

# Tzu Chi

Spring 2017

慈濟



Social Studies 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016  
CHIEFDOMS IN SIERRA LEONE  
A Chiefdom is an area ruled by a Chief. Examples of Chiefdoms in Sierra Leone are Barri Chiefdom in Pujehun district and Nongowa Chiefdom in Kenema district. A Chiefdom is made up of towns and villages.  
There are One hundred and forty nine (149) Chiefdoms in Sierra Leone.

Deep in  
Sierra  
Leone



# A Most Helpful Person

Text and photo by Liu King-pong



“The family that accumulates goodness is sure to harvest abundant happiness.” This saying is known to almost every Chinese, and the stories about Deputy Commander Susanna Wu (武淑賢) of the Kaohsiung Airport Brigade, National Immigration Agency, prove just how true the saying is.

Serving in the Southern Office of Taiwan’s Foreign Ministry, I often help foreign celebrities and high-ranking officials pass through customs at the Kaohsiung International Airport. This seemingly easy job can be a big hassle very early in the morning, especially when I had errands to run till very late the previous night. My colleague Pearl Yu (游明珠) kindly reminded me that I could always turn to Deputy Commander Wu, who happens to be a Tzu Chi member, for help at such times.

“She’s one of the most helpful people I’ve ever known,” Pearl noted. She said that Wu had recently helped a female Vietnamese laborer based in Kaohsiung to return to Ho Chi Minh City to visit her mother, who had suddenly fallen ill with a fatal disease and was about to die. The laborer could have left for Vietnam with her Vietnamese passport, but she did not have enough time to apply for a proper re-entry permit that would allow her to come back to Taiwan. It was quite a dilemma until Wu stepped in to help. She immediately contacted the local agencies to obtain the permit for her, and even helped the Vietnamese woman purchase a much cheaper airplane ticket through a local travel agent. She saved the woman at least US\$150, a large sum of money for her. It is worth noting that Wu contacted the travel agent and finally got the ticket issued when she was off duty and on her own time.

“I bade good-bye to her at the airport at six o’clock in the morning. It was such a relief knowing that she would be home with her mother just four hours later!” Wu exclaimed proudly.

“This small example indicates how warm-hearted Wu is,” Pearl remarked. She pointed out that nobody expected Wu to do such a kind

thing, and nobody would have blamed her if she hadn’t done it.

Pearl is correct in her assessment of Wu’s character. Wu has never turned me down when I’ve asked her for help. Out of curiosity, I asked her if her sweet and helpful demeanor was a part of her intrinsic nature.

“Oh, no! It was my father who taught us since we were kids that the value of our lives lay in doing good and helping others,” Wu explained. Her father, Wu Yong-zhong (武永仲), 90, had been a low-ranking officer in the army. He and his wife, Tsai, 80, painstakingly raised their five children on a meager salary. They also taught their children to lead a frugal life by setting good examples for them to follow.

“My parents always ate every grain of rice in their bowls—a wasteful lifestyle was never allowed in our family,” Wu said. When she was a kid, she seldom opened the refrigerator at home when she felt hungry because there wouldn’t be much food in it anyway. She always looked forward to festivals, as some of their rich neighbors might be so kind as to share their extra food and fruit with them. Ironically, she and her siblings were particularly happy when a typhoon struck because it was a chance for them to enjoy tasty rolls and bread that their mom had purchased as a “strategic grain stockpile.” The children all needed to work part-time after school. As a result, they basically had no vacations or holidays at all when they were young.

The family’s financial straits prompted the kids to study hard in order to obtain diplomas, which would allow them to find decent jobs with higher pay after they left school. All of their endeavors have paid off. Wu’s elder brother, Wen-ying (文瑛), earned his doctorate in adult education at Kaohsiung Normal University in 2006. Coincidentally, her father worked in the university parking lots around that time. “You can imagine how proud and happy my father was when telling his colleagues and friends this good news,” she noted.

All these wonderful stories about Wu’s family are food for thought for us. More importantly, they remind us how important it is to do good whenever possible. ☸

**Deputy Commander Susanna Wu abides by her father’s instruction to do good whenever possible.**



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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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Deep  
in

# SIERRA LEONE



## EBOLA ORPHANS

The Ebola epidemic left behind many orphans in Sierra Leone. The relatives of many of these orphans have refused to care for them for fear of contracting the disease from them. Thanks to some kind-hearted people, these children, sitting in front of their school, have been provided for and are receiving an education—for now. Nobody knows what the future holds for them.



# Glimpses of Sierra Leone

Text and photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

*The West African Ebola virus epidemic broke out at the end of 2013. Before it was contained in 2016, more than 28,000 people had been infected, half of them in Sierra Leone, which had barely recovered from a civil war. The country needed help. Tzu Chi has been providing aid since 2015.*

I arrived in Freetown, Republic of Sierra Leone, West Africa, in late September 2016, 33 hours after I left Taiwan. What took me there? How did Freetown get its name? For that matter, how did Sierra Leone get its name?

Let me start my story from the year 1462, when Portuguese explorers first arrived by sea. While mapping the range of hills that surround what is now Freetown Harbor, they named the oddly shaped formation “Serra da Leoa,” Portuguese for “lioness mountains.” That name eventually evolved, via Spanish, into Sierra Leone.

By 1495, Portuguese traders had built a fortified trading post at the harbor. The Dutch and French also set up trade there later. Then came the English. They traded in the abundant natural resources of the region, such as minerals and timber. The trade later expanded into slaves, which were needed for labor on the New World plantations in the Americas. Sierra Leone became an important center in this business.

Following the American War of Independence (1775-1783), some freed slaves were returned to Sierra Leone. They were settled in an area that was given the name of Freetown, denoting their status as a free people no longer under the yoke of slavery.

## Post-independence

Sierra Leone became an independent nation in 1961, freed from being a British colony. The country covers an area of 27,699 square miles and has a population of about seven million, according to 2015 census data. Freetown, the capital, is the largest city and an economic and cultural center.

Diamonds, aluminum and titanium ores, cocoa, and coffee are among the nation’s main exports. Natural resources, especially diamonds, are rich enough to sustain a good economy, which the nation enjoyed for a period of time after the country was founded.

However, those good times were soon followed by periods of power struggles and unrest: the final years of democracy (1964–1967), military coups (1967–1968), a one-party state (1968–1991), the Sierra Leone civil war (1991–2002), and the reinstatement of democracy (2002–2014).

About 50,000 people lost their lives and over two million were displaced during the war. The destructive 11-year armed conflict was characterized by extreme brutality and widespread human rights abuses. Thousands of people suffered the atrocities of limb amputation. Many victims were not even actual participants in the conflict. They were targeted merely because of

their tribal affiliations or religion, or because they were suspected of aiding the other side. Many amputation victims were plainly innocent civilians.

The civil war set the already weakened nation back a great deal. But then, just as it was beginning the long journey back from violence and chaos, the country was broadsided by an Ebola outbreak.

## Ebola

The vicious Ebola virus disease sank the poor nation to new lows, but its media exposure skyrocketed throughout the world.

Fruit bats are believed to be the normal carrier of Ebola, able to spread the virus without being affected by it. It so happens that people in Africa hunt these bats for food.

A child in a Guinea village who is believed to have started the Ebola outbreak in December 2013 may have contracted the deadly virus through contact with a fruit bat. The disease quickly spread into Sierra Leone, which neighbors Guinea. The outbreak overburdened the weak healthcare system in Sierra Leone, resulting in more deaths from medical neglect than the virus itself.

To put things in perspective, prior to the Ebola epidemic there were only 136 doctors, 1,017 nurses and midwives, and 114 pharmacists in Sierra Leone. The civil war had driven many of the country’s healthcare professionals away. Those figures were stark indicators of how few healthcare resources the nation had. When the Ebola epidemic hit, the health system simply was unable to cope, so the World Health Organization and humanitarian

medical groups from many countries rushed in to combat the transmission of the virus.

After much pain, suffering, and brave effort, the situation was brought under control two years later. The WHO declared Sierra Leone free of Ebola in March 2016. Since the first confirmed case in May 2014, more than 14,000 people had been infected and nearly 4,000 had died.

Having sustained such a crushing blow, the nation badly needed help.

## Help

The Tzu Chi Foundation has monitored the situation in Sierra Leone since shortly after the epidemic erupted.

In 2015, the foundation signed a memorandum of understanding with Caritas Freetown and the Healey International Relief Foundation (HIRF) to deliver aid to the nation. Caritas Freetown and HIRF are two organizations that provide much needed medical and material help throughout Sierra Leone. The memorandum of understanding was primarily a result of the efforts of Stephen T. Fomba, a Sierra Leonean who migrated to the United States after the brutal civil war.





The first batch of Tzu Chi aid arrived in Sierra Leone in March 2015. Fomba was on the scene on behalf of the foundation to work with Caritas Freetown and HIRF personnel. They distributed such items as portable beds, blankets, and instant rice to government hospitals and clinics, nonprofit clinics, Ebola orphans, and amputees and their families.

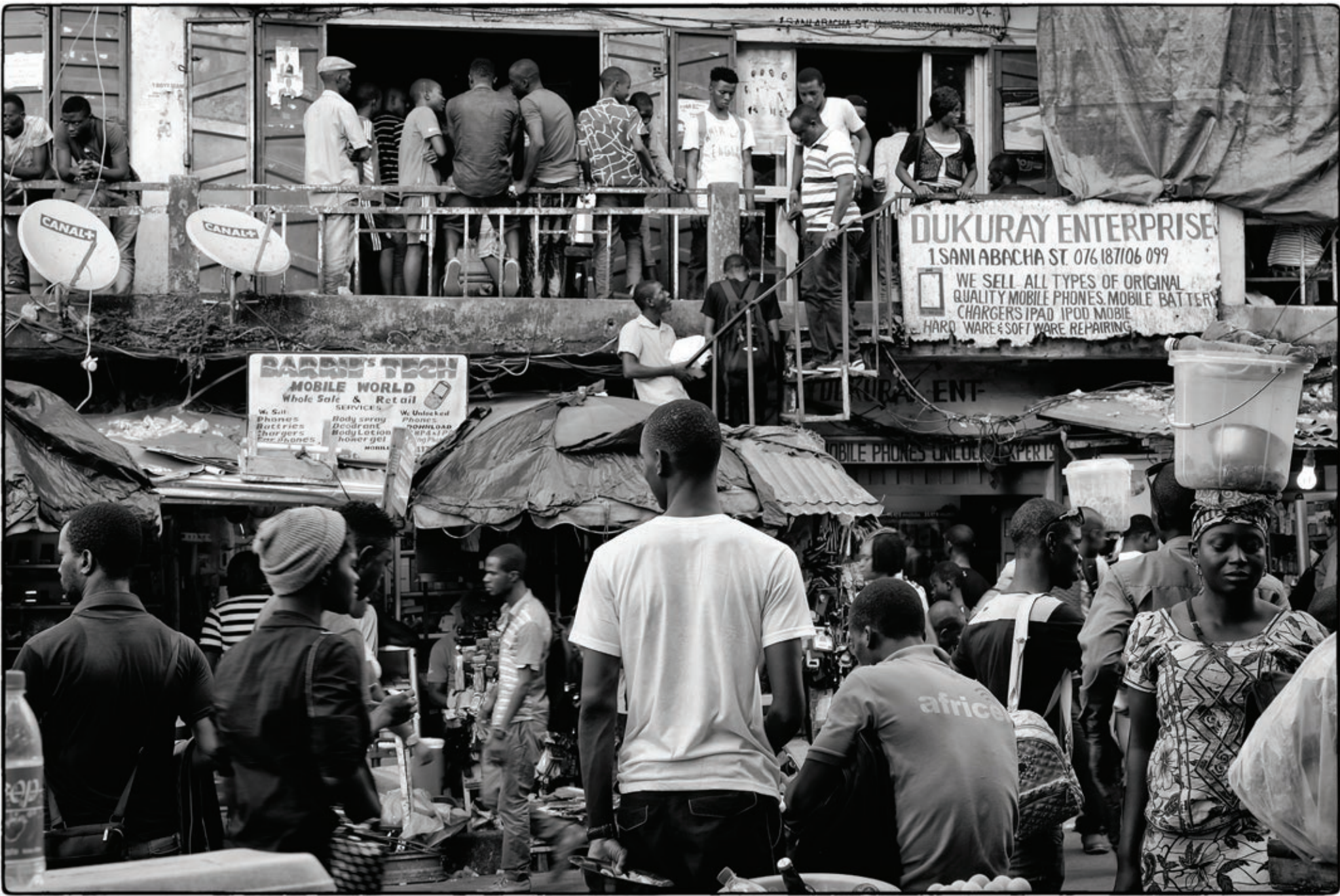
Tzu Chi initiated more distributions afterwards, including medical supplies such as latex gloves, surgical masks, and stethoscopes. Then, in late September 2016, a delegation of seven Tzu Chi people from Taiwan and the United States traveled to the nation and worked with partners to distribute rice. I was on that delegation to cover the event for the *Tzu Chi Monthly* magazine.

Taiwan's Council of Agriculture had provided 200 metric tons of rice for Tzu Chi to distribute to the needy in Sierra Leone. Caritas Freetown, HIRF, and the Lanyi Foundation joined forces to compile rosters of recipients and work out the logistics of moving and storing the rice. On September 27, 2016, Tzu Chi and its partners kicked off the distribution of 60 tons of rice, the third set of Taiwanese rice distributions.

The first stop was in Newton, home to 20 amputee families of 150 people. Despite the brutal treatment the amputees had received during the civil war, the government had not given them any help. One hundred and thirty-nine ten-kilogram (22-pound) bags of rice were distributed here.

Then our caravan proceeded eastward to Bo, the second largest city in the nation. We visited the Commit and Act Foundation, one of the organizations that Tzu Chi had helped. This foundation primarily provides assistance to battered women and children.

Our caravan spent the night at Bo and set out the next morning for Koindu, the origin of the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, on the easternmost tip of the nation.



### CITY CENTER, FREETOWN

A bustling downtown scene in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone



Soon after we set out, the rice truck had a flat tire. Our party re-distributed its load of 180 bags of rice among the other three vehicles and moved on. Along the way, we had to plow through a 17-kilometer (10-mile) stretch of muddy mountain roads before reaching Koindu at three o'clock in the afternoon.

The rice was unloaded and piled up neatly on blue plastic sheets. Before it was handed over to recipients, the village head reminded the assembly that Tzu Chi was the first organization to come to Koindu and distribute rice since the Ebola outbreak had been brought under control.

### Why help?

Koindu was home to 54 families who had survived Ebola and more than 40 Ebola orphans. One hundred and seventy-one bags of rice were handed out there.

People may be curious as to why the Tzu Chi volunteers traveled all the way to Sierra Leone just to distribute some rice that might feed recipients for just a short period of time. Before answering that question, let me offer a background story.

At the height of the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, many medical care professionals in the nation and from many other countries were on the ground fighting the epidemic, one of the worst in the history of mankind. When the situation was finally brought under control two years later, 3,956 people had died, including some excellent medical care professionals.

With their skills, these professionals, domestic or foreign, could have looked the other way, stayed well out of harm's way, and lived out their lives in comfort and safety. But instead of running from the risk of fatal infection, they waded into the midst of the danger. They had direct contact with Ebola patients, and they died as a result on the front lines of patient care.

Why did they do it? Were their efforts worth it? I cannot answer those questions for them. But reading about their valiant deeds from a distance, I have realized one thing: Those medical professionals had willingly and bravely chosen their battles. Even though they ended up losing



### A CIVIL WAR VICTIM

Missing an arm, this woman in Newton is one of the numerous collateral victims of the civil war.



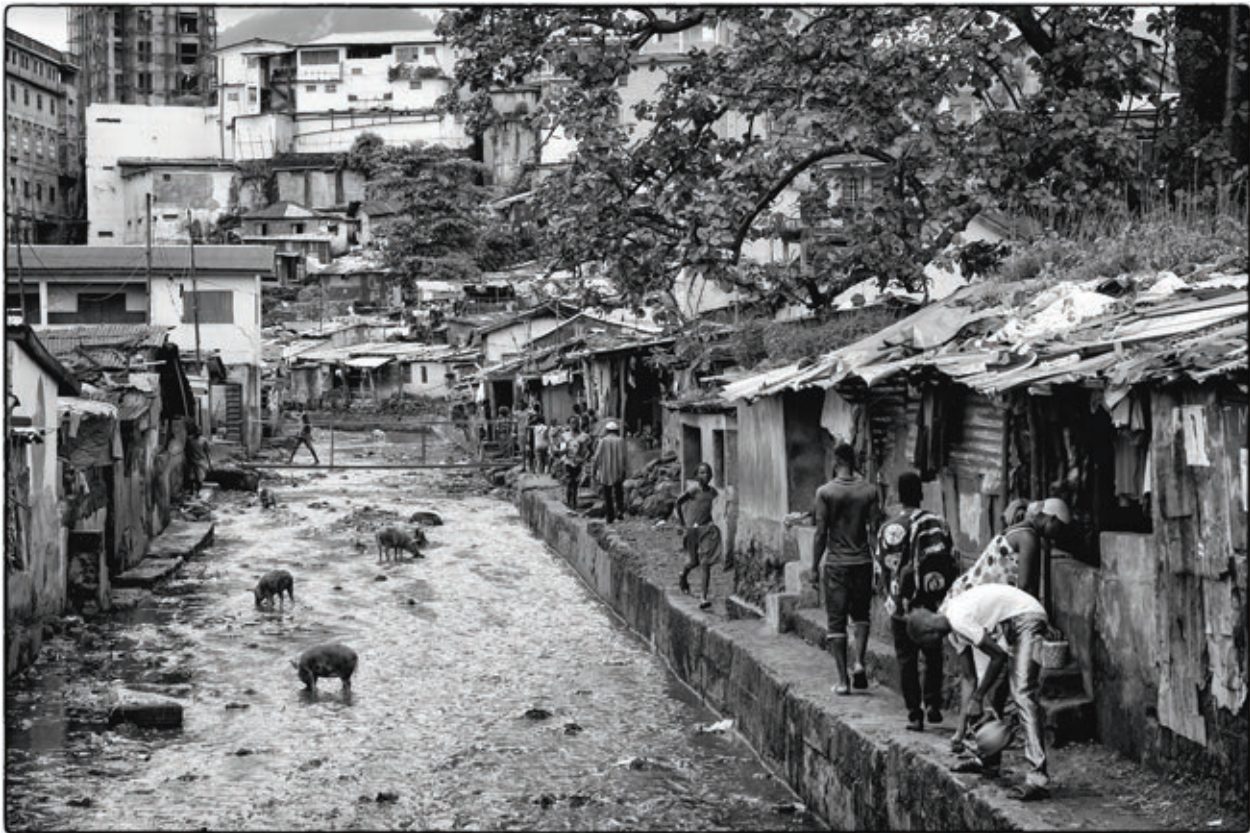
An open-air hair salon and peddlers—people’s daily needs can all be met in the slum.



A small business stall in the slum



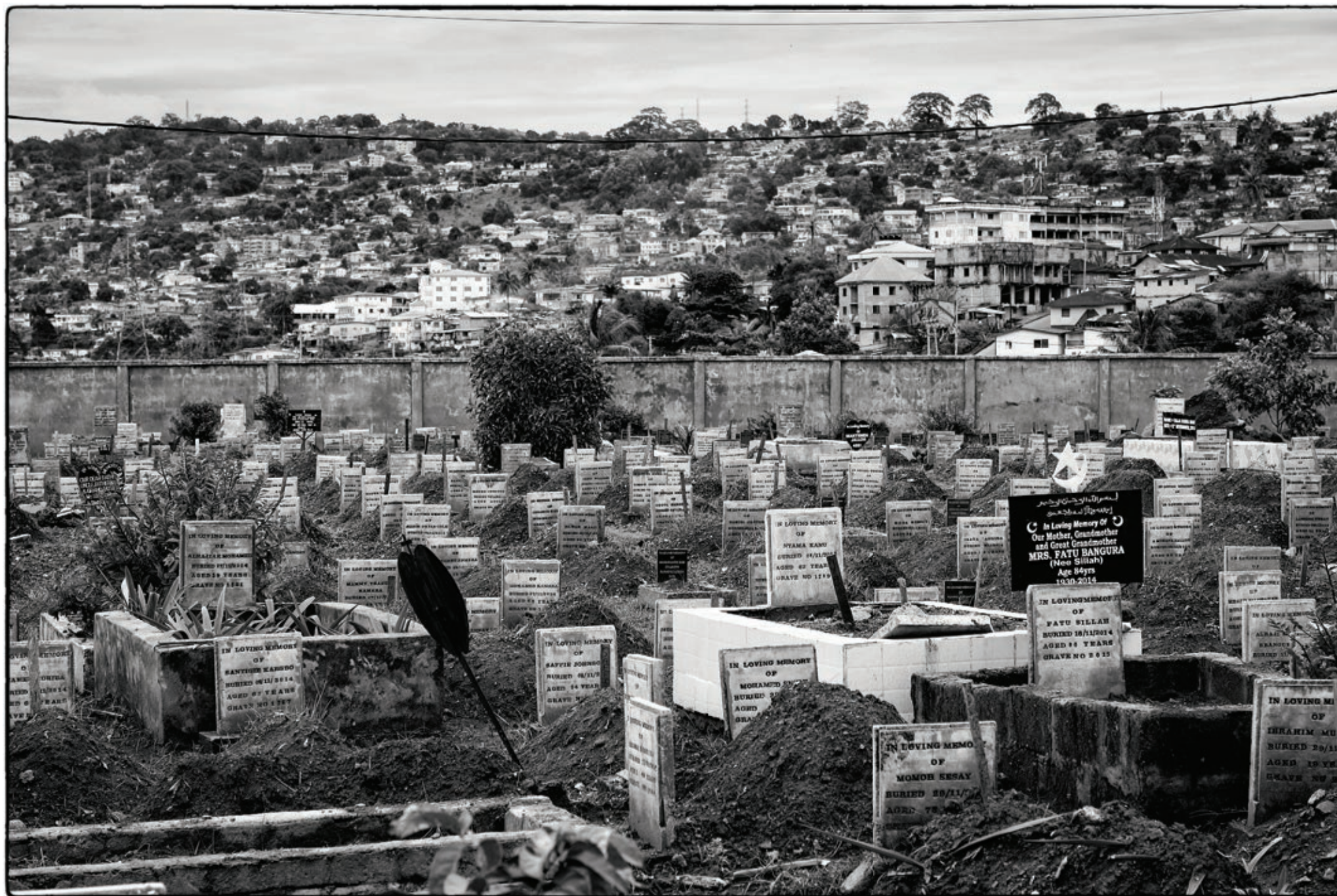
Pigs seek food in an open ditch. All beings, human and animal, have their place in the slum.



An empty can is as good as a drum.

**KROO BAY SLUM**  
Sixty thousand residents are packed in this Freetown shantytown, the size of three soccer fields. There is no running water here except for a few public faucets. There is likewise no public, legal power supply. Getting electricity into a house is entirely up to the owner’s savvy. The area, located by the sea, is humid and poorly ventilated. Overcrowded, with poor sanitary conditions, it could easily fall victim to another epidemic like the last Ebola outbreak.





## KING TOM CEMETERY

More than a thousand Ebola victims here bear witness to the horrific epidemic that took their lives.

their lives, they had done what they felt they needed to do. The profound effects of such valor and love cannot be fully appreciated by someone who was not on the ground in the nation and witnessed the Ebola devastation, or who didn't pay much attention to news reports on the ravages of the disease.

I believe that a spirit of humanitarianism was among the main factors that had propelled them to act the way they did. It is easy to notice the outpouring of help from all corners in the aftermath of a disaster. It is human nature to want to reach out to help in unfortunate times, and this is why many international humanitarian organizations and non-government organizations have consistently rushed to help disaster victims. Tzu Chi has been but one of those groups.

It has been a Tzu Chi practice to help people in a selected disaster area over an extended period of time. Therefore, I expect that its aid to Sierra Leone will also be a long-term engagement. As long as circumstances allow, the footprints of Tzu Chi will be found again and again in this West African country.

That's why our delegation, during our week-long stay, visited many local charities to gather information, share experiences, and network with their people. That's one of the ways we can learn to improve our work in this nation in the future.

After the distributions in Sierra Leone, members of our delegation, each with a stack of information that we had gathered, returned to our own countries. Delegation members reported to Tzu Chi management about what had happened during the trip, and they perused the information that they had brought back to prepare for and nail down the best time for the next course of action.

But before any further action could be planned, Hurricane Matthew ravaged Haiti. Volunteers who had just returned to the United States from Sierra Leone revved up again to take up the Haiti project. But that is another story for another time.



# Resilience After War and Ebola

By Stephen T. Fomba

*When the Ebola epidemic that had dragged on for two years finally came to an end, people returned to their lives of poverty and want. In an environment that lacks food, medical care, and education, dealing with the aftermath of the disaster will need long-term attention from all corners of society.*



Ebola killed these children's parents. These orphans, who survived the disease, have been adopted and are receiving an education in Koindu. Still, their Ebola experiences—being treated for the infection and losing their parents—could very well have greatly impacted them both physically and emotionally.



**M**y country, Sierra Leone, is said to be rich in mineral resources, but the reality on the ground tells a different story for its people. From the decade-long civil war to the deadly Ebola virus that ravaged the West African region, this country has suffered greatly. The senseless war left thousands dead, millions internally displaced, and thousands of amputees. Even now, 14 years after the war ended, people still remember it through the scars of the war-wounded and amputees. During the war, rebels would ask their victims if they preferred “long sleeve” or “short sleeve” before amputating them with a cutlass or axe. Short sleeve meant amputation above the elbow, and long sleeve meant cutting off their hand at the wrist. Many of those victims also lost their legs. When you couple the war and the Ebola epidemic with high illiteracy and poverty, you can easily see that Sierra Leone is a country in need of many different forms of help.



A worried woman cares for a sick child in a Catholic hospital in Pendembu. There is no question that Sierra Leone badly needs to make education and medical care available to its citizens, but without money, the question is how.



In this rudimentary classroom in Newton, about 24 miles east of Freetown, some students have no school supplies and cannot learn to write, so they learn by reciting and memorizing.



When the unprecedented Ebola virus made its way to West Africa—mainly to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone—the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation offered compassion and relief to the people of Sierra Leone. Not only did Master Cheng Yen offer prayers for the victims of the epidemic, she mobilized the foundation to send help in the form of food, medical supplies, beds, blankets, etc. I was privileged to be in a position to volunteer for Tzu Chi and bring aid to my country. Debra Boudreaux, Executive Vice President of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation USA, had contacted me to explain Tzu Chi’s philosophy and encourage me to volunteer. I hesitated at first because I was very busy with school, family, and work. But after looking into this opportunity to transform lives in my country, I became excited about volunteering and helping.

The formation of the partnership to help the people of Sierra Leone began with then United Nations Under-Secretary General, Dr. Kandeh Yumkella. It was rather fortunate that I knew Dr. Yumkella at the time. I contacted him for advice on how Tzu Chi could go to Sierra Leone. He recommended that we work with the Healey International Relief Foundation (HIRF) and Caritas Freetown. After virtual introductions, teleconferences, and a visit to HIRF in New Jersey, the partners met in Taiwan to officially sign a memorandum of understanding. HIRF was represented by its president Bob Healey, Jr. and executive



A volunteer bows respectfully as she gives an amputee a bag of rice.



Residents in Newton receive rice from Taiwan. More than 150 amputation victims of the civil war live in Newton, and the town has also taken in Ebola orphans. But there is a deficiency of government support.





Tzu Chi vehicles had to navigate stretches of muddy road like this. Here a couple of other vehicles got stuck in the mud, blocking the road that Tzu Chi volunteers were trying to get through.

director Benjamin Parra. The Tzu Chi Foundation was represented by Global Affairs Director Stephen Huang and Debra Boudreaux. Mrs. Philomena Yumkella represented her husband and witnessed the signing of the MOU.

In March 2015 Tzu Chi arrived in Sierra Leone for the first time with needed relief. The situation on the ground was dire as Ebola was still ravaging people. The Tzu Chi multi-functional beds were enthusiastically received by health facilities, especially because they were easy to sanitize, which prevented cross-infection. The beds and blankets served children in orphanages, especially Ebola orphans. The food supplies were an important relief to Ebola survivors, orphans, war-wounded, and amputees. The instant rice was admired for its easy preparation and delicious flavor. Despite the support that many nonprofit organizations like Tzu Chi have provided the people of Sierra Leone, the needs of those affected by Ebola are still many.

The government of Sierra Leone created the President's Recovery Priorities, an initiative to help meet the various needs of those directly and indirectly affected by the deadly disease. The main objectives are to provide care in the areas of livelihood and health. To accomplish these objectives, the government advocates involvement by nonprofits and the private sector for the needs of those affected, as well as provides support directly from various government agencies. Free medical services are provided for all Ebola survivors. To track all support to them, a Presidential Delivery Team works with nonprofits and others who give donations of any kind to survivors.

Despite these initiatives, many survivors report that the help they get from the government does not measure up to what nonprofits like Tzu Chi give them. The free medical care is also reported to be ineffective for two main reasons: (1) the lack of accessibility for thousands of survivors who live in remote areas, and (2) the inadequacy of the healthcare sector. Sierra Leone still records one of the highest infant mortality rates and the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.



In the last two years my Tzu Chi volunteer work on the front lines with our local partners, the HIRF and Caritas Freetown, with implementation assistance from the Lanyi Foundation, provided substantial support to those directly and indirectly affected by Ebola even before the President's Delivery Priorities were set up. Tzu Chi and its partners have provided support to 29 health facilities across Sierra Leone, hundreds of Ebola orphans, war-wounded and amputees, and all survivors of Ebola in the form of food supplies, beds, blankets, stethoscopes, latex gloves, protein powder, clothes, school uniforms, and shoes. Our recent rice distribution to all Ebola survivors in Sierra Leone has received praise from various stakeholders including the Honorable Minister of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs, Dr. Sylvia Blyden, and the Presidential Delivery Team. According to the government of Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Association of Ebola Survivors—an organization set up by survivors of the disease to fight against social stigmatization and advocate the needs of all survivors—our partnership is the first to provide support to all survivors in the country. This task is very strenuous due to poor road conditions and the remoteness of many areas, yet we have been able to make it happen.

Since our arrival in 2015, lives have been transformed. From orphans who struggled with hunger, health facilities that lacked basic supplies, students and adults who had to walk barefoot, flood survivors, poor people in slums, war-wounded and amputees who were still neglected and in poverty, to survivors of Ebola who had lost almost everything, Tzu Chi and its partners have successfully improved their lives by providing them with the most needed relief. Those who have benefited from our support rejoiced and thanked Tzu Chi for the help they had received, reporting that what we gave them not only came in time but also changed their lives for the better. Today we see poor students, orphans, and adults in our shoes, uniforms, and clothes. We also see how much difference our rice has made in the lives of Ebola survivors during the rainy season, also known as hunger season. Health facilities are still benefiting



A group photo taken before a distribution at Koindu, where the Ebola virus first reached Sierra Leone.



from all the medical supplies, beds and blankets that we donated. War-wounded and amputees have been benefiting from our partnership since 2015, and they report that our relief supplies have helped make life easier.

An example of a life that was touched by our relief support is that of great-grandmother Kadiatu Tarawallie, the only person in her family who survived the deadly Ebola virus after they were infected in 2014. The 76-year-old reported that she lost all of her relatives, including her children and grandchildren. She is not sure which relative was the initial carrier who infected the family. But when asked about bodily contacts being the source of the infection, she said, "How can one see her child sick and crying and not respond? How can a grandmother see her grandchild in pain and not offer comfort? How is it possible to lose a loved one in front of your eyes and not touch the body in mourning?" She covered her face with a cloth to wipe away the uncontrollable tears that sprang from her eyes. She added that she wished she had died instead of her children as she is old and no longer useful, while her children and grandchildren were just beginning their lives. She said that she lives by herself and depends on neighbors for food and water, among other basic needs. She happily thanked Tzu Chi and its partners for the rice she had received, saying that the donation was more important to her than we could imagine. She ended by saying that she would make the rice last her as long as possible because hunger was something she battled frequently.

Even though the people in Sierra Leone have demonstrated their resilience against war, Ebola, and extreme poverty, they still have many unmet needs. From our experience, the direst needs that we have identified are education, healthcare, and employment. Sierra Leoneans need opportunities to earn a living in order to become self-sufficient and climb out of poverty. Healthcare in our country is so poor that when one falls severely ill, there is no hope for recovery—one can only expect an early death. Children under five still die at a very high rate, a crisis that seems to be getting worse despite the government's initiative



Tzu Chi volunteer Debra Boudreaux, from the United States, entertains Ebola orphans in Koindu.





A recipient cheerfully carries a precious load.

for free medical care for children under five. This scheme must struggle to keep children healthy and alive because government hospitals and clinics almost never have the needed medications, and staff members are not qualified to provide good healthcare. Sierra Leone is still a place where being pregnant is like committing suicide—the country records the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.

Additionally, health facilities still struggle to get the most basic medical supplies like gloves, medications, and blood pressure gauges, let alone modern medical equipment. Medical personnel also lack the needed knowledge to accurately diagnose diseases and provide care with compassion and professionalism. Education is perhaps the most important unmet need in Sierra Leone. The country records illiteracy as high as 68 percent. During our distributions, we see first-hand how serious a problem illiteracy is in my country. A large majority of people who benefit from our support are unable to sign their names, and about the same number do not even know their ages or other basic information about themselves. Illiteracy is high because of the poor educational system, the government's underinvest-

ment, lack of access due to location, and affordability. The poorer the community and people, the less their chances for formal education. Many school structures in poor communities are makeshift. Sierra Leone could benefit from suitable classrooms with dedicated teachers. School materials such as stationery supplies, textbooks, and literature books would be of great benefit to students and adult learners.

From the initial contact to our first trip to Sierra Leone to the just concluded Tzu Chi and HIRF delegation visit there (led by Debra Boudreaux), I have felt reassured each day that our partnership of Tzu Chi, HIRF, and Caritas Freetown has without any doubt brought hope to people here. During the visit of our joint delegation from the USA and Taiwan, we had the opportunity to inspect what we have been doing, how we have been affecting lives, and how our partnership has been holding up. After a week with an intensive schedule that included a trip to Koindu, where Ebola started in Sierra Leone, we agreed that the partnership is effective and efficient. We pledged to continue working together to transform more lives in a country that needs so much.



Volunteers visited the Catholic Mile-91 Clinic in Guadalupe. Sister Patricia Dominic (front row, center), a family medicine physician from Spain, is in charge of the clinic.



# GARBAGE MEANS BUSINESS

## Recycling in Sweden

*Environmental preservation seems to be etched into the collective DNA of Swedes. Over 90 percent of their household garbage is recycled, easily establishing them as world leaders for recycling. They are marching ever closer to the Holy Grail of sustainable energy: zero reliance on fossil fuels.*



Conservation starts at a very young age in Sweden.

CECILIA LARSSON LANTZ/IMAGEBANK.SWEDEN.SE



By Lai Ying-qi  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang  
Photos by Alberto Buzzola  
Used with permission of *Rhythms Monthly* magazine

I traveled from Taiwan to Stockholm, Sweden, to do research on environmental protection. One day out walking, I saw many office workers and students on bikes. As buses passed me, I felt quite at ease inhaling deeply—something that I am not inclined to do in my own city—because these buses did not produce smelly, choking exhaust.

Consisting of 14 islands connected by a network of bridges, Stockholm is often called the “Venice of the North.” Aside from its beautiful scenery, the city is a paragon of environmental preservation. It was the first city to receive the European Green Capital award from the EU Commission in 2010.

As far as environmental preservation is concerned, Stockholm, and indeed Sweden as a whole, is a poster child in this world of climate change, rising oceans, and receding glaciers. It seems that Swedes do not do anything without first taking into account the impact of their actions on the environment.

The public transportation system in Stockholm, for example, strives to use fuels produced through biological instead of geological processes. Fuels produced by geological processes, such as petroleum and coal, are produced over millions of years, and they are neither easily nor quickly renewable. In contrast, fuels produced through biological processes, such as methane and other biofuels, can be produced quickly and are easily renewable. Thus most public buses in Stockholm run not on gasoline or diesel, but on methane gas obtained from garbage and kitchen waste. Buses that are not methane-powered run on other biofuels.

For people who choose to drive their own vehicles, the government provides incentives for them to purchase automobiles that are more environmentally friendly. The city also promotes a common transportation resource that uses no fuel at all: the bicycle. Bike routes are extensive and far-reaching in Stockholm, making it easy for people to get to their destinations and get exercise at the same time.

For more examples of how Swedish citizens are committed to the preservation of the environment, one need look no farther than how they process their garbage and waste. In Sweden, a deposit for each can and bottle is included in the purchase price of the item. People can return empty cans and bottles to stores and receive a deposit refund. On average, each Swede returns 146 bottles or cans a year. Eighty-eight percent of used bottles and cans are recycled.

In conjunction with the deposit refunds and other policies that provide incentives for people to recycle, the nation has also built disincentives into its system so that people think twice before throwing things away as garbage. The Swedes pay for their household garbage collection by weight, so they have a strong incentive to recycle as much as possible to cut down on their garbage fees. Over time, handling their garbage with utmost care has become second nature to the Swedes, adults and children alike.

Though these policies are working well, the Swedes are not resting on their laurels. They continually look for better ways to strike a reasonable, sustainable balance between the environment and development.

#### **A sensible balance**

Tall, densely packed residential buildings, neat streets, green parks, and well-kept landscaping provide positive first impressions to visitors when they come to Järva, a suburb outside Stockholm. The community was built between 1965 and 1975 to ease a housing shortage at the time. It was constructed with materials and technology of that era, which understandably do not pass muster today in terms of energy efficiency or environmental friendliness.

The city government has vowed to make Stockholm entirely free of fossil fuels by 2050, including energy-inefficient neighborhoods like Järva. As a step towards that lofty objective, the city embarked on the “Sustainable Järva” project, a joint program involving the city government, housing companies, and community residents. One of its initiatives is the refurbishing of old housing. In addition to improving environmental sustainability, the effort also aims at creating positive social and economic development

**There are solar panels on the roofs of almost all the buildings in Järva.**





in the area. About 80 percent of Järva residents are of immigrant backgrounds, and unemployment is high.

By retrofitting old housing in the neighborhood, the project has successfully cut down energy use by 50 percent. The refurbished buildings not only are more energy-efficient but also generate energy by means of solar panels.

“We have solar panels on the rooftop of almost every building to produce electricity and thermal energy,” Anne Arnström, communications manager for Svenska Bostäder, a Stockholm real estate company that is doing the refurbishing of Järva properties, said to me and my photographer, Alberto Buzzola, as we went up to the roof of a building. She then pointed to a chimney-like flue and said it was actually a vent of the air filtration system for the building. The system is capable of capturing and storing the heat in the air.

When we went back down into the building, we saw further evidence of the Sustainable Järva project on display, which included the use of energy-saving LED light bulbs, water-saving faucets, and energy-efficient refrigerators. The windows in all apartments are double-paned for better insulation. All of these have helped reduce energy use, and thus have reduced the carbon footprint of the building.

Besides doing the environment a good turn,

the Sustainable Järva project has also created jobs. “The project has created many work opportunities, including those for gardeners, security guards, and janitors,” said Helen Larsson, who works in public relations and communications for the project. All housing units are for lease only. Larsson told us the rent here starts at 3,000 kronor (US\$335) a month.

To attract tenants, community management has further spruced up the surroundings. Ample outdoor space with nice landscaping has been retained. The community has also been made more livable by adding outdoor basketball courts, an indoor swimming pool, a supermarket, and a school.

When we went indoors again, Arnström showed us another nice feature of the living quarters: “This contraption on the wall here is actually a waste inlet. Just open the lid and drop your garbage in.”

The feature was so simple. A resident can just drop garbage in and forget about it. But where does it go? What happens to it?

What Arnström showed us was merely a door to a chute that is connected to a complex piping system underground. Waste eventually ends up in a collection facility operated by Envac, the supplier of the system.

A few days after our visit to Järva, we went to Envac.



Insulation in the attic of a building (upper left), water-saving faucets and LED light bulbs in the bathroom (bottom left), and double-pane windows (above) can help make a house more energy efficient.



Even air is recycled. An air filter, left, extracts thermal energy from exhaust. The recovered energy is then used to heat inflowing air, right.



### Garbage is a resource

In 2011, the Swedish government started a new four-year plan, investing 100 million kronor (US\$11.3 million) each year to promote research and innovation in environmental technology. Sweden strives to offer a friendly environment for green technology companies. The country also promotes the export of Swedish environmental technology to contribute to economic growth.

It is not just the public sector that is involved. Mistra, for example, is a private foundation which, according to its own website, supports research of strategic importance for a good living environment and sustainable development. Each year, Mistra invests about 22.4 million U.S. dollars in sustainability technology companies or research organizations.

Statistics show that Sweden’s environmental technology sector employs about 40,000 people and rakes in 120 billion kronor (US\$13.4 billion) in annual revenues. Envac, the company we

were visiting, is a part of that environmental technology sector.

Many modern conveniences come into or out of modern houses through conduits underground or behind the walls, such as electricity, gas, water, and sewage. Envac has taken garbage collection underground too.

Let us rewind to the apartment building in Järva where Arnström showed us the Envac waste inlets. Once garbage is dropped in, it goes into an underground vacuum piping system which suctions waste and transfers it to a central collection station that operates completely without any human intervention. The automated, sealed, and underground nature of the system means that it is very clean. There are no smells associated with conventional garbage collection methods and no unpleasant bins.

“Residents simply put their kitchen waste, paper, bottles and cans, and non-recyclables into our inlets,” said Jonas Törnblom, director of marketing and communication at Envac Group.



AUTOMATIC VACUUM PIPING RECYCLING SYSTEM

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ENVAC

Users throw their waste bags into waste inlets located either indoors or outdoors. The waste is stored in closed underground tanks which are emptied regularly, depending on the amount of waste discarded. Then the waste is transported through a vacuum piping system to central collection stations.

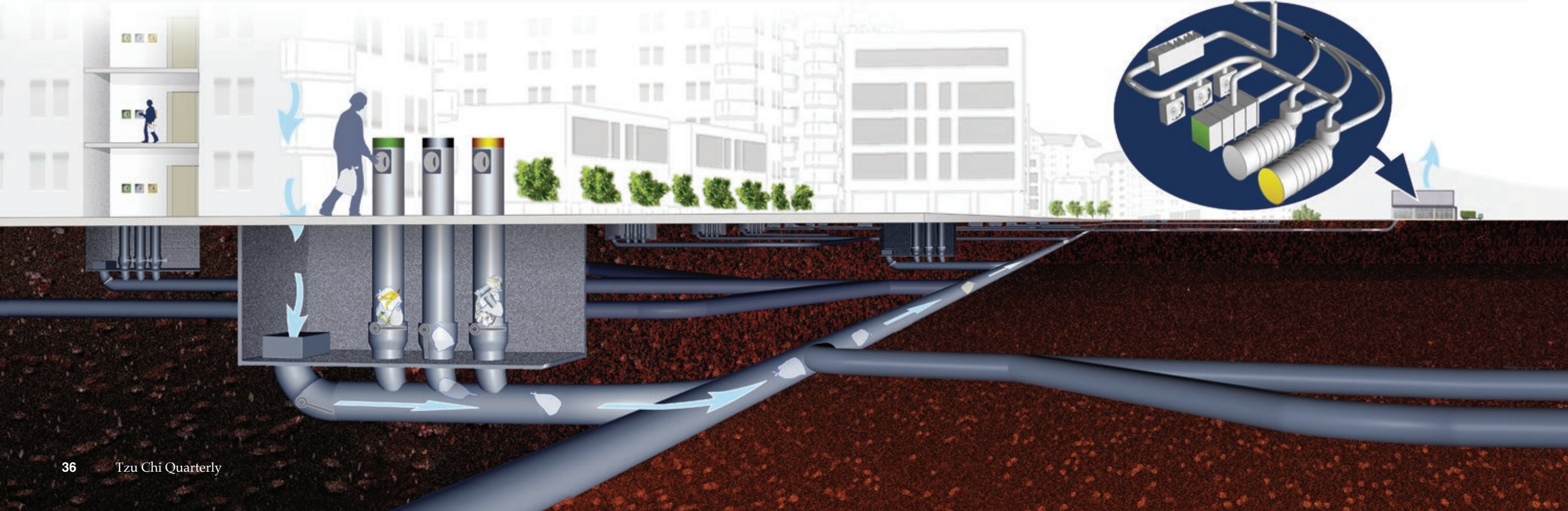


An indoor waste inlet accepts color-coded bags containing sorted garbage.



Outdoor waste inlets specially designed by Envac for the convenience of residents.

Inside an Envac central collection station, right, all operations are automated. Household users sort their garbage into Envac-provided color-coded waste bags, below, which are separated by color automatically, below right, for further processing.





"We're standing right next to one, but we don't get any foul smell at all."

This Envac system has been installed in many places beyond the country's borders. The Beijing World Center, Ng Teng Fong General Hospital in Singapore, some residential areas in Quebec, Canada, and Taipei 101, a Taiwan landmark and once the tallest building in the world, have all imported the Envac system.

Even competitors seek to work with Envac. In October 2016, BIR, the second largest waste management firm in Norway, licensed the technology from Envac for about US\$23 million. BIR will install the Envac system in Bergen, the second largest city in Norway, where the system is expected to handle at least 30 tonnes (66,140 pounds) of garbage a day.

### Importing garbage

It seems that Sweden has a large capacity to handle garbage. Amazingly, the nation even imports garbage. What happens to it all? Where does it go?

The belief that garbage is the least costly fuel lies at the core of WTE (waste to energy), the process of generating energy from waste. There are currently 32 WTE incinerators in Sweden which generate enough energy to provide approximately 950,000 homes with heating and 260,000 with electricity.

That is respectable, but they cannot keep the incinerators running without some help.

Because recycling has been so firmly established as a habit there, the Swedes produce very little unrecyclable garbage. The incinerators can-

not obtain enough raw materials within Sweden, and so garbage must be imported from other countries. The nation imported 1.5 million tonnes (1.65 million short tons or 3.3 billion pounds) of garbage in 2015 alone. It seems incredible that a well-developed economy should import unrecyclable garbage.

Technically, Sweden does not import the stuff because it does not shell out money for the garbage. On the contrary, other countries—the exporters—pay Sweden for taking in their garbage. It is kind of a sweet deal for Sweden: Other countries pay the nation to take their excess waste, and Sweden burns it for heat and electricity. It is such a good business for Sweden that they are projected to import 2.3 million tonnes of waste a year by 2020.

With profit comes entrepreneurship. The Fortum Brista CHP plant in northern Stockholm is one example that is grabbing a piece of the action from the waste-to-energy industry.

Mats Claesson, the Brista plant manager, said that they burned 350,000 tonnes of wood chips a year to produce electricity and heat, but even though they achieved a 90 percent combustion efficiency, it wasn't enough to support the operation of the plant. In 2013 they inaugurated a new waste-fired unit, with which they could also burn garbage as a more cost-effective way to generate heat and electricity, which is supplied to the northwestern district heating grid of Stockholm.

The new waste-to-energy unit burns garbage to boil water, which is made available for sale to households in the district through a 264-kilometer (165-mile) piping grid system. Used hot

water is collected from homes and is piped back to the plant to extract residual heat for reuse.

Burning garbage to generate energy is innovative in that it diminishes dependence on fossil fuels and reduces the amount of garbage disposed in landfills. However, this technology is not without its detractors.

In the process of burning garbage, carbon dioxide and toxins are released into the air. Even though the Swedish government has repeatedly assured its people that the gases that this practice releases into the air are 99 percent harmless, environmentalists are still not convinced.

Can proponents of this technology really defend it as environmentally friendly?

"Indeed, garbage burning does not reduce carbon dioxide emissions at present," said Ingela Ronnermark, head of sustainability at Brista. She told us that they have designed a carbon offset program to compensate for the greenhouse gas emissions from their plant. Specifically, they boost the social welfare of the community and they preserve biodiversity. She pointed out that the wetlands located next to their plant are an example of their efforts to conserve local biodiversity.

### All but nuclear waste

Ashes are left when garbage is burned, and Swedes, true to form, do not even consider the ashes to be useless waste. Through advanced technology, they have been able to extract useful substances from ashes that businesses need and for which they are willing to pay.

Ragn-Sells is a privately held corporate group that is involved in waste management, environmental services, and recycling. "We don't want to waste anything that can be reused," said

Since recycling is so important in Sweden, public garbage cans (left) are works of art. Dumpsters (below) for different kinds of recyclable garbage bear color-coded labels.







After processing, waste residues are stored in silos to prevent leakage.

Useful substances, such as phosphorus, are extracted from ashes of burned waste.



This Ragn-Sells waste processing site collects and handles all types of residential and industrial waste.





SOFIA SABEL/IMAGOBANK SWEDEN SE

Trucks go through streets and alleys, efficiently picking up household recyclables.

Compressed bales of used paper products await recycling.

Super-sized bags are used to collect bulky household waste, which is handled by specialized companies.



COURTESY OF RIV ATERWINNING

Larshans Pär, head of sustainability at Ragn-Sells. “With the sole exception of nuclear waste, we recycle just about everything.” General household waste, sewage sludge, used solvents, and metal scrap are all right up their alley.

The group collects, treats, and recycles waste and residual products from businesses, organizations, and households. “We can handle more than 800 kinds of waste, and each may require its own method of processing. Therefore we’ve invested heavily in R&D,” said Patrik Enfält of Ragn-Sells. He mentioned that his company has technology to extract substances such as phosphorus from ashes obtained from sewage sludge. Phosphorus is a very important chemical element used commercially in animal feeds, fertilizers, industrial products, and food additives.

The life cycle of phosphorus may look like this: Phosphate rocks are harvested, from which raw phosphorus is extracted. The element is then added in the process of making fertilizers. When crops are consumed and digested, some phosphorus is excreted in the waste, and it remains in the ash when the waste is burned. The used phosphorus is reclaimed and reused as a raw material to make another end product.

We toured a Ragn-Sells garbage processing plant, the largest of its kind in all of Europe. The plant was huge and very impressive. Larshans Pär explained to us that when garbage reaches their plant, it is sorted and placed in separate areas. Different technologies are used to process and recycle the various types of garbage. He pointed to a pile of waste ahead of us which had been frozen and would then be allowed to thaw to release useful substances.

In addition to processing a wide variety of waste, the facility also includes a place for storing garbage that the company is unable to recycle at present. Pär believes that his company might one day develop new technologies to recycle even such “unrecyclable” garbage profitably.

Arguably the most environmentally friendly nation in the world, Sweden has achieved high levels of recycling, recovering, and reuse. Still, the nation keeps striving for perpetual sustainability. That is something that every nation, every person on earth, can learn from. We all need to respect nature, and we all can do more to reduce the creation of garbage in the first place. ☘



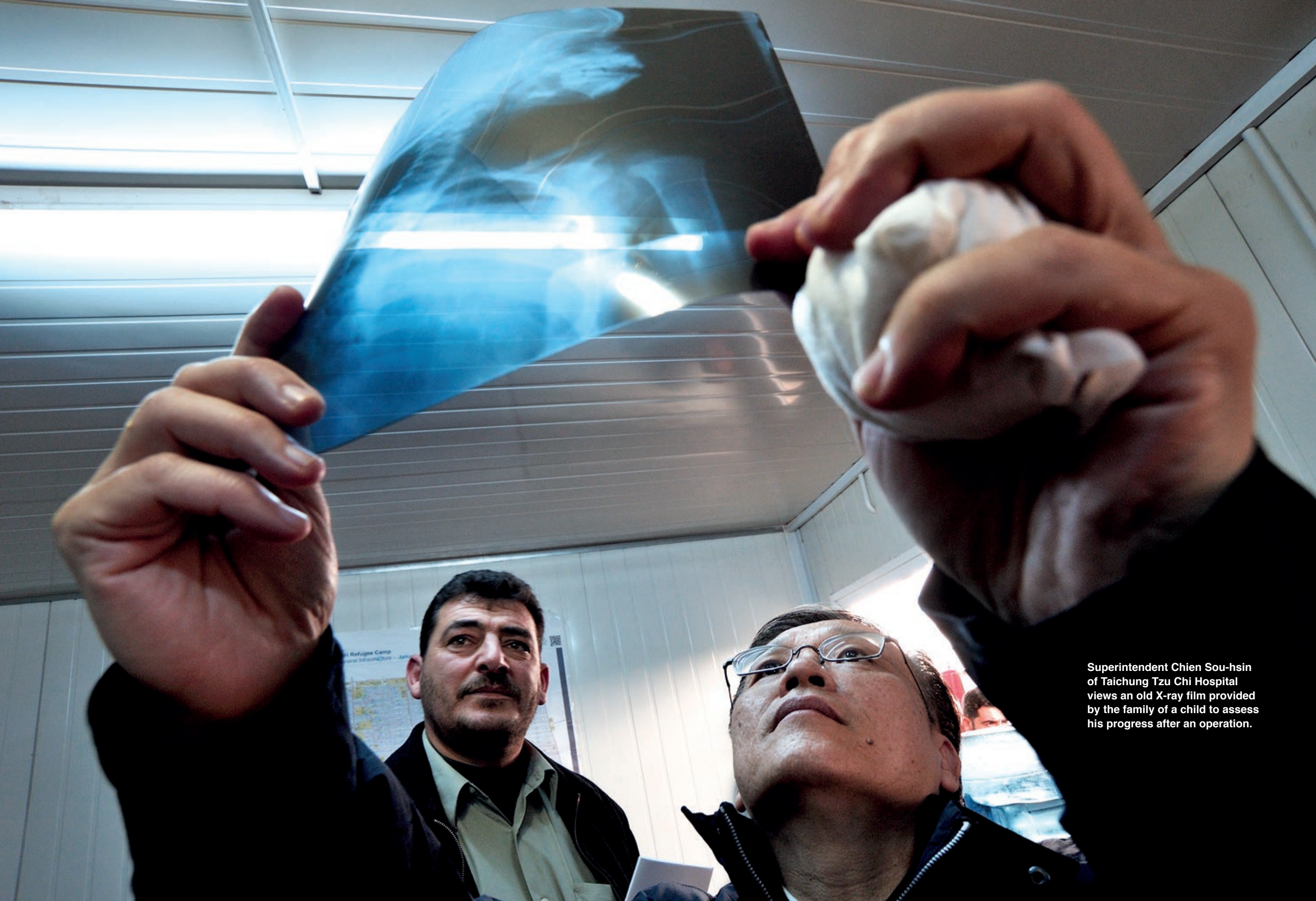
A Syrian boy hefts a bag of rice into his home in the Azraq refugee camp. His family also received cooking oil and other daily necessities at a Tzu Chi distribution.

*The Syrian civil war has raged since March 2011, displacing millions of citizens from their homes. To help the small number of Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan provide more aid to Syrian refugees in the country, a delegation of volunteers from Taiwan and other countries arrived in Jordan in December 2016. They immediately went to work holding aid distributions and free clinics for the needy.*

# A Relief Trip to JORDAN

By Zhang Jing-mei  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang  
Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe





Superintendent Chien Sou-hsin of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital views an old X-ray film provided by the family of a child to assess his progress after an operation.





**M**illions of Syrians have fled their homeland to escape the chaos of the raging civil war there. They face a dim future as refugees, but before they can even worry about tomorrow, they have to solve the problems that confront them today: putting food on the table, finding a dry and flat place to sleep, obtaining clothes and heat to survive through the frigid winter, and providing an education for their children.

On December 24, 2016, a delegation of 35 Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan arrived in Jordan. They were joined by seven more volunteers from six other countries. The delegation was there to provide relief for some Syrian refugees.

#### Effects of war

"Sir, have airplanes ever dropped bombs on your home?" Ayya, 10, asked a volunteer from the Tzu Chi delegation. The volunteers were visiting and delivering goods and medical care to people living in the Azraq refugee camp, located in desert terrain about 56 miles south of the Jordan-Syria border.

Ayya and her family had lived in the camp for quite a while. She liked the volunteers, so she had been following them around and helping them out.

After hearing Ayya's question, the volunteer replied with compassion, "It's safe here; you don't need to be scared."

"I'm not afraid of the cold, and I'm not afraid of hunger. I'm not afraid of anything, but I'm really scared that I might be killed by a bomb," Ayya said, trembling.

The volunteer could feel his nose stinging and his eyes reddening with tears. He hugged the little girl and said to her, "Don't be scared. Remember to smile every day. We'll be back to see you." Then he turned away from Ayya so that she wouldn't see his tears.

#### No tomorrow at the camp

The Tzu Chi delegation had set out from their hotel in Amman for the Azraq refugee camp early that morning. It was quite cold,

**The Azraq refugee camp extends 15 kilometers (almost 10 miles). This vast facility has very few resources for its residents when it comes to subsistence or health care. Winters here are harsh for refugees.**

and with clouds dark and hanging low, the sky looked like rain. Everyone in the delegation prayed on the bus for a clear day so they could smoothly carry out their mission, which was to include holding a free clinic for camp residents.

After a while, the sun peeked out of the eastern horizon and painted a rainbow on the opposite side, a rare phenomenon in deserts. The vol-



unteers hoped the rare rainbow boded well for the mission at hand.

When they reached the Azraq camp, they gained admittance to the compound by showing a special permit that Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan had issued to them.

Home to more than 38,000 refugees, the Azraq camp was divided into sections. The second section seemed to fare worse than other areas of the camp. It had no hospital or school. Residents in this district were all poor. They could not work outside the camp, so they passed their days in endless idleness and hopelessness.



Abdullah Ali, 42, came from war-torn Aleppo, a major city in northern Syria. An air raid seven months before leveled the entire street block where he lived. All 30 homes there were destroyed. Ali's own house collapsed in the bombing, and his ankles and knees were badly injured.

In a desperate run for their lives, Ali, his wife, and their ten children were directed by an aid organization to ride, walk, ride some more, and walk some more for five days until they reached the Jordanian border. There they were admitted into the Azraq refugee camp. All the while, Ali's fractures went untreated. The delay

cost him the best time for treatment. As a result, he is now crippled.

He and his family were assigned two housing units at Azraq. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gave them some tarpaulins. They also received two single sleeping pads and a few thin blankets from aid organizations. A portable heater rounded out all the belongings of the family.

But one heater could not keep two sleeping units warm. In the darkness and bitter cold of the night, Ali curled up under a thin cover, thinking about how his wife and children were also suffering through the long night. He cried in silence, blaming himself for their suffering.

Each month the UNHCR gave each refugee shopping vouchers worth 20 Jordanian dinars (28 U.S. dollars). Given the high prices at shops in the camp, the vouchers could sustain Ali's family for only about 10 to 15 days. They ate bread the rest of the time.

Given those dire circumstances, Ali was grateful for the rice and beans that Tzu Chi volunteers provided to him and his family. The supply would last them about ten days. After that, he was clueless as to what would come next. He simply could not plan that much ahead of time. All he knew was that he could not do anything worthwhile in the camp. He just wanted to leave the place.

Ali used to have a home and a life in Syria, but the civil war had turned him into a penurious refugee, drifting aimlessly like a leaf on the currents of life. He was by no means alone, not by a long shot. Millions of others were in the same boat.

Reetagi, 12, sat alone in the Tzu Chi free clinic. "Scared of the dentist?" a volunteer asked her. She shook her head and smiled almost imperceptibly.

To escape the civil war, Reetagi and her family left Syria and ended up in Jordan four years ago. She, then 8, saw corpses that the senseless fighting had left behind. "Were you scared?" asked a volunteer, holding her hands. Shoulders raised in tension and lips pressed tightly together, she just froze like a statue and stared blankly ahead.

When asked, "Do you want to go home?" she quickly shook her head in reply.

Usually taciturn and shy, the girl could recite fluently from memory several sections of the Quran. "I only feel at peace when I chant the Quran," she told the volunteers.

### Eggs for refugee kids

Hard-boiled eggs were a breakfast staple at the hotel at which the Tzu Chi delegation was staying. The volunteers would take a couple of them and put them in their pockets before they set out for a day's work. When they met refugee children who seemed particularly thin and feeble, they gave them an egg.

"Have an egg," a volunteer said to a three-year-old boy as he put one into his small hand. The child just held it in his hand, but made no motion to eat it. Thinking that he was probably shy, the volunteer patted him on his head and urged him to eat it. The boy then put the egg—shell and all—into his mouth. The volunteer hurriedly took it back and peeled off the shell for him.

After a few days of giving out hard-boiled eggs to refugee children, the volunteers were puzzled and disheartened to discover that

some of the children were simply throwing them away. After asking around, they finally learned the reason: These children had been born in the refugee camp and had never seen eggs before. They did not know what the oval-shaped, whitish objects were, much less that they were edible.

This discovery prompted volunteers to buy 500 hard-boiled eggs from their hotel. "Why do you want so many eggs? Don't we provide enough for breakfast?" the hotel owner asked the volunteers. Chen Chiou Hwa (陳秋華), the head of the Jordan Tzu Chi chapter, told him that they were giving out the eggs to refugee children the next day. Hearing that, the owner asked Chen to take the eggs to the children free of charge.

**Camp residents fetch water at a water station designated for their residential zone.**





The following morning, 500 eggs, ready to eat and neatly packaged in boxes, went with the volunteers to a women's center in the third section of the Azraq camp. The volunteers were providing free clinical services to refugees there that day.

The eggs were placed in the pediatric clinic. Each patient received two when they entered the exam room. Almost all the patients were accompanied by their mothers. Surprised by the volunteers' friendly gesture, the mothers peeled the eggs for their children and put them in their hands. The children took small bites and then broke into lovely smiles.

**Two Syrian families go home after receiving relief goods from Tzu Chi. Abdullah Ali, left, carries a bag of rice on his lap as his children and others propel his wheelchair.**

### Out on their own

The Zaatari camp, established in July 2012, is located in the middle of a desert seven or eight miles from the border. Home to more than 80,000 Syrian refugees, it is the second largest refugee camp in the world.

Some refugees have chosen to live outside the camp. They have been more or less on their own because they gave up access to the housing and other facilities and services that came with camp residency. Some of them just pitched tents outside the Zaatari camp. Part of the mission for the delegation was to distribute relief goods to these refugees.

The area was hit by a rare heavy rain on the night before the delegation's planned visit. Head volunteer Chen worried that the ground would become a big, muddy mess, which would very likely affect the distribution. But

that prospect did not dampen the enthusiasm of the volunteers. They arrived at the site on schedule, resolute, confident, and ready to carry out a successful mission.

The volunteers saw tents thinly spread across a wide stretch of desert land. The temperature had dropped precipitously, and the howling winds made it feel even colder. The thin canvas of some refugees' tents strained against the wind. A few sheep stood stolidly in their pens. Piled haphazardly on the ground were some twigs, the refugees' only fuel for a fire to keep warm.

Though it might not appear to be an ideal place to put down a home, it still cost the residents 40 dinars (US\$57) a month to rent a tent. That did not include water, which had to be purchased separately.

A little boy, shoeless and in thin, tattered sweaters, stared curiously at the group of uniformed volunteers from a distance. Then he ran away.

Shuddering in the cold, the volunteers divided themselves into groups and visited every tent to gather up Syrian children. Then they gave the children jackets or coats according to their sizes, and helped them put them on. Some children, their noses running, smiled innocently. Some wore only slippers, their feet caked in dry mud. "Are your feet cold?" a volunteer asked them. They nodded. "Is it hard for you to live here?" They shook their heads and ran away.

### Sick kids now better

Treading on the muddy ground, volunteer Chen Chiou Hwa led Dr. Lin Chin-lon (林俊龍), CEO of the Tzu Chi Medical Mission, Chien Sou-hsin (簡守信), superintendent of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, and some other volunteers to the Arabian Medical Relief (AMR) clinic inside the camp. Over the past year, the Jordan Tzu Chi chapter has underwritten operations for more than a hundred children whose names it had received from the AMR clinic.

When they learned that the volunteers were visiting the clinic, many parents whose children had received surgery through Tzu Chi's help brought their children to the clinic to express



**A boy eats an egg given to him by a Tzu Chi volunteer.**

their gratitude to the volunteers. Many of the children held up hand-written thank-you notes as they and their parents entered the room where the volunteers were. The children were energetic and lively, and Chen could not help choking up with happiness. He was happy to see how much better these children were than before their operations.

Four of these children had received operations for imperforate anuses, a condition in which there is no opening where the anus should be. He recalled how miserable these kids and their parents had been before the surgery. Unable to evacuate solid waste from the body, the kids had suffered with distended bellies. Their parents rushed them to doctors for help, but some facilities simply refused to treat them while others suggested treatment that the





families could not afford. The children therefore remained untreated, their lives wasting away. Through Dr. Monhnad, a Syrian, the Jordan Tzu Chi branch learned about the condition of these children, and volunteers helped them get treatment.

Some of the other kids who had gathered in the room had had surgery for hernias, and some for undescended testicles or other conditions. Now at their reunion, the children appeared to have few memories of the suffering they had had to endure until their respective operations. Their parents were all smiles. Dr. Lin said to Chen, "These smiles are more precious than anything else."

#### Still many more sick kids

Many other children were not as fortunate as those who had already been treated.

The news that Tzu Chi volunteers had come to the AMR clinic attracted many parents to bring their sick kids to the facility in the hope that their little ones too could get treatment.

**A volunteer helps a boy put on his new jacket.**



Dr. Monhnad knelt in front of a sofa as he examined one sick child after another. Some kids were scared and burst into tears, their cries wrenching the hearts of those around them. Other children just smiled shyly, unaware that they were in critical condition.

Looking at the scene in front of him, Dr. Lin thought about the fact that in the entire Zaatari complex—the second largest refugee camp in the world and home to more than 80,000 people—there was only one X-ray machine, and it had long been broken and unserviceable. He sighed and said, "But these children are so innocent!"

Dr. Chien, his expression focused and serious, worked with Dr. Monhnad to examine the children. He saw a kid suffering from abdominal edema because of a kidney problem, another in pain due to angiomas, and a newborn baby afflicted with a severe hernia. There were also other kids who needed prompt attention. With his brows knitted, he said to Chen and Lin, "These children have to be sent to the hospital ASAP."

Three days later, the volunteers arranged for seven of the most severely sick children to have operations at Akilah Hospital in Amman.



But at the Zaatari refugee camp, more than 300 sick children were still waiting for a chance to receive surgery.

#### Refugees and Bedouins

The Jordan Tzu Chi chapter has been providing regular assistance to 79 refugee families in Amman and Ar Ramtha. During their trip to Jordan, the delegation held a year-end blessing ceremony for these families.

One Syrian woman, like the other participants at the gathering, received from Dr. Lin a *hong-bao*, an artistically designed small red packet carrying blessings from Tzu Chi. She opened her purse and took out another *hong-bao*, one that she had received during the blessing ceremony the year before. With both packets in hand, she seemed to review in her mind the interactions that her family and Tzu Chi volunteers had had during the year.

Four years before, she and her husband took their family to Jordan to escape the civil war at home. However, her husband later went

**A girl wearing a jacket that she just received from Tzu Chi volunteers stands in front of her family's tent outside the Zaatari refugee camp. A team of volunteers distributed aid supplies to 450 refugee families living in tents spread outside the Zaatari camp.**

back to Syria to fight, and he ended up in prison there. She had had to raise their four children alone in a strange country. They had very little to live on and no one to turn to until Tzu Chi volunteers started caring for them and providing financial aid for her children so that they could continue their schooling. Eventually her husband returned to Jordan and joined the family again, but he was sick and his legs were disabled.

In the face of such seemingly unending adversity, she felt warm at the thought that Tzu Chi had been behind her family. She gently stroked the red packets in her hand, her face at peace as the Tzu Chi song "Prayer" began to play through the public speakers at the venue.





At the Azraq refugee camp, women (accompanied by one male) wait outside a converted shipping container, the site for an internal medicine clinic. In late December 2016, volunteers visited the Azraq camp to provide the first Tzu Chi free clinic there, which provided services in several departments.



Besides giving assistance to Syrian refugees, Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan have also been caring for several communities of Bedouins for 17 years.

On the seventh day of the delegation's visit, Chen led the volunteers to an area near the southern end of the Dead Sea, where they would be holding a free clinic and an aid distribution for some local Bedouins and other needy people there. On the way to their destination, the volunteers saw the azure hue of the Dead Sea. Israel was visible across this deepest salt lake in the world.

The volunteers used a school in their host Bedouin community as the venue for the free clinic and aid distribution. Though not very spacious, the classrooms were clean, neat, and adequate for the occasion.

**Chen Chiou Hwa opened his home for a Tzu Chi clinic.**

The volunteers provided medical services in pediatrics, internal medicine, surgery, traditional Chinese medicine, and dentistry. At the same time, volunteers handed over daily necessities to 500 families.

In the crowd was an old man in traditional Arabian clothing, standing quietly waiting to receive his goods. In his hand was a claim check for the event. When he saw Tzu Chi volunteers, he broke into a big smile, revealing a toothless mouth. Volunteers carefully placed his goods in a plastic bag for him and watched him slowly walk away with the help of a walking stick.

The volunteers could not help having mixed feelings. On the one hand, they were happy that these needy people were getting some reprieve from their hardships. On the other hand, their hearts went out to them—if not for such a hard life, they would never have had to show up at the distribution at all.



### One more time

For members of the delegation from Taiwan, December 31, 2016, was their eighth and last day in Jordan. Early that morning, they set out for Chen's home. They were spending their last three hours in Jordan holding a free clinic at Chen's place for some refugee families in the Amman area that received regular aid from Tzu Chi.

Chen felt guilty for being such a demanding host to the delegation. He felt that he should have been more hospitable than to put his guests to work in their final hours in the country. But they just patted him on his shoulder and smiled at him, as if telling him not to worry about it. Then they all went right to work and set up his home for the free clinic. Chen turned around and wiped away his tears.

**Dr. Chien Sou-hsin examines a woman during a free clinic in a Bedouin community near the south end of the Dead Sea.**

A few doctors moved the tables and sofas to the sides in the living room to make room for four dental chairs. Dentists and their assistants donned their blue gowns, and soon the sound of dental equipment filled the living room. If nothing else, the high-pitched drone of the instruments uniquely and unmistakably identified this space as a dental clinic.

Gastroenterologist Cai Xiao-yun (蔡筱筠) moved a small table into the hall by a bedroom at which patients could check in. The kitchen became the pharmacy. Pediatric patients were examined in one bedroom while another room served patients in internal medicine and surgery.





**A patient holds a bag of medicine at a free clinic held in a Bedouin community.**

More than ten Syrian patients had already gathered at Chen's home waiting to be seen. They had all been exiled in Jordan for over three years.

Looking at the hustle and bustle in his house, Chen thought back to five days earlier when they were on their way back from an aid distribution and their bus got deeply stuck on a muddy road. Everyone got off the bus and pushed together to free the vehicle.

That incident mirrored another event decades before. One day more than 40 years ago, Master Cheng Yen and her followers went to visit the needy in the countryside in Taiwan. Their bus

also got stuck in mud on the way, and they had to get off the bus and push together to set it free.

Both bus incidents took place when Tzu Chi volunteers were delivering aid to needy people. Though they were separated by 40 years, Chen's heart warmed as he thought of the similarity between the two events.

Chen felt grateful as he reflected on how he was not alone on the road of helping the needy. Though over the years he had shouldered a heavy burden in Jordan due to the small number of Tzu Chi volunteers in the country, he never felt the work was too hard for him. Challenges might abound, but he had faith they could be overcome one by one, just as he had overcome numerous challenges before. ❀

# Do Good With Compassion, Live Life With Wisdom

**By Dharma Master Cheng Yen**

Translated by Teresa Chang

**W**e have ushered in a new year. Let's be grateful for every peaceful day we've lived throughout the year gone by, and let us welcome each new day with a heart of pious sincerity. As I usher in the New Year, I make the same wishes for the future I always make: "May people's minds be purified, may society be harmonious, and may there be no calamities in the world." Only when peace reigns in the world is it possible for everyone to enjoy happiness.

Tzu Chi came into existence half a century ago. Our humble beginning is known as our Bamboo Bank Era—a time when we saved small change in bamboo coin banks every day to help the needy. We have come a long way since that time, working hard all along the way to overcome all kinds of challenges to carry out our charity work. From a handful of members in Taiwan, we now have large numbers of volunteers in many countries. Our philanthropic footprints can now be found in over 90 nations. Though we have come a long way in that half-century, our guiding principles and spirit remain unchanged. All Tzu Chi volunteers must abide by the principles of sincerity, integrity, good faith, and honesty. They must strive to live out the spirit of the Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. With loving-kindness, we experience no regrets and discover that our love is boundless; with great compassion, we

have no complaints and our resolution is firm; with a joyful mind, we have no troubles and our happiness knows no limits; with equanimity, we give without expecting anything in return and we can do great good.

When we have made the pledge to give of ourselves and walk the Bodhisattva Path, we must not let difficulties stand in our way and deter us from our initial commitment to serve. Instead, we should do our best to help others, eliminate afflictions, learn the Dharma [the

Buddha's teachings], and demonstrate a firm resolution to attain Buddhahood. With faith and sincerity, we will be able to truly internalize the Dharma and head in the right direction. We'll also take solid steps on this path and work without any grudges. When we can give without asking for anything in return, our hearts will be at peace.

We must not underestimate even the smallest act of kindness or forgo even the smallest chance to do a good deed. Remember that even small grains of rice can fill up a basket and little drops of water can form a river. When every

little act of kindness comes together, the power of love created will be so immense that it will be able to help not just one person or a family, but a society or even the whole world. Let us remind ourselves every day to be loving and helpful towards others and form good affinities with all living creatures. By doing so, we will sow and accumulate blessings.

There are many elderly volunteers at our recycling stations who do their best to sow bless-



TZU CHI ARCHIVES

This article is excerpted from a series of speeches delivered by Master Cheng Yen from January 1 to 17, 2017.





At a year-end blessing ceremony, volunteers in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, put on a musical presentation based on the twelve great vows of the Medicine Buddha at the local Jing Si Hall.

ings by doing good. These silver-haired bodhisattvas actively participate in our recycling work by collecting and sorting recyclables. They know that instead of leaving material wealth to their posterity, it's better to leave behind a healthier planet for them. They are truly wise by making such good use of their golden years.

We should all strive to live our days fully. Every day is an important day that shouldn't be taken lightly. I hope that everyone makes the best of their time to improve themselves and nurture compassion and wisdom in their hearts. Charitable deeds of loving-kindness can bring bountiful blessings, and conducting yourself with wisdom allows you to pass down virtues in your family. When we can head through life in the right direction, doing good and sowing blessings, we will bring happiness to our families, give peace to society, and help relieve the world of disasters.

#### End afflictions and nurture wisdom

At our year-end blessing ceremonies this year, Tzu Chi volunteers and employees put on

musical presentations based on the twelve great vows of the Medicine Buddha. Our world is riddled with all kinds of suffering rooted in the ignorance of human beings. To rid the world of afflictions, the Medicine Buddha made twelve great vows to awaken the minds of living beings dwelling in darkness and to relieve all suffering, whether physical or mental.

After presiding over our blessing ceremonies held at different places in Taiwan, I visited several Tzu Chi offices before I returned to the Jing Si Abode. Though the weather was cold, these offices bustled with people and activity and were permeated with a joyous atmosphere. Volunteers at these offices were busily erecting canopies and putting up Chinese New Year decorations in preparation for our winter distributions and traditional year-end meals for Tzu Chi's long-term care recipients. The aroma of vegetarian food wafted from kitchens where more volunteers were getting the meals ready.

This year, Tzu Chi offices around Taiwan invited 25,000 families to our winter distributions and year-end meals. In addition to giving

the families Chinese New Year gift packages, we provided them with free clinics and free haircuts. There were also performances to entertain them. All of these efforts were to bring warmth to our care recipients' hearts as they awaited the arrival of Chinese New Year.

The warm stream of love can relieve life's bitterest cold. Taiwan's most precious treasure is our abundance of love and kindness. I hope that people in Taiwan never lose their passion to give love and do good.

Thoughts of kindness arise in everyone's mind. We must take good care of these good thoughts and act upon them. The Dharma is like water that can help us nurture the seeds of kindness in our hearts. Let's diligently tend to these seeds of kindness with that Dharma-water so that they won't wither. If we can do that and give of ourselves lovingly, we'll reap infinite blessings life after life.

Those who aspire to be real-life bodhisattvas must make the Four Great Vows and strive to fulfill them: "I vow to save all living beings however countless they are, to get rid of all worries however innumerable they are, to study the methods of the Dharma however endless they are, and to attain the Buddha Way however transcendent it is." To help relieve the suffering in the world, we must go out and serve people. When we have witnessed the suffering of birth, old age, disease, and death among people, we will come to realize the origin of all misery. Then we can better learn to cherish what we have and give of ourselves diligently.

It is important that we take the Buddha's teachings to heart, have faith in them, and live them out so that they can help us remove suffering. We must also go one step further and pass on the Dharma to others. If we can do that, we help our own wisdom-life to grow [as opposed to our physical life] and form good Dharma-affinities with others. This will in turn help protect and safeguard their minds.

When we can absorb and spread the Dharma, allowing it to put down firm roots in our minds, our faith will be steadfast and not easily shaken by winds of ignorance. None of us knows how long we will live, but we can control the breadth and depth of our lives. What do we want to take with us into our next lives: our afflictions or the wisdom of the Buddha? It all depends on whether we have worked hard on sowing seeds of goodness and nurturing our wisdom-life with the Dharma in this life.

#### Live a valuable life

The *Medicine Buddha Sutra* tells us that there are many kinds of suffering and various forms of illness in the world, and that not everyone is born with sound body and mind. Those of us who are blessed with well-formed bodies and good health should be very grateful and make good use of our healthy bodies by working for the benefit and well-being of mankind. When we can do that, we are leading valuable lives.

Some of our volunteers, even though afflicted with illness, still give the best they can. Lin Yong-quan (林永全) is one example. He was one of the participants who put on musical presentations of the Medicine Buddha's twelve great vows at this year's blessing ceremonies held at the local Jing Si Hall in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan. He was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer a couple of years ago. He said that he was depressed when he first learned of the diagnosis, but he quickly pulled himself together. He and his wife encouraged each other and decided that they would be sad for only one day. After that, he actively received treatment and made plans to make the most of his time to give.

A true Buddhist, Lin knows that birth, old age, disease, and death are in the natural course of life. Though we may not be able to change the circumstances of our lives, we can change our mindsets. When things go well for us, we must remember that everything is impermanent; when adversity hits, we should keep in mind the karmic law of cause and effect. He realized during treatment how willpower could create miracles, so he continued to volunteer when he could and even used his experiences to encourage other cancer patients. Lin truly sets a good example for us to follow.

Xie Jia-cheng (謝佳成), also a volunteer from Taoyuan, was struck with acute abdominal aortic dissection. This condition caused him to lose so much blood that the medical workers who treated him could not find his pulse or blood pressure. He was brought back to life after the medical team transfused more than 10,000 cc of blood into him. The whole time he was hospitalized, whether in the ICU or the regular ward, other Tzu Chi volunteers kept him company. Seeing that, the other patients in the same ward thought that he was some kind of a big shot. He told them he was just an ordinary person, but his fellow volunteers cherished him as though he were an indispensable big shot.



Xie did his best to give when he was well. When he fell ill, he received blood donated by many kind-hearted people, and his fellow volunteers gave him genuine care and support. He was truly reaping the blessings he had sown. We shouldn't pamper ourselves so much in life that we never exert ourselves for the benefit of others. On the contrary, we should do our best to contribute to the welfare of society and make positive differences in others' lives. Both Lin and Xie have demonstrated this to us. Life is transient, and illness can strike us in a second. We mustn't delay to do good.

Our Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital is ten years old. I remember that when ground was broken for the hospital in 2002, my mentor, Dharma Master Yin Shun (印順導師), attended the ceremony and gave a talk. He was delighted to see how Tzu Chi volunteers had practiced the fundamental spirit of Buddhism by wisely carrying out various works that benefited mankind.

I'm very grateful to my mentor for affirming our volunteers' mindful, loving giving. Tzu Chi, founded 51 years ago, began with the mission of charity. Six years later, we set up a free medical clinic for the poor, which marked the start of our

**Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. It is one of six Tzu Chi hospitals in Taiwan.**



LIAO JINDE

medical mission. Forty-five years have passed since then, and now we have six hospitals around Taiwan working together to safeguard people's lives and health.

A patient afflicted with both cardiac tamponade and aortic dissection was rushed to Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital one day. He had no vital signs when he arrived, but the medical team rescued him from the clutches of death. The patient was very grateful to Dr. Yu Jung-min (余榮敏), the head of the cardiac surgery department, who operated on him. But Dr. Yu humbly credited the success of the operation to the united efforts of his colleagues and to the Tzu Chi volunteers who have supported the hospital over the years.

Today, many medical professionals opt not to work in emergency and critical care because the work is very demanding and under-appreciated. This makes me even more thankful to our hospital staff who stick to the job of caring for critically ill patients.

The Buddha taught us to contemplate the impurity of the body as a way to eliminate our attachment to it. The human body is often called a "stinking sack of skin" in Chinese. We can imagine what hard work it is for hospital workers to take care of the ill day in and day out, [including cleaning away their body waste]. Yet, they do it compassionately, resolved to safe-



HUANG SHI-ZE

**Eating vegetarian is good for the Earth and helps us nurture our compassion.**

guard lives. Their dedication is truly touching and fills me with immense gratitude.

Illness is the greatest suffering in life. Many people who are struck down with illness suffer and struggle in fear. Even their families are dragged into misery along with them. They really need the help of medical workers who can care for them, rid them of suffering, and thus bring them happiness. Boundless are the merits medical workers accumulate for restoring people back to health, helping them regain a good quality of life, and thus giving their families peace and joy.

#### **Cultivate compassion by eating vegetarian**

Europe has experienced extremely cold weather this winter, resulting in many deaths. The Balkan Peninsula, which many Syrian refugees travel through during their migration to their final destinations, is freezing cold, which makes the refugees' lives in tents even more painful.

The unbalanced minds of just a few people have plunged an entire nation into turmoil and

forced people from their homes. We really need to work harder to help purify people's minds so that we can help ward off disasters, both man-made and natural.

Strife and conflict are induced by men, but extreme weather and frequent natural disasters are also closely linked to human behavior, to the impact that our habits and lifestyles have made on the Earth. Tzu Chi volunteers have attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference for several years in a row. Our representatives found that all attending nations agree that greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced, but there is still a deficiency of concrete action.

Actually, it is not difficult for everyone to do good for the environment—the most effective way is to eat vegetarian.

An average of 1,770 animals are killed every second around the world for human consumption. This means that over 150 million animals are slaughtered every day. It is staggering to think about the astonishing amount of water and grain needed to raise such a huge number of animals and the great quantity of greenhouse gases emitted by their excrement. In order to satisfy people's cravings for meat, human beings raise animals in cramped quarters, and if an infectious disease breaks out, they kill the livestock on a massive scale. It's sad to think about such cruelty.

A vegetarian diet can significantly reduce pollution and the consumption of resources, thus bringing great benefit to the Earth. Eating vegetarian also helps us cultivate compassion and kindness.

Weather abnormalities, wars, and plagues all have their origins in unbalanced human minds, minds that are plagued by such mental poisons as greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt. An effective antidote to these poisons is thoughts of kindness. These thoughts can purify the spiritual turbidity in the world. When people's minds are purified and they harbor compassionate thoughts and refrain from taking lives, our Earth will be healthy, and all living creatures will be free from fear and live in peace.

Good and evil are in a tug-of-war in this world. We can all do our part to move the world toward goodness. If we can think wholesome thoughts, turn hostility into peace and harmony, and do good together, we will create a lot of blessings and help stave off man-made and natural disasters.

Please be ever more mindful.







# Freeze This Beautiful Moment

Grandma Jian, an elderly woman in her 80s with middle-stage dementia, often forgets things and people around her these days, but some memories seem to be intact in her mind. Here she sews with ease, probably like in the days when she taught sewing to many apprentices.



# An Epidemic of Dementia

By Yang Shun-bin  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang  
Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

*In Taiwan, one in twelve people 65 or older is afflicted with dementia. The prevalence of dementia jumps to one in five for those 80 years or older. Considering that Taiwan is projected to enter the ranks of “aged societies” by 2018—14 percent of its population will be at least 65 years of age then—dementia has become an issue for the whole of society to face.*

*Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital is doing something to lessen the impact of this disease.*

“I like this soup. Pack it up for me to take home,” you say to an eatery owner. A few moments later, however, you find yourself riding on a bus, confused as you look at the soup in your hand. You ask a fellow rider, “What is this? How did I get it?”

Your memory has become so short that it feels disconnected. As soon as you walk out your door or get into your car, you forget what you did just a moment ago. It eventually gets to the point that you can’t even write your own name....

## Unending delusion and forgetfulness

“When I’m at work, Mom sometimes cooks a big pot of rice at home, only to follow it with two more big pots. She even hides them sometimes. By the time we find out, the rice has spoiled and it stinks,” said Huang Yan-fei (黃燕飛) of Beigang in Yunlin County, southern Taiwan. Her mother suffers from middle-stage dementia.

Despite her illness, she appears perfectly normal when out and about or interacting with others. It is not immediately apparent to casual observers that she suffers from memory loss. Only her family, being so close to her, can detect that something is wrong.

Talking about her mother’s memory loss, Huang remarked that at first she just felt curious why her mom kept asking her if she had eaten yet or kept whispering to her that so-and-so seemed to have stolen some money from her. Those accusations, when examined closely, weren’t true at

all. Gradually, her mom even began to talk to herself or call her family bad names.

Huang said with an air of resignation that once a cousin angrily questioned why she had not given food to her mother. Her mother had complained to the cousin that she had not had anything to eat for three days and that she was about to starve to death.

The truth of the matter was a different story. In fact, Huang’s mother often forgot that she had eaten and would as a result eat without restraint. To prevent her from overeating, Huang and others in the family had had to put food away after meals.

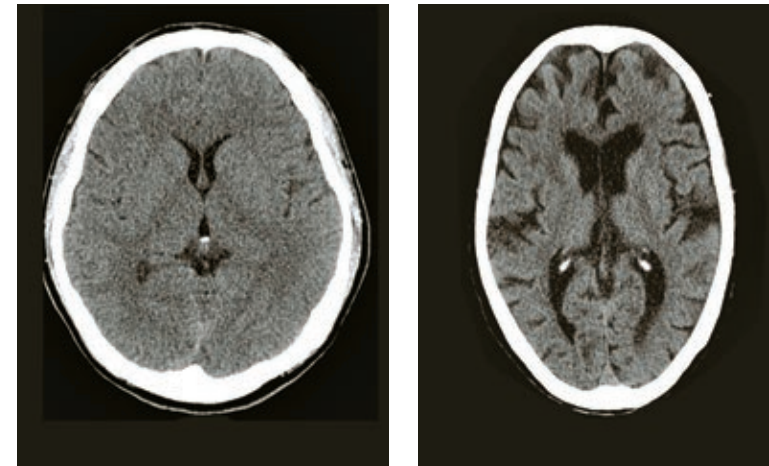
One time, her mother even fed their three dogs more than 20 times in a day, almost stuffing them to death.

“Fortunately, because she worries that people might break into our house and steal things from us, she doesn’t wander about,” Huang said. It’s a “silver lining” of her mom’s delusions; at least her family doesn’t have to worry about her wandering away and getting lost.

What is happening to this family is not an isolated case. They may not be fully representative of all families with dementia patients, but this does provide a glimpse into what it is like to live with people who suffer such a disease.

## An on-going epidemic

Dementia has become a familiar term in today’s world. Most people can name off the top of their heads some common symptoms of



COURTESY DALIN TZU CHI HOSPITAL

**A CT scan of the brain of a healthy person, left, and that of a dementia sufferer, right, which shows brain shrinkage.**

the disease, such as a tendency to get lost or forget the current time. According to the *World Alzheimer Report 2016*, published by Alzheimer’s Disease International, 47 million people worldwide live with dementia today. That number is projected to increase to more than 131 million by 2050, as populations age. If the projection holds, more people will live with dementia by 2050 than the total population of Japan today, 127 million.

Beyond the sheer magnitude of these numbers, what is even more worrisome is that there is still no cure for dementia. Drug therapies offer only limited benefit. Cognitive and behavioral interventions may help mitigate the effects of the disease, and exercise programs may also be beneficial, but there is no cure.

Dementia is not a direct cause of death, but it degrades the sufferer’s quality of life, immune system, and motor function, leading indirectly to death. Alzheimer’s disease, the most common form of dementia, has been listed as the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.

The average life expectancy of Alzheimer’s disease patients following diagnosis is approximately eight to ten years. During this time it is the goal of caregivers to blunt the impact of the disease, postpone its onslaught, and retain the functioning of the patients until as close to the end of life as possible.

## The dementia center

Chiayi and Yunlin counties, in southern Taiwan, lead the nation in having the oldest populations. Chiayi is in the top spot, with 17 percent of its citizens 65 years or older. According to statistics compiled by Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, located in Chiayi County, 40 per-

cent of its patients are 65 or older. The implication is clear: the more older people, the more potential dementia patients.

Dr. Tsao Wen-long (曹汶龍) took the helm at the Department of Neurology of the Dalin hospital in 2011. He noticed that many older patients at his clinic were afflicted with dementia, and that many didn’t come to seek help until their diseases were very advanced and their caregivers were at their wits’ end.

Tsao pointed out that there is a difference between dementia and aging. With aging, a person may forget things sometimes but can usually recall them later. With dementia, however, a person can forget completely what he or she has said or done—with no recall whatsoever—potentially to the point of making it difficult for them to carry on a conversation with others. In addition to a decline in memory, dementia patients also suffer from a deterioration of cognitive, visual-spatial, and motor functions, as well as a decreased ability to interact with others. Some dementia sufferers may also appear to undergo a total personality makeover.

Even though there is currently no cure for dementia, it can be detected early. Recognizing and treating the disease early may improve a patient’s quality of life. In Taiwan, once diagnosed, dementia sufferers can request medicines from the national health insurance program.

With the large senior population in the Chiayi area, Tsao knew that his hospital had to deal with dementia head-on. There was no avoiding it. A dementia center and a dedicated clinic were established at the hospital in September 2012. Initial staff members included Dr. Tsao, case manager Liu Qiu-man (劉秋滿), and clinical psychologist Hsu Chiu-tien (許秋田).





**Tsao Wen-long (right) chats warmly with a patient and a family member in his clinic.**

To identify people at risk of dementia as early as possible, Tsao and Hsu often visited local government officials to solicit support and assistance so that their hospital could conduct dementia screening at community events.

The center has also worked closely with Tzu Chi volunteers. Together, they have held training classes in Yunlin, Chiayi, Tainan, and Kaohsiung to coach volunteers on how to fill out AD8 Dementia Screening Interview forms. With this knowledge, volunteers can conduct basic dementia screening at community activities, thus facilitating early detection and treatment.

As a result of Tsao's advocacy, the Chiayi County Health Department in 2013 incorporated the AD8 Dementia Screening Interview as one of the regular checkup items at the free physical exams the department provides for county residents.

Tsao's efforts extended even further. He pointed out that in the past it typically took a patient at least five visits to a hospital before he or she could be prescribed the needed pharmaceuticals. These visits included the initial clinic appointment, followed by appointments for a cognition test by a clinical psychologist, a CT scan, and blood tests. After all these visits had been finished, an application could be made to the national health insurance for dementia drugs. It could take several months before the entire procedure ran its course.

That cumbersome and lengthy process was a deterrent to dementia sufferers seeking medical help, especially those whose symptoms were not severe. To improve this situation, the dementia center revamped and streamlined this process. Now when its outreach team conducts screening in communities, the team includes a clinical psychologist, who stands ready to evaluate the patients that screeners suspect might be afflicted with dementia. If the evaluation

confirms their suspicion, home visits ensue to bring the family up to speed, and an appointment with the dementia center is made for an initial clinical visit.

During that initial visit, because a lot of information has already been gathered by this time, the patient receives a CT scan and laboratory tests. Usually, the patient can receive medicine for the dementia as early as the second clinical visit.

The entire process has been greatly streamlined, cutting out much of the patients' travel, wait time, frustration, and hesitancy to continue through with medical care.

### **Personal touch**

The center also offers organized support groups to stand behind dementia patients and their families. Members of the support groups include doctors, nurses, nutritionists, physical therapists, social workers, and volunteers.

Case Manager Liu Qiu-man has been with the center since it was first established. She used

### **Volunteers lead participants of a memory upkeep class in physical exercise.**

to be an inpatient nurse and believed that she was well versed in elderly care. She anticipated that changing her focus to the care of dementia patients would not be a problem. However, once she joined the field, she experienced a rude awakening. Take, for example, the issue of a dementia patient who refused to go to bed at night. When a patient's family asked her what to do regarding this issue, Liu, still new in this field, instinctively posed a question back to them: "Does he sleep too much during the day?" She only found out later that such behavior is a symptom that shows up in the progression of dementia, a symptom that often also keeps a patient's family up at night, draining their energy and making them exhausted.

"A good way to handle this issue is to increase the patient's physical activities during the day, along with using the proper medicine." Now Liu, having learned many aspects of dementia care, can easily answer most questions from families. Furthermore, she knows that listening to them with empathy can prove to be even more helpful. Dementia care is much more than just giving drugs to patients and proper answers to their families. Listening to weary







**Zhang Yi-rong, a social worker at the dementia center, visits the homes of two patients every Thursday afternoon. Each visit takes a long time. Even when it is a return visit, it still feels very much like a first visit because the patient often has difficulty remembering things from before.**

family members pour out their frustrations helps them decompress. Caregivers need the relief a sympathetic listener provides.

The dementia center also sends its staffers to visit patients at home. It is a service that requires a commitment of a tremendous amount of time.

Zhang Yi-rong (張益榕), a social worker at the center, makes such house calls on Thursday afternoons. She usually visits two families: one new, one old. New patients are usually referrals from neighbors, local government leaders, or the center's outreach screening service. During these visits, she checks if they want further medical help or would like to join a memory upkeep class. For existing patients, she checks on their situations to find out if there are any difficulties with which they and their families need assistance.

The children of many older Taiwanese citizens live away from their hometowns, which makes for a challenging situation when those

with dementia can no longer care for themselves. In place of their own family members, many patients live with and are cared for by hired caregivers from other Asian countries, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Home visits to these patients are particularly important and valuable because there often exists a language barrier between the patients and their foreign caregivers.

Zhang pointed out that home visits have helped her see the real needs of patients or things of note. One time she visited an old woman who was in the middle stage of the disease. Talking with her, Zhang found out that she had been a master seamstress in her younger days. Soon the woman—drifting back to the proud days of her past—thought Zhang was a customer in her shop. Zhang played along and kept the conversation in that vein. But eventually this “dream” skidded to a stop when the old woman set out to draw a pattern but found that she couldn't.

“I once wondered about the value of my work—I doubted that dementia patients would

**A clinical psychologist carefully assesses the condition of a participant in a corner of a memory upkeep class.**





ever find hope,” Zhang said. But now she has realized that though she cannot really change the fact that they will keep losing memory, she can keep giving them love.

#### **A wider care network**

The Dalin hospital dementia center offers its services through clinics, community screenings, support groups, and publications, but the most outstanding results they have seen are through their memory upkeep workshops.

In 2014, to improve care for the senior population in Taiwan, the Ministry of Health and Welfare set out to select 22 locations throughout Taiwan that would receive government support to provide care for dementia sufferers. The dementia center at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital

**A social worker from the center talks to seniors, who are easily her grandparents’ age, to help stimulate their brains.**

submitted its bid, as did many other hospitals in the county, and won the only slot allotted for Chiayi County.

With the government support, the center started a memory upkeep workshop at Youdong Village in the town of Xikou. It has since offered two classes every week at this location, providing cognition training and physical fitness courses to hopefully help slow memory loss for the participants. Just one year after it began, thanks to the hard work of all those involved, the government rated the performance of the workshop “superior.”

From this initial location, the dementia center has expanded its services to other places in southern Taiwan: four more locations in Chiayi County, one in Yunlin County, two in Tainan City, and two in Kaohsiung City—a total of ten locations now. Some of these locations are at Tzu Chi offices.

Each location enrolls just over 20 participants on average, so more than 200 dementia sufferers

**A senior, with a book bag slung across her shoulder, on her way to a memory upkeep class.**

are being served across the ten locations. Behind those people, over 200 families are receiving some support and a little breathing room through the workshops.

The mother of Huang Yan-fei, mentioned at the beginning of this article, is one of the participants. Huang said that at first she had to cajole her mother into going to the classes, but now she willingly and cheerfully attends them. She remarked that the biggest change in her mother is that she has begun to smile again. Huang also declared that now she and her family are clearer on the progression of the disease and know how to better handle a situation, such as new changes in her mother’s behavior. They have even been able to anticipate what is to come and attune themselves to it accordingly.

#### **A team on the go**

The team from the dementia center is busy from Monday through Saturday. They only rest on Sundays.

When the memory upkeep courses first got started in Kaohsiung, Dr. Tsao and clinical psychologist Hsu Chiu-tien often drove there, an 80-mile trip, to conduct training classes for volunteers. After the classes, the two of them would then drive back, even when they were very weary. At times, they would doze off while on the road. It was just not the best time for them to drive. But they had simply braved it and eventually helped the new classes get off to a good start.

Fortunately the dementia center has been able to hire more help with funding from the Tzu Chi Foundation. In 2016, a social worker, a clinical psychologist, a nurse, an administrative staffer, and—this must be music to the ears of Tsao and Hsu—a driver came on board. The professional staffers can now concentrate on what

they do best for dementia sufferers and caregivers and leave the driving to a pro who will take them home safely, however exhausted they may be at the end of a long day.

Since their establishment, the ten workshops have each evolved and developed characteristics all their own, shaped not by the center alone, but by the combined efforts of the center and the local volunteer teams. Tsao hopes to help each workshop keep improving so that each location will be a haven for patients and their families. He wants all of them to take home from the classes fond memories filled with laughter.





# Mom, I'm Your Son

By Yang Shun-bin  
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting  
Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

*Her memory keeps declining, to the point that she often confuses her son with her late husband or her brother. Her mind might be muddled in her battle with dementia, but her son refuses to throw up his hands in defeat. Instead, he is doing his best to help her live in the happiness of the moment.*

After he got up this morning, Xu Dong-liang (許棟樑) quietly put his mom's clothes and her book bag for her memory upkeep class in her room. He reminded her of the class, and he told her to remember to take the bus in front of their home to get there. When the time had come for her to go and she was still sitting at home, he said to her, "It's eight already. Aren't you going somewhere? Or would you prefer to stay home today?" When his mom heard that, she shouldered her book bag and walked out the door. There was no way she was going to miss the class. She loves going there.

Xu's mother is now 91 years old. Xu and his family first suspected something was wrong with her not long after Xu's younger brother died in an accident six years ago. They began to notice that she was becoming more and more irrational, often saying things that didn't make sense. Originally a kind, mild person, she became hot-tempered and quick to find fault with others. She even quarreled with fellow passengers on a bus. She would often accuse others of stealing her stuff, but when Xu and others in the family tried to confirm her allegations, they discovered that they were completely unfounded.

"At first, we thought it was just normal cognitive decline related to aging," Xu recalled. He took his mom to a geriatric physician, thinking a doctor might help her. The doctor put her on medicine to ease the deterioration of her condition, but just a few days after she started taking the medicine, her feet became

badly swollen, forcing her off the meds. Xu left the matter alone for a while until a relative suggested that she might be suffering from dementia and advised him to take her to a neurologist for an assessment. Xu took his mom to Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, where she was diagnosed with a mild case of dementia.

## Adjusting

After learning that his mom was ill, Xu began to take part in support groups and lectures for dementia patients and their families, hoping to learn how to help his mom get better. But the more he learned about the disease, the more he realized that his mom's condition would only get worse—there was no stopping the decline.

To care for her, he took her to live with him and his family in Taipei, northern Taiwan. But even though his wife and children were fine with this arrangement, his mom had a hard time getting acclimated to the new environment. She even got lost in his house, on her way from her room to the bathroom. Three days later, after it became apparent things weren't working out, Xu decided to let her move back to her place in Yunlin, southern Taiwan.

Feeling uneasy about her living alone, Xu began to split his time between Taipei and Yunlin. After doing this for some time, he noticed that his mom wasn't eating properly, which resulted in malnutrition. Eventually, he decided to leave his family and job behind in Taipei and move in with his mom to take care of



**"Are they here yet?" With a book bag slung across her shoulder, Xu Dong-liang's mother asks him every few minutes why the bus that will take her to the memory upkeep class has not arrived yet.**

her. That was six years ago. His wife and kids complained about it at first, but they have since come to respect and accept his decision.

Xu admits that at first it was difficult living with his mom day and night. He didn't know her behavior patterns very well, and when she lost her temper at him he didn't know how to deal with it. He could only bottle up his pain. Sometimes he would lose his temper too and shout back at her: "I'm just a human being after all. It's hard to always hang onto my emotions."

Now, after having lived with her for six years, he has become much more adept at handling a volatile situation. If they get into an argument, he cooks up an excuse to leave the scene first, such as saying that he has to go out to buy something. When he returns 30 minutes later, chances are his mom has forgotten all about the argument.

## Cajoling

Three years ago, Xu signed his mom up for a memory upkeep class offered by the dementia

center at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. Since then, his mom has had two more happy days each week, and he can enjoy some free time for himself too. At times, instead of using that free time to take care of some business, he joins the support group on the floor below his mom's class. There he and other family members of dementia patients share their frustrations and learn from each other how to provide better care for their loved ones.

It wasn't easy to get his mom to join the class at first. After all, she was illiterate (like many women of her generation in Taiwan) and well advanced in age. When he told her about the class, she responded, "A class?! At my age?" and plainly refused to go.

It was a stroke of luck that the class was scheduled to start just before Senior Citizens' Day. Xu tricked his mom into going by telling her that an event was being held in honor of the day, and that older people who attended the event would receive a monetary gift. He took money out of his own pocket and prepared the gift for his mom.

Just like that, he succeeded in getting his mom to go to the first session of the class. However, they arrived too early and then had to listen to a government official deliver an open-





On this day, a lecturer brought a ball-hitting toy to the memory upkeep class to help participants improve their hand-eye coordination. With everyone's encouragement, Xu's mom (in yellow school T-shirt) gave it a try. She finally hit the ball on the third try, but the entire toy flew away along with the ball. It left everyone in stitches.

ing speech for the class. His mom was bored. Just ten minutes after she sat down she told Xu she wanted to go home. She even left the class on her own and walked out to the street. Xu had no choice but to drive her home. The first session thus ended in failure.

Xu wondered how, with that bad experience, he would be able to get his mom to attend the second session two days later. Fortunately for him, his mom soon forgot all about that bad experience, and Xu was able to get her to the second session by using the same trick—promising her she would receive a gift. This time he was sure to time it so that the session would start as soon as they arrived.

That second session went well. And after that, the third and fourth. Sometimes his mom remembered to get the money from him, and sometimes she didn't. As time went by, she

stopped mentioning it altogether. She was having a blast at the class and she would attend it with or without a gift.

Her memory continues to decline and she often confuses Xu with her late husband or her brother. It makes Xu sad sometimes when she does this, but he has learned to be more positive about it. His mission now is to make his mom happy. When she suddenly recalls the passing of his younger brother and feels sad, he says to her, "What are you talking about? He's alive and well and working in Taipei. He came home for a visit just yesterday. Have you forgotten about it?" He does that to prevent his mom from dwelling on sad memories.

"I don't expect the class to bring about any marked improvements in her. It would be enough for me if she likes going to the class and has a good time there." Xu said that since he learned about his mom's dementia, he has become a lot more tolerant and patient with her. She is ill after all, and it won't do to judge her behavior by normal standards.

Though he has to humor his mom in many things and often feels like he is dealing with a child, he has come to take it as a part of his life. He is prepared for what may lie ahead.

## My Grandpa Remembers My Name

By Yang Shun-bin  
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting  
Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

*He volunteered to return to the countryside to take care of his grandfather, who had been diagnosed with dementia.*



Wu and his grandpa ride around on a tandem bicycle.

If you learned that your grandpa had been diagnosed with dementia, what would you do? Wu Yao-zong (吳耀宗), 30, encountered just such a situation a few years ago...and he made a decision that surprised everyone.

Before he went to elementary school, Wu was cared for by his grandpa, who lives in a rural community in Yunlin, southern Taiwan. Wu only went to live with his parents in northern Taiwan when

he was of school age, so he had a strong bond with his grandpa. About six years ago, his grandpa often forgot his way home, and he was diagnosed with dementia. As his condition continued to deteriorate, his children, all of whom lived in northern Taiwan, decided to let him live with them in turns so they could take care of him.

Wu went on-line to look up information about the disease and found that a constant



change of environment is bad for dementia patients. In order to let his grandpa stay in his familiar environment, Wu volunteered to quit his job in northern Taiwan, move back to Yunlin, get a new job, and take care of his grandpa.

"My dad was against it at first," Wu said. "We didn't agree on what is best for a dementia patient." But his dad surrendered to his son's will in the end.

**In the memory upkeep class, people care for one another like family.**

Wu moved back in with his grandpa and began looking after him, but he soon ran into challenges. The old man's kidneys didn't function properly, and so his legs often became swollen. When that happened, Wu was blamed for not taking good care of him. Neighbors liked to put in their two cents too. Some of them even suggested that he seek divine help, such as having a Taoist ritual performed on his grandpa to have his scattered spirit made whole, or letting the old man drink some magical water supposed to have been blessed by the gods.

At first Wu, having received a pharmaceutical education, found such suggestions unbelievable, but he also knew that those neighbors meant well and were trying to help. If it wouldn't do his grandpa any harm, he would try out a method that they suggested.

His grandfather was in mid-stage dementia. In the beginning Wu enforced a strict regimen on him. He would prescribe a set amount of daily exercise for him and insist that he eat certain foods. This, however, resulted in tension between grandfather and grandson, so the

younger had to adjust his mindset and the way he cared for his grandpa.

In 2016, Wu learned that the dementia center at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital had started a memory upkeep class in a nearby community. He decided to sign his grandpa up and take him there.

Wu soon noticed the positive effect the class had on his grandpa. "He really enjoys it," Wu commented. While the medicine his grandpa had taken didn't seem to have much effect, the class was a different story. His grandpa rarely said a word at home, but in the class he had no problem opening his mouth. He would also willingly follow the lecturer in doing physical movements. Wu was surprised. In the class he himself also learned how to better care for his grandpa. Since the class was such a success, he signed his grandpa up for a similar class in another community. Now in addition to the original class each Friday, he takes his grandpa to the other class every Wednesday.

At home, he massages his grandpa with essential oils. He also makes sure he gets enough physical exercise. He starts exercising with his grandpa at seven in the morning on those days when he has to work the night shift. With their arms linked together, they walk around the courtyard, or they play catch, or they water plants. Wu even bought a four-wheel tandem bicycle on which he and his grandpa can ride around for some exercise while enjoying the scenery along the way. When the old man gets enough physical activity during the day, he falls asleep easier and doesn't pester Wu to go out at night.

His grandpa moves slowly, but Wu is always patient with him. The two of them have, as a result, grown even closer than before. What makes Wu happiest is this: His grandpa used to have to think a long time before he could call out his name, but now he always remembers his name. The grandfather's blood pressure, blood sugar, and blood lipid levels have also returned to normal under his grandson's care. Wu even discovered his grandpa's talent for singing. Family members have been surprised when they visit and hear the old man belting out a song.

Wu knows there are many unknowns on the path ahead, but he has learned not to dwell on what he has no control over. He will just continue to do his best to help his grandpa live happily each day. ☸





# Love Begins at Home

By Zheng Shan-yi  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang

*She did not nag or argue when her husband came home late at night.  
Instead, she greeted him with a smile.*



Fang Bi-zhu (方碧珠) was born into a wealthy family in Linyuan, Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. Everyone in the family doted on her, the youngest of eight siblings.

"My mother was not well when I was three," Fang recalled. "A fortuneteller told her that her youngest daughter—me—was the cause of her bad health. He told her the two of us were naturally incompatible, and that I was her natural nemesis. He advised my mom to give me up for adoption." Such superstitious practices were not uncommon at the time.

**Wang and Fang often take their granddaughter to attend Master Cheng Yen's early-morning sermon.**

Her mother unwillingly took the fortuneteller's suggestion, but she carefully chose to give her daughter to a good family nearby with sufficient financial means to raise the girl. Her plan turned out to be prescient and her choice excellent. Fang's large adoptive family treated her like their own. They all loved her, and the six big brothers in her new home just pampered her. Her adoptive father and mother gave her ample



Wang and Fang's daughters and their schoolmates played music to attract passersby to stop and listen to Tzu Chi volunteers promote bone marrow donation in 1997.

One day Fang returned home, and as her daughters were hovering around her and telling her that they had already done their homework and practiced the piano and the recorder just as their schedules had called for, Fang's mother-in-law suggested to her that, instead of volunteering, she should consider getting a paying job. "If you

latitude in seeing her biological parents. She was a darling in both families.

When Fang was ten years old, her birth mother died. Her birth father remarried a few years afterward, and her stepmother loved her dearly too.

In 1980 Fang married Wang Tian-fu (王添富) of Chaozhou in neighboring Pingtung County. His parents also treated her like their own daughter. Fang later moved with Wang to Pingzhen, Taoyuan, northern Taiwan. There their three children, two girls followed by a boy, grew up under their careful attention.

Fang said of her good fortune of being so well-loved by people around her: "Perhaps it's due to the good affinities that I formed in my past lives. I'm really grateful to my three mothers and mother-in-law. They have all loved me so dearly." She pondered how to pay their love forward to help other people and to serve society.

## A husband standing behind her

Fang's stepmother passed away in 1989. The family held a Buddhist-style funeral. The solemn, dignified ceremony inspired in Fang the desire to find a spiritual haven.

At the invitation of Zhuang Jin-feng (莊錦鳳), a neighbor and Tzu Chi volunteer, Fang attended a Tzu Chi gathering in neighboring Zhongli. The following year Fang, now in her thirties, started volunteering for the foundation. She would sometimes take her five-year-old son with her when she volunteered, and leave her two daughters, who had just started going to school, in the care of her mother-in-law, who was staying with them at the time.

This went on for some time until her mother-in-law had some issue with her volunteering.

and Tian-fu both work, you'll be able to provide a better education for the kids," she said.

"I've thought about this, too, but looking after the children now takes precedence over all other concerns," Fang replied. "We can get by on Tian-fu's income, and I'll live frugally to give the children the best education."

Just as her mother-in-law was about to reply, Fang's younger daughter said, "Mommy, let me show you the big kite that sister taught me to make," and dragged her out of the living room.

Watching them walk away, Wang said, "Mom, I think it's better for Bi-zhu to volunteer for Tzu Chi than to work at a paying job."

He observed that Bi-zhu had always been the baby of her family, getting all the love and attention, and all her friends were in the south. She used to want to visit her parents' home all the time and strongly expressed a desire to move back south. She really missed her family and friends. Sometimes when Wang came home late from work, she'd sulk or even refuse to say a word to him while tears welled up in her eyes.

But things began to change after she started to volunteer at Tzu Chi events. She would take her children along on weekends to visit needy people at their homes, to help clean up the homes of old people who lived alone, or to attend Tzu Chi gatherings or fund-raising activities. She was so happily occupied with her volunteer work that she not only quit nagging him about moving back to southern Taiwan, but she wasn't upset anymore when he came home late.

"But..." his mother said, still not fully reassured. Wang quickly followed, "Don't you worry about it. I'll keep an eye on her."

"I'm not worried about her," his mother said. "It's you. I need to remind you that sim-



**Fang and her son solicited donations for victims of Typhoon Herb in 1996.**

ply because she's not mad at your coming home late doesn't mean that you can overdo it. Don't spend too much time socializing for business. You need to take better care of your health." His mother's words left him speechless.

#### A considerate wife

One night, Wang came home very late—again. The children had already been put to bed. Fang was alone in the living room, taking care of the paperwork on the donations that she had collected from members she had recruited.

Fang put down the things that she was working on and asked Wang if he was hungry. He shook his head and sat down on the couch. She asked if he would join her and their son to visit the needy the next day, but he claimed he had a scheduling conflict. He then quickly went to take a shower just so he could get out of that conversation.

Fang and their son went on the home visits the next day. When Wang returned home from work that day, their boy clung to him and babbled on about what he had seen during the home visits. It sounded like some weighty stuff.

Fang enlarged on what the boy had said. A woman had given birth to a handicapped child. She could not bring herself to take the baby to visit her in-laws because she was afraid of what they and other relatives would say. She had cried in her room all day long every day since returning home from the hospital. To comfort her, Tzu Chi volunteer Zhuo Mei-yu (卓梅玉) told her that every child comes to this world for a reason. Since there is a purpose behind every birth, Guan Yin Bodhisattva is sure to hand-pick a mother capable of raising the child. "You're the good mother the bodhisattva has chosen for your baby," Zhou concluded.

"When she heard what Sister Zhou said, the woman finally smiled through her tears," Fang told her husband, adding that she had really witnessed the power of good words that day.

Wang could see that his wife was no longer just a homemaker whose main concern was her family and household affairs. Her world had

apparently broadened. Having worked for a long time, he considered himself worldly-wise. But even so, he often found himself deeply captivated by the stories his wife shared with him after her home visits.

"Last time we visited another family. I still can't forget that mother. Her image often surfaces in my mind." Fang went on to tell her husband the story. This family had four children, all of them afflicted with spinal muscular atrophy. Two had passed away. The mother had been diagnosed with cancer. After surgery, she went home to take care of her two children, despite the fact that her wound was still bleeding.

Fang asked her, "Doesn't it hurt?" The mother answered, her brows slightly knitted, "Of course it hurts. But losing a child hurts even more. I must take good care of my remaining two children. I don't want to lose them too."

Her voice choked with emotion, Fang told her husband that as a mother, her heart really went out to the woman. "Compared to her, I'm very fortunate. What have I got to complain about?" Such first-hand observations of pain and suffering had helped Fang appreciate the blessings that had enveloped her own life. She said that since she had begun to visit families like that, she no longer got mad when her husband came home from work late. "Like Master Cheng Yen says, we should be understanding toward others. We should count our blessings, cherish them, and sow more blessings."

In 1991, Tzu Chi volunteers were mobilized to solicit donations on the streets to help flood victims in eastern China. One day after a gathering with his friends, Wang went to a local temple where his wife and other volunteers were raising relief funds. He was moved as he looked at



COURTESY WANG TIANFU



ZHAN XIU-FANG

**Wang, Fang (third and second from right), with their children and grandchildren.**

the group of people hard at work soliciting donations from passersby. Without saying a word, he joined them.

Soon after, he started training to become a certified volunteer. The next year, he and his wife received their certifications at the same time. Volunteering has since become part of their family life.

#### Nice kids

One afternoon Fang was on duty at the Zhongli Tzu Chi branch when her children phoned her. They wanted her to return home right away because their dad's parents had just arrived from Pingtung but he was not home.

As soon as Fang got home, her mother-in-law praised how well Fang had raised her three children. First, the children seated them and gave them water to drink. They told them that their parents were not home. The oldest of them went upstairs to call their mother and ask her to return home. Then while her siblings kept the grandparents company, she went to the kitchen to get a plateful of fruit for them.

Fang's in-laws were impressed by how polite and well-mannered these three children were; after all, they were just around ten years old or a little older. "Your father-in-law couldn't stop smiling and praising how well you've reared your children," Fang's mother-in-law told her.

Just at that moment, Wang returned home, and, hearing what his mother had just said, remarked, "Now you know what a good thing it is for the kids that Bi-zhu has stayed home, instead of going out to work."

Fang smiled and told her mother-in-law that she had only learned how to guide her children after she joined Tzu Chi. She had learned from Master Cheng Yen that parents are their children's role models. If the parents are upright, the children are more likely to be upright too. Her volunteerism and willingness to help others had become good examples for her children to emulate. What's more, the couple and the three children had surrounded themselves with like-minded volunteers who were always gentle, civilized, kind, and helpful. Those qualities had quite naturally become theirs.

Fang mentioned that she, her husband, and the children went with other volunteers to the Taoyuan Veterans Home once a month. The





ZHAN XIU-FANG

**Wang serves as a documenting volunteer, video-taping Tzu Chi events.**

young ones played recorders for the elderly residents, massaged them, and talked with them. They strove to give the elderly—most of whom had fled to Taiwan with the Nationalist government and left their families behind in China after the communists gained control of China in 1949—a sense of family and somewhat relieve them of their homesickness.

The children also took to the streets with other volunteers to promote bone marrow donation. They recruited their schoolmates to play musical instruments so as to attract passersby to stop and watch; when they stopped, volunteers used the opportunity to explain to them how donating their bone marrow could help save lives without harming their own health.

After Typhoon Herb ravaged Taiwan in 1996, the children joined other volunteers to solicit donations for typhoon victims. They stood for hours on end under a hot sun, handing out flyers and holding out donation boxes.

Fang pointed out that since her children had grown up in a “do-good” environment, the kindness and beauty of human nature had naturally

taken root in their hearts, and they grew to be upright, warmhearted, and helpful.

Wang’s parents nodded in agreement as they listened to Fang. Wang spoke up right then: “Those old folks at the veterans home are so happy when they see the kids. It’s like their own grandchildren are visiting.”

“You go too?” his mom asked.

“Yes,” he answered.

“You don’t have to socialize for business any more?”

Embarrassed, he said, “Most Tzu Chi activities take place at night or on weekends, so I have no time for business socializing any more.”

Smiling, Fang’s mother-in-law took Fang’s hand and said, “The family that does good is sure to reap abundant blessings. I believe you will be one very happy and blessed family.”

The three children have since grown up, and Fang and Wang are now grandparents. Since retiring from work, Wang and his wife volunteer full-time together. They lead a simple life. What money they do not spend they donate to help the needy. They have found their days very purposeful and fulfilling.

# So Young, So Strong

*Engellie, 11, suffered a stroke in 2016. Despite the setback, she was determined to pass her final exams and be promoted to fifth grade without any delay.*

By Arimami Suryo Asmoro  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang  
Photos by Arimami Suryo Asmoro  
and Chen Gui-xiong



**Engellie studies her own X-rays as she recuperates at home.**

To Engellie, an 11-year-old girl in Jakarta, Indonesia, it is a blessing to go to school and meet friends, not something to be taken for granted. After fighting for several months to recover from a stroke, she was finally able to return to her school, an elementary school in the first Tzu Chi Great Love Village in Indonesia. She and her family live near the village.

Engellie was born with thin blood vessels. Though it is difficult to treat this congenital condition, she had managed to stay in school throughout her early childhood. But early in the morning of March 25, 2016, as she was washing up in the bathroom, getting ready to go to church with her family for Good Friday services, she suddenly felt limp and the right side of her body went numb. She collapsed on the floor. The thud prompted her mother, Tjhin Siau Ling, to open the door to the bathroom to check on her.

The girl was rushed to the emergency room at the hospital in the Tzu Chi Great Love Village. The doctors there said that her condition was too serious for the hospital to treat, and they referred her to RSUD Cengkareng, a larger hospital.

At the Cengkareng hospital, Engellie was diagnosed with a stroke to the left side of her brain. When Tjhin heard this, her thoughts flashed back ten years, to the time when her son died of a brain disease at the age of five and a half. Now a brain problem had struck her other child. She could hardly muster enough courage to walk into the intensive care unit to see her daughter.

Tjhin’s friends from church went to the hospital after the church service. They cheered her and told her that she must believe that there would be a way out of this bind.

Deeply worried, Tjhin sat at Engellie’s bedside and prayed for a miracle.

After nine hours in the ICU, Engellie could move and bend her right leg, and she could stick out her tongue. Tjhin became hopeful, but her hope was quickly dashed when the hospital suggested that Engellie be transferred to another hospital for more specialized treatment. The mother again despaired, worried about the cost of treatment.

Her friend Robert informed Engellie’s school principal of the family’s predicament. The principal in turn brought the situation to the attention of Tzu Chi volunteers. Volunteer





**A strong desire to stay in school propelled Engellie to attend classes, even though she was still recovering from her illness.**

Yang Bi-lu (楊碧露) happened to know Dr. Gunawan Susanto, a neurologist at Rumah Sakit Satya Negara, a private hospital. With the doctor's help, Engellie was admitted into the hospital that same evening. Aggressive treatment ensued.

Tjhin appreciated Tzu Chi's help. "I'm truly grateful. Through the foundation, God has opened a way for Engellie."

Volunteer Chen Gui-xiong (陳桂雄) visited Engellie at the hospital not long after. He also talked to other volunteers about giving the best help they could to the family.

Dr. Gunawan Susanto explained to the family that many risk factors might result in a stroke, such as lifestyle, sleep deprivation, and stress. In Engellie's case, abnormal blood vessels were the

culprit. She was the first pediatric stroke case that the doctor had ever encountered.

The left side of Engellie's brain had sustained extensive hemorrhaging, and she was in a coma. The medical team decided to operate on her in two stages. First, they would remove the blood clots and remove the left side of her skull to lower her intracranial pressure. When her cerebral edema had abated, they would follow up with a second operation to reattach the side of her skull.

The surgery no doubt carried its risks, but Tjhin decided to trust the medical team. "I hope that this is the best arrangement for Engellie, and I'll keep praying to God."

The first operation took place on March 31, six days after Engellie collapsed at home. The left side of her skull was removed and stored in her own abdominal cavity. Then she was discharged to recuperate at home. On May 17, she had another operation to restore her skull.



**Teacher Sunarjo tutors Engellie at her home to help her make up the classes she missed.**

She underwent rehabilitation and speech therapy through April and May. Volunteer Chen was at her side. He pointed out that the girl was strong and firmly resolved to triumph over her disease. "She's making louder and louder sounds," he reported, "and she can now walk unassisted. She's made great strides in her recovery."

Her mother asked whether she wanted to stay in school. Engellie said yes and added, "Mom, I want to return to school as a fifth grader. I don't want to be held back."

To reach that goal, however, she would need to surmount some obstacles. Though she still could not write with her right hand, she asked school authorities to allow her to make up for the classes that she had missed. The school consented and sent her homeroom teacher, Sunarjo, to tutor her.

"Engellie had no problem with her grades before she fell ill, and she's eager to learn," Sunarjo said. Other teachers, such as for English and Chinese, also went to her home to teach her what she had missed.

School administrators were impressed by her desire and effort to learn and respected her

**Volunteer Chen Gui-xiong accompanies Engellie to a rehabilitation session.**



determination to be promoted to the fifth grade, so they allowed her to take the final exams at home.

The girl and her mother went to school to pick up her report card on June 22, about five weeks after her second surgery. She had passed the tests with flying colors, and she would advance to fifth grade, just as she had worked so hard to achieve.

Tjhin felt particularly blissful that day. "I'm grateful to Engellie's doctors, and also thankful to Tzu Chi volunteers for all that they've done for us, especially their help with my girl's medical bills," she said.

Engellie started fifth grade on July 18, 2016, when the school opened for the new school year. Many parents took their children to their new classrooms, and the campus bustled with life and excitement. Engellie and her father, hand in hand, walked into her new classroom.

She was ready to go ahead and pursue her dream: She wants to become a chef. People around her—her family, volunteers, doctors, and teachers—can feel her vitality and determination, and they stand ready to give her their best support. ☸



# The Illustrated JING SI A PHORISMS

## The Buddha says:

We live in houses for protection from cold and heat, wind and rain, and the invasion of mosquitoes, not for vanity or indulgence.



MATERIAL GOODS IN THIS WORLD ARE MEANT TO BE USED BY PEOPLE. UNFORTUNATELY, DUE TO THEIR LACK OF WISDOM, PEOPLE WHO ARE NEVER SATISFIED BECOME SLAVES OF THEIR MATERIALISM.



DESIRE ONLY BRINGS SUFFERING. IF WE ALWAYS DEMAND THINGS FROM OTHERS, WE WILL ONLY GET ENDLESS MISERY FOR OURSELVES.



## What should we do when people criticize us without good reason?

Everyone has limited energy and time. Instead of getting upset when others criticize us unreasonably, it would be better to just forget about it and do the best you can.

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

# Be With Me As I Grow Up

## By Shen Ya-hui

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photo by Lin Bi-zhi

Drawings by Yong Zi

*Xiao-xuan lives in a world where her grandparents loom large. Soon after she was born, her parents divorced and left home, leaving the family without the middle generation. Her grandparents have cared for her ever since.*



The sun had sunk low and pedestrians were casting long shadows when we arrived at Xiao-xuan's home late one afternoon. The fifth-grader lives in a neighborhood in Annan District, Tainan, southern Taiwan.

Xiao-xuan's grandfather, the man of the house, was cooking dinner, which usually starts quite early for this family of three. The young girl and her grandmother were watching TV in the living room. Grandma was diagnosed with Huntington's disease in 2014, and ever since then Grandpa has been taking care of things around the house.

Soon after Xiao-xuan was born, her parents divorced and left home, leaving the family without the vital middle generation. She has since been raised by her grandparents.

Grandpa has always taught her by his own example to be positive and look on the bright side of things. He has also encouraged her to be open. "I don't wish to see her keep to herself or bottle up unpleasant emotions. I want her to get them off her chest. I'm quite all right with it even if our discussions lead to arguments. Keeping the channels of communication open is more important."

Xiao-xuan has turned out as he has hoped: She is a vivacious and thoughtful child.

Without any parents to turn to, she is more mature than the average child of her age, especially as she realizes how hard her grandparents have had to work to bring her up. Though still very young, she has come to terms with the fact that she does not have the luxury of being a whimsical child the way many children seem to be these days. Instead, she always strives to be considerate and helpful to her grandparents.

"I boiled some dumplings for her grandma," said Grandpa as he emerged from the kitchen, sweaty from the relatively simple cooking. "Xiao-xuan said that she'd eat the leftover rice vermicelli from lunch. I just needed to heat it up."

"I help Grandpa with the cooking," Xiao-xuan said, as she ate the rice noodles. "I wash the dishes too. I do whatever I can to help."

After dinner, she deftly did the dishes in the kitchen, apparently quite experienced with the routine. Then she came back to the living room with a glass of water for Grandma to take her pills. Because Grandma's limbs might jerk out of control due to her Huntington's illness, Xiao-xuan puts the pills into her mouth so she does not risk dropping them.

Knowing that we were there to gather information so we could write a story about





Xiao-xuan, Grandpa, eyes on his wife, said, "I really hope that, through Xiao-xuan's story, more people will become familiar with the rare disease that has afflicted her grandma. There is a fifty-fifty chance that a child can inherit this disease from a parent, so people should pay attention."

Looking at Xiao-xuan feeding Grandma her pills, Grandpa added, "How can we not dote on such a darling?"

He went on to tell us how considerate and caring the little girl had always been. One time when she was in second grade her grandma was hospitalized, and Xiao-xuan would go to the hospital on weekends to look after her. She would keep her company and sleep on a chair outside her room at night. Grandpa said, "One day she told me that she knew that her grandma would recover. I asked how she could be so sure. She said that she had asked our ancestors about that by throwing divination blocks [a traditional Chinese divination method] and they had told her that it would be so. Even my own children aren't as mature and understanding as my darling granddaughter."

### A tight bond

Grandpa used to run a business of his own. Business was good for a while, and he and his family had a comfortable life. But then it went under, plunging the family into difficulties. Now he and his wife and granddaughter live in a rented home. He provides for the family with an income earned from hand-picking corn on farms.

Because Grandpa has brought up Xiao-xuan since she was a baby, she has always been very attached to him. He recalled that once he went out at night to harvest corn, and when Xiao-xuan woke up in the middle of the night and did not see him by her side, she

burst into loud wails. "I couldn't stand the thought of her crying at home, so I started taking her with me to work, sometimes laying her down to sleep on the ridges between the fields," he said with emotion, his heart going out to his granddaughter.

One time he broke a leg in a traffic accident. He was unable to work for a time, and his family abruptly lost its only source of income. When Tzu Chi volunteers learned of their situation, they began to provide care for the family.

When volunteers made their first home visit, they saw in the small living room a dilapidated couch. It was beyond repair because grandpa had slept on it ever since the traffic accident. Thanks to a benefactor, volunteers were able to replace the worn-out couch. Poor though the family was, that was actually the first time that it had received outside aid. Never before had they requested help from others; the three of them had simply stuck together and lived with what they had.

Grandpa recalled the time after he was injured in the traffic accident. "Xiao-xuan was really considerate. When I went back to the hospital for follow-up visits, she'd go with me and take care of everything for me. If she didn't know how to handle something, she'd just ask for help."

Xiao-xuan knew that her grandpa's leg hurt, so she even bought medicated patches at a drugstore for him with the allowance that she had saved. When the owner of the store found out about her thoughtfulness, he gave the patches to her free of charge.

Grandpa could not say enough good things about the girl, albeit with a trace of sorrow. His granddaughter was at an age when she was supposed to be carefree, but circumstances had forced her to grow up more quickly than most of her peers.

All this, however, does not seem to matter to Xiao-xuan. To her, all that matters in the world is her grandparents. She knows that they love her dearly, and as long as they are happy, she is happy too.

Because she is too young to help earn money, she strives to be a source of joy in the house. When Grandpa feels blue, she plays the recorder to lift his spirits, and then she asks him, "Was my playing good?" He, tickled, sometimes says the opposite of what's in

Xiao-xuan washes the dishes after a meal.



his mind. He even purposely guesses wrong the title of a song she is playing, and the two of them will collapse in a heap with laughter. Grandma, though unable to speak, smiles from ear to ear.

"When she was younger and saw me getting mad, she'd stick her butt out, swing it from side to side, and say, 'Grandpa, come spank me!' It was a funny sight, and of course, how could I bring myself to spank her?" Grandpa said, smiling heartily. But his smile soon faded and he said solemnly, "Come to think of it, she's the source of strength that's kept my wife and me going. We wouldn't know how to carry on if she weren't around."

The two generations in the house indeed deeply rely on each other.

### A pure heart

A small table in the living room also serves as the family dining table. Underneath that table is a coin bank, which Xiao-xuan received when she attended a Tzu Chi prayer service with volunteer Wu Li-heng (吳麗姮). Wu asked Xiao-xuan at the time if she knew what such a bank was for. Xiao-xuan replied, "It's for people to save money which they can use to help those in need."

"Grandpa doesn't have much money, so don't keep asking him for money so you can

save it in the coin bank," Wu reminded the little girl.

Soon after that, Xiao-xuan started to help at her school store. She makes 200 NT dollars (US\$6.50) a month from that work. She puts half of it into the coin bank and gives the other half to Grandpa. She explained cheerfully, "People have helped us, so we should help those who are poorer than us when we can."

She has kept none of that money for herself. Not only that—she rarely asks her grandparents to buy anything for her. She is more disposed to think of her grandparents' well-being first and foremost.

On October 30, 2016, the Tainan Tzu Chi branch awarded scholarships to 229 students. Twenty-four recipients were awarded scholarships in the category of filial piety—Xiao-xuan was the youngest among them.

The scholarship program has been around since 2007. Since then, more than 42,000 scholarships have been awarded to students around Taiwan. More than 9,000 students received awards in 2016 alone.

Xiao-xuan's grandpa was present with her at the ceremony. She was happy he was there, and she told us her wish: "I want Grandpa and Grandma to be in good health and live to be a hundred years old. I want them to accompany me as I grow up."



# Tzu Chi Events Around the World



A volunteer hugs a refugee at a camp in Adaševci, Serbia. In February 2017, Tzu Chi volunteers delivered aid to four refugee camps in the nation.

## Serbia

In February 2017, Tzu Chi volunteers from Germany, Italy, Austria, Bosnia, Singapore, and Malaysia visited Serbia. They joined local volunteers in carrying out aid distributions at four refugee camps in Sid, Adaševci, Principovac, and Obrenovac. In the course of one week, the 21 volunteers delivered items including food, underwear, sportswear, four washing machines, and four dryers to the camps.

On February 5, delegation members met Octav Damia and Antonius Trisno Wanda from an instant noodle factory in Serbia. The two men had come with 62 cartons of instant noodles for refugees. Anthoni Salim, a Tzu Chi supporter from Indonesia, owns the noodle factory. Upon learning that the volunteers would visit Serbia, he agreed to help and asked his staff at his local factory to give the volunteers full support.

The factory was only 30 minutes by car from the Obrenovac refugee camp. The volunteers expressed a desire for Damia or his colleagues to

meet with staff from Serbia's Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. That way, the commission could in the future simply inform Tzu Chi what it needed, and the foundation would plan and coordinate subsequent steps with staff at the factory to provide the requested items for refugees. Damia agreed to the suggestion.

That evening the volunteers took the instant noodles to the Obrenovac camp, which used to be a military barracks and had been opened to refugees only about 10 days before. During the short time it had been in operation, the camp had taken in about 600 people, most of whom were from Afghanistan, with the rest from Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and other countries. Commissariat staffers told the volunteers that they urgently needed aid groups to provide breakfast for the refugees. Undergarments and sportswear were also needed. Also on its wish list were washing machines and dryers. Volunteers jotted the items down for discussion later at their hotel.

From February 6 to February 10, volunteers visited all four refugee camps and distributed items including underwear, sportswear, instant rice, and fruit to refugees. The camps in Sid and Obrenovac each received two washing machines and two dryers from the volunteers.

At the Sid refugee camp, a 17-year-old woman from Afghanistan told Tzu Chi volunteers that she felt very warm and respected when the volunteers politely handed over relief supplies to them. Refugees were very happy to receive the undergarments, which they really needed.

Early on the morning of February 11, the day before the volunteers were to leave Serbia, the delegation visited the Obrenovac camp again to distribute freshly made bread to residents. The refugees lined up, and the volunteers respectfully handed the bread over to them. Many refugees were wearing the clothing that they had received earlier from the volunteers. One of them told volunteers that the sportswear was warm and snug, and he expressed his gratitude for the volunteers' help.

Sava Rakic is a staffer at the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. He said that he first assumed that Tzu Chi was like many other aid groups who would just drop their relief goods at a refugee camp and leave. But over the last few days he had seen how mindfully the volunteers had carried out their distributions and he was really impressed.

Volunteers will continue to give aid to refugees to help make their weary journeys to their destinations a little easier.

## Myanmar

On the night of February 2, 2017, a fire on Zayar Khamar Street in Mayangone, a township in northern Yangon, burned down buildings and left over 400 people homeless. The conflagration also killed an 87-year-old man. The fire was so intense that 50 fire trucks were dispatched to quell it.

Tzu Chi volunteers went to evaluate the situation the following day. They also visited fire victims in the temple where they were sheltered to see how they could help. They learned that the National League for Democracy had been providing meals for shelter residents and that charity groups had also delivered other supplies to the shelter. The volunteers talked to survivors to find out what they still needed.

After that, the volunteers immediately went to purchase the needed items. At one o'clock

that afternoon they sent out a message asking for more volunteers to help pack the supplies. Twenty-nine volunteers arrived at the Tzu Chi office soon afterwards. They did not finish until nine that evening.

Wasting no time, the volunteers went back to the shelter that very night to deliver the goods. They bowed respectfully and presented emergency cash and supplies to the victims. They also talked to the victims to ease their anxiety.

Htet Htet worked in a garment factory. She said that she only had enough time to grab her purse and cell phone before she had to run from the fire, so all her other belongings had gone up in flames. She was happy to receive the aid from the volunteers.

Daw Htay Htay Myint was very grateful that the volunteers had given them what they needed the most. She was very touched that Tzu Chi, a foreign charity group, was there to help them.

Another fire victim, U Htin Aung Kyaw, said that he had previously read about Tzu Chi on social media but had not expected that volunteers would show up when he needed help. He said that he and his fellow townspeople would remember the assistance the volunteers had given to them during this difficult time.

Each family received biscuits, a storage box, tableware, tooth brushes, toothpaste, laundry detergent, soap, a bucket, a mosquito net, blankets, and emergency cash depending on family size: 15,000 kyat (US\$11) for a family of up to two people, 20,000 kyat for three or four people, and 25,000 kyat for larger families. The distribution benefited 462 people.

**A conflagration on February 2 left over 400 people homeless in Mayangone, Myanmar. Tzu Chi volunteers distributed emergency cash and relief supplies to fire victims.**







WANG QING-SHAN

A volunteer from the Pingtung Tzu Chi office, located in southern Taiwan, hands over clothing to a homeless person at Zhongshan Park.

## Taiwan

Cold snaps pose serious challenges for many people in need, especially the homeless. They are often inadequately dressed and fed for the weather. They are also less able to take necessary precautions to defend themselves against a sudden dip in temperature, when the chances of a stroke or heart attack increase. In February, Tzu Chi volunteers throughout Taiwan joined hands with social workers, other aid organizations, and medical workers to distribute goods and give warmth to help homeless people, elderly folks living alone, and needy families to prepare for the frigid winter days ahead.

In the late afternoon of February 9, volunteers and social workers in Pingtung, southern Taiwan, went to Zhongshan Park to distribute freshly brewed ginger drinks, hand warmers, and clothing to the homeless there. Volunteers visited a homeless shelter the next day to distribute more supplies. They were also on standby to respond to calls on a special hotline that

they had established to help the homeless and older folks get through the winter

On the evening of February 10, Dr. Ji Bang-jie (紀邦杰), a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association, went with other volunteers to the Taichung Railway Station in central Taiwan to care for the homeless. They gave out jackets, scarves, and other winter clothing, served the street people bread and hot rice porridge, and examined their physical conditions.

On February 11, volunteers in Taipei, northern Taiwan, visited places including the Banqiao train station to distribute relief supplies to the homeless. They passed out sleeping bags, scarves, socks, hand warmers, porridge, and bread.

In eastern Taiwan, volunteers called on care recipients living in the mountains and urged them to keep warm. They also reminded those with high blood pressure and high cholesterol to watch their diets.

As the weather got cold, Tzu Chi volunteers endeavored to bring a stream of warmth to people in need. They wanted to help them feel cared for and less alone during these challenging winter days.



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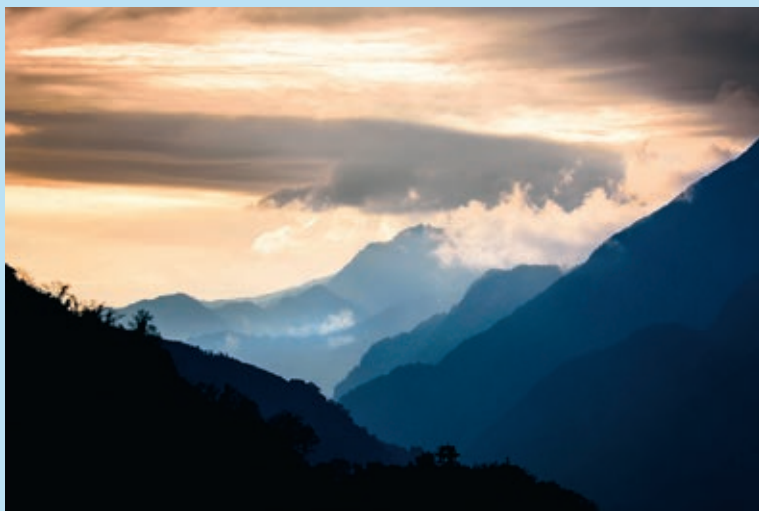
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*Only by first lighting up your own heart can you inspire  
others to do the same.*

*—Master Cheng Yen*

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