical volunteer treated his wound and other volunteers helped clean up their house. The couple was very touched by the warmth from the volunteers.

The volunteers visited the couple again on August 12 to give them the Master's letter and emergency cash. With the couple's consent, they sent Tong to a hospital to have his wound treated. They sent Chin, who was restricted in mobility, to a nursing home. Lim Geok Choe (林玉招), CEO of the Tzu Chi Melaka branch, said that after Tong was discharged from the hospital, Tzu Chi would help the couple find a



HUANG YU-HUA

Tzu Chi volunteers held a winter distribution of eating utensils, pans, and blankets for underserved people in Nogales, Chile.

suitable house that would never be flooded.

The volunteers also met two sisters who were over 70 years old. They had begun cleaning up their home the day before, but they had not completed the work. They were taking a break from the cleanup when the volunteers visited them.

They accepted the emergency cash from the volunteers, but after listening to the volunteers introduce the history of Tzu Chi, they told the volunteers that they wanted to donate the cash back to the foundation. The volunteers asked the sisters whether they would keep some of the money to buy daily goods for themselves, but the elder sister insisted that they would like to donate all the money and use the opportunity to help others. With that, they donated all the cash that they had just received from the volunteers.

Dr. Sharifah Omar worked at a hospital, where she regularly encountered Tzu Chi volunteers. Although she too was a flood victim, she felt that she had the means to recover from the flood, so she accepted the consolation letter but declined the emergency cash. She asked the volunteers to give the money to people who needed it more.

Tzu Chi volunteers worked 175 shifts on August 11 and 12 and delivered aid to 355 families.

Chile

"Tzu Chi volunteers have arrived and my wish has come true!" Margarita Osorio, mayor of Nogales, exclaimed emotionally at a Tzu Chi distribution held in her city.

Eighty percent of the population in this city of over 21,000 people are farmers, many of them poor. The mayor herself is a single mother raising three children, so she understands the hardship that her people are going through.

The mayor had previously met Xie Zhenxiang (謝楨祥), head of Tzu Chi Chile, through a

friend. Knowing that Tzu Chi was a charity organization, she asked Xie to help the needy in her city.

Four volunteers from Santiago drove 90 minutes to Nogales on June 20 to assess the needs in the city and meet with the mayor and her staff. Together, they decided to hold a winter distribution of eating utensils, pans, and blankets at the city stadium on July 23.

People started arriving early that morning. They queued up in an orderly line and picked up their claim checks first. While recipients were waiting for the distribution to begin, Xie explained to them how Tzu Chi had started: Thirty housewives, led by Master Cheng Yen, each saved 50 Taiwanese cents (about 1.2 U.S. cents) a day to help the needy. Using that story to illustrate his point, Xie urged them never to underestimate the power of mere pennies. Many coins, when taken together, can be used to help people and make a difference. Volunteers then performed the Tzu Chi song "Our World Is Full of Love." The soft melody moved some people to tears.

The volunteers had prepared enough snacks and toys for 50 children, as well as 50 winter vests for the elderly. A 90-year-old woman who had received a vest said to the volunteers, "Thank you so much. I've never seen a distribution that was so touching." One young woman said cheerfully that she was



COURTESY OF TZU CHI CHILE

grateful to Tzu Chi and everyone else there because every family had received much needed eating utensils and pans.

The distribution benefited 650 people. Xie was happy that the city government had given the foundation this opportunity to do something for the local people. He added that though the distributed goods might one day wear out, the love and care would remain with them forever.

Myanmar

An outbreak of H1N1 influenza began in Myanmar in July. By mid-August, it had claimed 27 lives.

Soon after the epidemic broke out, Tzu Chi volunteers in Myanmar purchased masks and hand sanitizers for teachers and students at 20 schools to help them fend off infections. Volunteers in Malaysia also shipped N95 respirator masks and rapid influenza detection kits to help fight the disease. These supplies were given to hospitals where Tzu Chi members regularly volunteer.

Though the outbreak was being brought under control, experts feared that the rainy season could trigger more cases. Furthermore, there were not enough masks, isolation gowns, or other supplies in Myanmar, so medical workers were being exposed to undue risks of infection.

Fearing for the safety of frontline medical personnel, Myanmar health authorities wrote a letter on August 2 to Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan asking for assistance in expertise and more resources to help them combat the disease. As soon as they received the request, the foundation went to work.

Four Tzu Chi hospitals in Taiwan together contributed 2,000 isolation gowns, over 3,000 influenza detection

In response to an H1N1 influenza outbreak in Myanmar, Dr. Lin Chin-lon, CEO of the Tzu Chi Medical Mission, and three other Tzu Chi doctors from Taiwan visited major hospitals in Yangon to exchange epidemic-fighting experience. The team also donated medical supplies to the nation.

kits, and supplies of Tamiflu antiviral medicine, among other medical items. Tzu Chi headquarters additionally donated 3,689 kilograms of instant rice for medical workers so they could keep up their strength. Tzu Chi Malaysia was put in charge of obtaining 10,000 medical gloves and 40,000 respirator masks, which were then shipped to Myanmar.

On August 10, Dr. Lin Chin-lon (林俊龍), CEO of the Tzu Chi Medical Mission, and three other Tzu Chi doctors flew from Taiwan to Myanmar. They visited major hospitals in Yangon to exchange ideas and experiences about epidemic control. They also donated medical supplies prepared by Tzu Chi to Myanmar government officials.

The United States

The Tzu Chi U.S. headquarters held a mobile food pantry and back-to-school distribution at Alhambra High School in Alhambra, California, on August 5. The event was held in conjunction with the Alhambra Unified School District, the YMCA, and the City of Alhambra. Tzu Chi volunteers, police, students and teachers of the school, members of the YMCA, and employees of local businesses, 346 in all, came together to help 753 underprivileged families.

Tan Jian-fen (譚建芬), the emcee, kicked off the distribution by thanking all the kind-hearted people for their donations of fresh produce, backpacks, shoes, etc. Next, Jane Anderson, pres-



HUANG LU-FAN



Tzu Chi U.S. headquarters sponsored a distribution of fresh vegetables, fruits, school supplies, and \$15 prepaid cards to purchase shoes, for underprivileged students in Alhambra, California.

ident of the Alhambra Unified School District Board of Education, Congresswoman Judy May Chu, and California State Assemblyman Ed Chau presented certificates of appreciation to Tzu Chi for its years of community service.

Every recipient family received 33 to 44 pounds of food, enough to last a family of four a week. Volunteers had lined up many carts to take distributed goods to the cars of the recipients. The volunteers became very sweaty pushing the carts back and forth under the hot sun, but they enjoyed the work very much.

This was the first distribution in which Timothy Vu, the city's police chief, had taken part. He said that this event reminded him of his penniless childhood. His parents had immigrated to the United States, and they had led hard lives, at times relying on aid to survive. Now, seeing the smiles on the faces of the children, he thanked the many young people who had come out to help the underprivileged. He believed that the kindness that had been displayed at the dis-

tribution would stay with these families forever. He felt honored to work with Tzu Chi, and he said he was already looking forward to working at the next distribution.

Diego was the first student to receive his backpack. He could not wait to see what goods had been placed inside. He exclaimed with joy every time he took out an item, and he screamed "Oh my God!" when he saw a multifunctional calculator. He and his brother were being raised by their single mother, Silva. She had brought them there at seven that morning. She said with a smile, "The kids are so excited. It makes me very happy. I want to thank Tzu Chi for its help."

Stephanie was another single mother, raising six children without a home. She was thankful that the city government had informed people like her that good people would come to help them, but she had not expected to receive so much, including food, backpacks, and school supplies. She appreciated the generosity. "We really need the help. Thank you so much." ❀

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Starting with the next issue, the *Tzu Chi Quarterly* will become a bimonthly publication. We will continue to bring you articles that inspire and that spread the ideals of goodness, truth, and beauty. We look forward to your continued support of our magazine.

Sincerely,
The staff of the *Tzu Chi Quarterly*