

# Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Winter 2014

慈濟

## CREATING BLESSINGS IN A SINK

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Jordyn Howe accidentally shot his friend, Jina Guzman-DeJesus, to death on a school bus similar to this one.



# An Astonishing Show of Forgiveness

Text and photo by Liu King-pong

“Mother forgives young killer.” That bold headline grabbed my attention as I was browsing through the *Miami Herald* on June 11, 2014. After reading the whole story, I could not help but praise the mother’s broad-mindedness and noble forgiveness.

The paper reported that Ady Guzman-DeJesus embraced 16-year-old Jordyn Howe in a Miami courtroom on June 10, 2014, two years after he accidentally shot her 13-year-old daughter, Jina, to death on their school bus. “Justice is done,” Guzman-DeJesus told reporters outside the courtroom. “I miss her, and I really do forgive him.” When the judge asked Howe if he wanted to say anything to the mother, he said that he felt sorry for her loss and apologized for what he had done.

That morning in November 2012, the teenage boy was taking his stepfather’s handgun, which had been hidden in a closet, to school to show it off to his classmates. In the back of the bus, he allowed a friend to handle the partially loaded gun. A few minutes later, according to witnesses, Jina began to play with it and aim it around as if she were pretending to shoot.

Howe took the gun back, pointed it at the floor and pulled the trigger, but the gun did not discharge. He then lifted the gun and pointed it at Jina, pulled the trigger again, and shot her in the neck. Jina was pronounced dead soon after she was rushed to Miami Children’s Hospital.

Howe immediately confessed to shooting his friend. He pled guilty to manslaughter with a deadly weapon, possession of a firearm by a minor and carrying a concealed weapon.

However, under a plea agreement blessed by Jina’s mother, he was adjudicated as a juvenile and required to complete vocational training at Park Youth Academy for a year. Until he is 21, he will undergo psychological counseling and random drug testing. In addition, he is required to maintain a full-time job or education, and speak in schools at least 12 times a year—alongside the victim’s mother—about the dangers of guns.

Guzman-DeJesus, who has three other younger children, said Jina would have wanted her to be kind towards Howe. “We can make a change to help other children,” she said. “He

was Jina’s friend, too, and I know she wouldn’t want the worst.”

This gesture of forgiveness undoubtedly moved many people in the courtroom and readers of the newspaper, including myself. Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Ellen Sue Venzer stated that in her 20 years of watching human tragedy unfold in the courtroom, she could never have imagined a victim’s mother embracing her child’s killer.

“To err is human, to forgive divine,” as the well-known adage goes. But to forgive other people’s misconduct is easier said than done, especially when people we love are fatally injured.

A bloody knife attack on a Taipei metro train that left four people dead and 21 injured on May 21, 2014, provides us with another chance to ponder the meaning of forgiveness. Wielding two knives, Cheng Chieh, 21, injured more than 20 passengers in a seemingly random attack just before the afternoon rush hour. He was stopped and detained by police and passengers on the platform after the train had pulled into the Jiangzicui station in Taipei.

Cheng, a college student, claimed he had had enough of the pressures in his life and did not want to live anymore. However, he was not brave enough to commit suicide. He thought that if he killed a great number of people, he would receive the death penalty.

As a result of the stabbing spree, there were calls for Cheng’s parents to take responsibility and apologize for the tragedy. Seven days later, succumbing to public pressure, Cheng’s weeping parents knelt in front of reporters and a crowd that had gathered at the Jiangzicui metro station to beg for forgiveness from the families of the victims.

The bereaved relatives, however, refused to accept the apology. We fully understand their reaction—they had suffered so much from the excruciating pain of losing their beloved ones. And yet, we should not forget that Cheng’s parents are victims as well. If we cannot forgive Cheng, perhaps we can at least leave his parents alone. Surely Guzman-DeJesus’s mental trauma was alleviated when she chose to forgive rather than seek revenge on Howe. ❦



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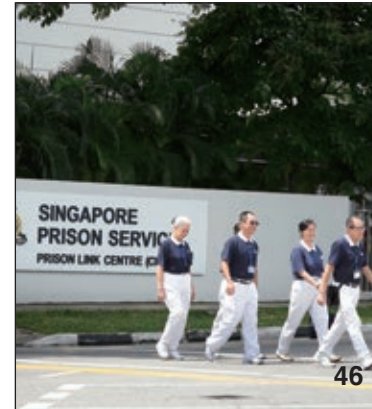
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The *Tzu Chi Quarterly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right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

Address: No. 2, Lide Road, Taipei 11259, Taiwan.  
Telephone: 886-2-2898-9000 ext 8046  
Fax: 886-2-2898-9977  
E-mail: [chris\\_wu@tzuchi.org.tw](mailto:chris_wu@tzuchi.org.tw)

## Tzu Chi Quarterly

President and Publisher

Shih Cheng Yen

Managing Editor

Wu Hsiao-ting

Staff

Teresa Chang

Lin Sen-shou

Liu King-pong

Douglas Shaw

Tang Yau-yang

Steven Turner

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# Steadying the Unstable

*Just before midnight on July 31, a series of explosions caused by an underground gas leak in Kaohsiung, Taiwan's second largest city, ripped open six kilometers (3.7 miles) of roads, killed at least 32 people and injured 309. Tzu Chi volunteers delivered meals and supplies and comforted victims. When their traumatized hearts settle down, recovery can begin.*

**By Li Wei-huang**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Lin Yan-huang

Tzu Chi volunteers deliver bottled water to neighborhoods affected by the explosions. They made sure that their presence would not interfere with rescue operations.





Late in the night of July 31, Li Xiu-chuan (李秀釧) was troubled to learn that there had been explosions not very far from her home in Kaohsiung. At the time, she was at home getting ready to leave for her graveyard shift at the post office, where she worked as an hourly contract employee sorting mail. She hurriedly called her supervisor and asked him for time off so she could help victims in the aftermath of the explosions. She put on her Tzu Chi volunteer uniform and rushed to a nearby hospital where she figured at least some of the injured victims would be sent.

Like Li, Liu Dan-li (劉丹莉) also lives in Lingya District. She heard two loud blasts at five minutes to midnight. Experience told her to expect injured people. She too put on her volunteer uniform and rushed out of her house to see what she could do to help.

She saw people clustering here and there in small groups. They didn't know what to do, so she urged them to stay away from the explosion site. She helped direct traffic, diverting cars and motorcycles away from the scene to keep it accessible for emergency response vehicles.

Then Liu hastened to Kaohsiung Armed Forces General Hospital. On the way there, she called other volunteers to duty. The emergency departments at many area hospitals were soon packed with the injured, their family members, and people looking for their loved ones in the midst of the chaos. The growing crowds were more than the hospital personnel could handle. Many people turned to uniformed Tzu Chi volunteers for help. Volunteers helped get prescriptions filled, fetched drinking water, and contacted family members on behalf of the injured to take care of the required paperwork for admission or surgery.

Li rounded up scores of volunteers that night to chant the name of Amitabha Buddha for the deceased. She was busy through the night and the next morning. Around noon she went with other volunteers to Sanduoyi Road, a heavily damaged area, to deliver bottled water and hot boxed meals to people living in that neighborhood.

**Rescue workers comb through the disaster scene looking for missing people.**





That afternoon, Li contacted Liu and together they planned for volunteers to make home visits in Lingya District the following day, August 2. They decided to divide the volunteers into 13 groups. Each group was to deliver hot meals to families along a specified route and assess their damage.

Li didn't go home to rest until eleven o'clock the night of August 1. She had not shut her eyes for 23 hours straight.

### The calamity

The explosions, triggered by propylene gas leaking from underground pipes, affected a three square kilometer (740 acre) area in Qianzhen and Lingya Districts along Yixin, Ersheng, Sanduoyi, and Kaixuan Roads. Those were major thoroughfares heavily traveled during the day.

The midnight blasts killed 32 people, wounded over 300, and unnerved many more. The infrastructure in the area sustained serious damage. Utilities including natural gas, electricity, and water were cut off in some areas, impacting nearly 84,000 people in about 33,000 families. Ninety-eight schools were temporarily shut down.

"If the catastrophe had occurred during the day, the casualties would have been unimaginably higher," said many survivors, trying to find a silver lining.

Many Tzu Chi volunteers lived in the disaster zone themselves, but they nonetheless pitched in to help soon after the calamity. They couldn't see clearly the extent of the damage in the darkness of the night, but in the light of the morning they saw how severe the devastation was. Their familiar streets had been ripped open, forming trenches along the roads. The powerful explosions reportedly blew cars and motorcycles high in the air. Many vehicles were left overturned on the roads; some were buried under debris. Pieces of broken asphalt flew like shrapnel, damaging roofs, walls, and windows.



**A man crosses badly damaged Sanduoyi Road, once a busy thoroughfare.**

**Volunteers, part of a contingent of more than a thousand, on their way to visit homes. The day happened to be one on which people regularly make offerings to their ancestors and souls in the underworld.**



Some even went through windows and injured residents inside.

### Love, care and warm meals

After obtaining permission from the authorities, Tzu Chi volunteers entered the disaster area and provided hot food for residents. Water and electricity services were temporarily disrupted, so cooking was inconvenient.

For days, Li and other volunteers gathered before lunch and dinner time at the Tzu Chi emergency service station in a school on Sanduoyi Road. They picked up boxed meals and bottled water, traversed temporary crossings over the trenches in the main roads, walked into lanes and alleys, and delivered the food and water to those who needed them. They also chatted with the residents.



Occasionally volunteers smelled something odd on their delivery trips. It was understandable why rumors were flying around about potential dangers lurking in the air. People were still quite edgy.

Most victims were unprepared for the lack of electricity and water. Most of them had only experienced disasters remotely, through the media; they had never thought that they would one day be victims themselves, much less people receiving assistance. Therefore it was not unusual for volunteers to see tearful eyes when they handed over meals and water.

Li met an old couple on one of her trips. The woman cried when she told Li about her worries. "What are we going to live on?" the old woman asked. "The more I think about it, the more scared I become." Li comforted the couple by saying that their property damage could be repaired and that the most important thing was that they were not injured.

Another resident said, "You've delivered meals to us every day for several days now. You even asked if the food was to our taste. You've made us feel so much warmth."

Liu said that she had also heard feedback from residents that the food volunteers deliv-

ered was "life-saving," in that it not only fed their stomachs but warmed their hearts and soothed their upset minds.

In order to add variety to the meals and make them more appealing, volunteers in the kitchen of the local Tzu Chi office prepared and rotated through nearly 20 vegetarian menus. Making the food attractive was a challenge, but the logistics of preparing several thousand boxed meals were also quite daunting. To make one boxed meal was easy, but to make several thousand of them was another story. For that, volunteers mobilized many voluntary helpers, who scooped steamed rice into meal boxes, topped the rice with vegetables, replaced the lids, packed the boxes into large cartons, and sealed the cartons for delivery. Several lines of people worked concurrently so that the multitudes of meals could be ready in time.

The food was then transported to neighborhoods. Volunteers also made special deliveries to hospitals and the central funeral parlor for survivors or family members. A grand total of 80,034 hot meals were distributed from August 1 to 30.

The disaster brought out the love of many people. In addition to those who came on their own initiative to help pack the meals, people

came to the Tzu Chi service stations in the disaster area to donate goods. A mother and her daughter arrived at one station with many packages of tissue paper and asked volunteers to distribute them to victims. There were also young people who showed up at the stations and signed up as volunteers. They did whatever work was assigned to them. The sweltering heat did not deter them in the least.

### Home visits

Tzu Chi held prayer services—including ones at Chung-Cheng Industrial High School on August 3, Fukang Elementary on the 5th, and Ying-Ming Junior High on the 17th—to help the affected communities heal. Volunteers encouraged the participants to bless each other to help restore peace to their minds.

On the afternoon of August 6, Tzu Chi kicked off a project in which volunteers from Kaohsiung and other areas in Taiwan took turns calling on homes in the disaster areas. Every day for ten days, about a thousand volunteers split into 200 to 300 teams and called on one household after another on designated routes. They visited victims as well as people who had not suffered physical losses but were anxious because they lived near where the explosions had occurred.

At each door, volunteers handed over a letter from Master Cheng Yen and a gift pack of Tzu Chi-made food items. By doing so, they hoped to deliver a message of care and support on

behalf of all the members of the foundation around the globe. Through these visits, volunteers were also able to identify people who might need help with child education, medical care, or elderly care. Local volunteers would follow up with these families and plan long-term care.

As if the explosions had not caused enough damage themselves, thunderstorms fell on Kaohsiung unrelentingly for a week soon after the catastrophe. They caused flooding in parts of the explosion zone, made getting around difficult and soured people's moods.

Volunteers found during their trips to the area that many people, even those whose homes had not been damaged in the explosions, had temporarily moved away and were staying with friends or relatives. After a major disaster, virtually anything can lead people to panic. Even the sounds of raindrops or thunder—some of the most ordinary phenomena in nature—can startle people. It is no wonder that people moved away to stay in places where they felt safer.

Volunteer Li Mei-ru (李美儒), from Taoyuan in northern Taiwan, related a story about an old man who had lived through air raids in World War II. The gas explosions reminded him of those days. A mother said that she was terribly scared when the blasts broke windows in her home, and that her son even had nightmares every day after the explosions.

Although many people recounted their traumatic experiences to the volunteers, even more

**During a home visit, volunteers leave a gift pack with food, a copy of *Jing Si Aphorisms*, and a letter from Master Cheng Yen.**

**Volunteers visit hospitalized casualties to find out if they need additional help and to give out cash aid.**

**Li Xiu-chuan, right, consoles a victim of the explosions who is worried about her livelihood.**







**Many people, like these company employees, volunteered to help Tzu Chi volunteers pack meals for delivery to victims.**

thanked them for the hot meals they provided after the disaster. A woman who ran an automobile service shop on Sanduoyi Road said that after the disaster she was in no mood to eat, much less to cook. If volunteers had not delivered meals to her home, she would not have cooked or even bought any meals.

Volunteers called on more households in the latter part of August, and by August 26 they had visited over 10,000 homes. During these visits, they expressed their sympathy and good wishes and distributed nearly 9,500 packs of food, which included instant noodles and rice, multigrain drink mix, nuts, and biscuits. Starting in late August, volunteers also gave cash aid to families whose houses had been damaged.

**Volunteers deliver boxed meals in the rain.**



HUANG HUI-ZHEN

#### **One volunteer**

Li Xiu-chuan, the volunteer who took time off from her job at the post office, worked hard after the explosions to help with and coordinate relief efforts. She left home early and returned home late every day. She worked even at night with other volunteer coordinators to plan the home visit routes that 200 to 300 volunteer teams would take the next day.

Such a heavy workload invariably ate into her family time, and her husband was not very happy with that. Li tried her best to appease him. For example, according to local custom, August 10 is a day for paying respects to one's ancestors with offerings. On that day, Li got up at four o'clock to get the offerings ready. Only after that had been taken care of did she set out in the rain to start another day of home visits on behalf of the foundation.

Over the years Li has volunteered in Tzu Chi relief efforts after many disasters in and around Taiwan. In 2007, an army helicopter crashed in the mountains of Kaohsiung, killing eight soldiers. She and other volunteers went to console mourning family members. That was a particularly difficult mission for Li, whose husband also worked in the military. When she got home that day, she could not help crying at her front door.

She was busy for six months after Typhoon Morakot devastated southern Taiwan in 2009, helping to clean up communities, conduct home visits to assess needs, and build new homes for

victims. She frequently took time off from work during that time.

A domestic passenger plane crashed in Magong, Penghu, an offshore island county of Taiwan, on July 23, 2014. In response, Li took four days off work and traveled there with her fellow Tzu Chi volunteers to help. On the evening of July 31, just three days after she had returned from Magong, she was off again to help victims of the Kaohsiung explosions.

Witnessing so many life and death situations has taught her to appreciate her husband and children more, and she thanks them for letting her devote so much time to Tzu Chi. She is also grateful to her supervisor at the post office for allowing her to take time off from work when she needs to volunteer for Tzu Chi. To help in the aftermath of the disaster, Li again took more than a half month off from work. Her supervisor allowed her to do that not only because he appreciated her kind-heartedness in helping the less fortunate, but also because she was a good worker.

All that time off from work also meant less pay, but Li did not mind at all. Like all other volunteers, she feels it is all worth it if they can help restore peace of mind to people who have been through the trauma of a horrible disaster. ☸

**A prayer service Tzu Chi held at a school on August 3**





# A Surge of Love in Time of Need

*Donated supplies began streaming into an emergency shelter set up by the government following the gas explosions that rocked Kaohsiung, Taiwan, on July 31. Volunteers from various organizations helped make the victims' temporary stays as comfortable and as comforting as possible.*

**By Zhang Jing-mei**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Chen Yu-yang

Volunteers from various charities unload Tzu Chi folding beds and relay them to classrooms housing over 280 shelter residents.





**“W**hen I was 16, I left my hometown in Zhejiang, China, to flee the Communist regime. I never anticipated that I’d be forced to take flight again 60 years later,” said Zhou Xiang-mei (周香妹), 76, as she shook her head in resignation. Her eyes were moist and her lips trembled with a wry smile. The Tzu Chi volunteers by her side listened quietly while she spoke. They were temporarily at a loss for words to comfort her.

The first escape Zhou was talking about was made in the midst of on-going battles between the Chinese Communist and Nationalist forces. The recent escape, on the other hand, was precipitated by a chain of explosions around midnight on July 31, caused by an underground gas leak. The shaking of the ground had frightened Zhou so much that her limbs went limp. But she was immediately roused to action when she heard her neighbors shouting, “Run! Run fast!”

Zhou held her husband, Shen A-si (沈阿四), 84, by the arm as they staggered together out the door. Raising her head, she saw that flames from the explosions had turned the night sky a crimson red. The scene looked eerily similar to the one from which she had fled 60 years ago.

The couple and their neighbors sought refuge in a park. Heavy rain began to fall. Both of Shen’s legs, which had just recovered from cellulitis, began to swell again.

A few hours later, the government placed them and others at Guanghua Junior High School. Only thin sleeping bags shielded them from the hard floor, which made falling asleep that much harder for the frightened flock.

At noon that day, the group was moved to Chung-Cheng Industrial High School, which took in nearly 300 people. Their eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep, they walked listlessly into the school only to find to their surprise that two rows of Tzu Chi volunteers were already standing near the front gate welcoming them.

After the survivors had finished signing in at the service desk set up by the government Social Affairs Bureau, Tzu Chi volunteers ushered them into one of the 20 classrooms that had been meticulously cleaned and furnished with neatly arranged sleeping mats and sleeping bags, courtesy of the Red Cross. Recycling bins and garbage

**At 5:30 a.m., 40 buckets of hot, seasoned porridge, enough to serve a thousand people, have already been delivered to the shelter at Chung-Cheng Industrial High School.**







**Tzu Chi volunteers purify their minds as they clean bathrooms at the shelter.**

set one up for you so you can sleep better.” She would not need to sleep on the hard floor this time.

#### **Donations and beds**

Whistles outside directed the multitudes of people arriving at the school in their cars or motorcycles, bringing in supplies to the victims taking shelter at the school. A motorcyclist brought several large boxes of bottled water; another person arrived in a car full of biscuits and instant noodles.

A small boy, weighed down with a dozen cans of tomato juice in his arms, went to the service desk, followed by his younger brother. The boy told a government worker there who was responsible for logging in donated goods that he wanted to donate the juice: “I think they must be very tired and need vitamin C. Mom told me that tomatoes had lots of vitamin C.” The boy’s kind-hearted gesture moved the government worker to tears.

Holding his two-year-old daughter in one arm, Yang Shu-wei (楊書偉) waited patiently in the hot sun for his turn to donate. He had learned from the Internet that the disaster area was in need of daily supplies, so he brought 40 packs of tissue paper and wet wipes. Looking at his daughter, he said, “If my baby were a victim, I’d like to see her get help. People who are more fortunate should of course help the afflicted.”

“Here come the folding beds from Tzu Chi!” someone shouted for all to hear. In just a few seconds, volunteers from various charities formed two relay lines to move the beds into the building.

The volunteers in the lines were a motley crew: marines in camouflage fatigues, college students in shorts, high school boy scouts, Christian volunteers in yellow vests, and a tall foreigner. They quickly relayed the mobile plastic beds into

cans stood outside each classroom. The bathrooms, though somewhat old, were always kept clean, dry, and stocked by Tzu Chi volunteers.

Along with the other evacuees, Zhou and Shen were escorted to their temporary home by Tzu Chi volunteers. Shen’s swollen legs were giving him a hard time, so with a frown on his face he began rubbing them. Volunteer Huang Guan-zhong (黃冠中) fetched a rolled-up sleeping bag and put it under Shen’s feet to make him more comfortable. Shen gazed at the volunteer for quite a while, then he turned to his wife and said, “These Tzu Chi folks are nicer than our own family.” She felt like crying.

Zhou had a heart condition, and it did not take much of a noise to wake her in the middle of the night. She needed rest, so Huang told her, “As soon as the Tzu Chi folding beds come in, I will

**A Tzu Chi doctor offers free medical services at Chung-Cheng Industrial High School.**

the 20 classrooms where Tzu Chi volunteers in twos and threes quickly set them up.

A total of 289 beds were made ready for use. The beds could be set up very easily. There was nothing to attach or assemble, and no tools whatsoever were required. All that was required was to open the folded bed and to gently press down on a few pressure points until the components of the bed snapped into place.

Someone asked, “Is the bed sturdy enough? Can I really lie on it?” A volunteer answered, “Go ahead and try it. The bed won a Red Dot Award [a prestigious design award] in Germany.”

With that, people began trying the beds out by sitting or lying on them. When they were sure that the beds were safe, they set to work putting mats on them. Couples linked their two beds together, while some families put four beds side by side so the four people in the family could sleep together.

Soon the place looked more comfortable. People sitting on their beds began talking to each other more freely. They had rarely talked the night before when they had to sleep on the floor. Some shared their horror stories from the night of the explosions. Occasionally laughter found its way into the conversation. It seemed that they just might sleep better that night.

#### **Individual attention**

Ke Qing-an (柯清安) lay alone in a bed, a walking stick leaning against it. A stroke had weakened the old man’s right side, but he lived alone so he was accustomed to doing things for himself. Now lying in the relative comfort of the portable bed, he felt a strong desire for someone to look after him and care for him.

“I don’t feel very well,” he said to volunteer Sun Tai-ying (孫台英). It was the first time that he had spoken in the shelter. Sun notified the medi-



cal station that members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) had set up on site. Soon Dr. Wang Qing-feng (王慶楓), pharmacist Cai Qing-yuan (蔡清源), and nurse Guo Mei-shan (郭美善) showed up at his bedside.

Wang leaned in close to the old man so he could hear him better and make sense of his halting, jumbled words. Then the doctor pressed on an acupuncture point to relieve the soreness and pain in the man’s right arm.

“Does it feel better?” Wang asked. Ke did not reply, too surprised by the realization that he could now raise his right arm and bend his right fingers much more easily—two feats that he had been unable to pull off since the stroke.

The school was the largest shelter in the aftermath of the gas explosions, and many non-governmental groups had rushed in to offer servic-



es. Compared to the people hustling and bustling outside, some of the evacuees in the classrooms looked spiritless and forlorn. To cheer them up, Tzu Chi volunteers summoned Cai Xiu-ying (蔡秀英), a hairdresser and also a Tzu Chi volunteer herself, to the school. Cai hurried over with her barbering and manicuring gear to serve people who needed service.

Lu Yong-rui (盧永瑞), 75, was the first to come to Cai. She cut his hair and trimmed his fingernails and toenails. His wife, Xu Yong-zhu (許永珠), asked Cai to also shave her husband's face, which was covered with stubble. After the careful makeover, Lu looked completely refreshed and rejuvenated, his old dispiritedness gone without a trace. He cheerfully strolled over to the mirror for a good look at himself and was pleased with what he saw. Previously, he had suffered from insomnia and hypertension, but those conditions had also improved thanks to prescriptions from a TIMA physician.

Shortly after, the couple's son came into the classroom to take them home. The son could not keep his tears from rolling down when he saw his parents so cheerful and well groomed. He was very grateful to the volunteers for taking such good care of his parents.

Cai's next customer, Ke Qing-an, staggered up to her with the help of his walking stick and asked her for a haircut and a shave. He specifically asked for a crew cut. When Cai was done, volunteers discovered how handsome Ke was. He was delighted when they told him so. He told them about the night of the explosions. Though he did so haltingly, it was nice to hear him talk—up to that moment he had been largely quiet in the shelter.

He told the volunteers that at first he thought it was a massive earthquake. When he heard a neighbor yell, "Run quickly," he pushed his wheelchair to the door of his home and gave the door a big shove. Through the open door, he saw fires blazing. His neighbors caught sight of him, put him in his wheelchair, and pushed him to a park. But about an hour later, it began to rain heavily, forcing him to return to his home. His home was still in danger, but under the circumstances it was the best he could manage.

When he was placed in the shelter, he intended to just ignore everybody. He had always lived alone and was something of a loner. He only opened up after he sensed the Tzu Chi volunteers' sincere care. Later, he even told the volunteers who had been caring for him, "I'll go home

once the electricity is restored. Be sure to come visit me when you guys have time."

### Hot meals

Hot rice porridge prepared by Tzu Chi volunteers seemed to relax the temporary residents at the school, and they opened up, talking about what they had experienced in the terrible disaster. Xu Chen Ying-jiao (許陳英嬌) never ate much, but at the shelter she finished two whole bowls of hot rice porridge one morning. She said, "It's so good to have hot porridge." Her good appetite really surprised and cheered her son, Xu Hui-qiang (許惠強). He went on to share his story about the explosions. "The walls in our house were all darkened by the smoke from the explosions and fires. The walls were still hot a day later."

Outside the school, a woman came to the Tzu Chi service station and said to the volunteers there, "We aren't residents of this shelter, but we wonder if we could also..." She seemed embarrassed to finish what she wanted to say. Eventually the volunteers found out that the woman, Lin Yue-ying (林月英), was there on behalf of her neighbors to ask for boxed meals from Tzu Chi.

Those people lived in a building behind the school. They could not cook because the natural gas lines had been shut off. Eateries in the neighborhood were also all closed, so they could not easily buy food to eat. In addition, they wanted to eat vegetarian meals to pray for blessings for the disaster victims. When they found out that Tzu Chi was giving out vegetarian meals, they had Lin represent them to ask for assistance.

In response to her story, volunteers began to deliver boxed meals to them, 42 at each lunch and dinner. Lin and a few of her neighbors were always waiting for them on the first floor of their building to receive the meals and distribute them to the residents. "The meals are delicious, and the portions are just right," they told the volunteers.

Once as volunteers were about to leave after a delivery, a man shouted out to them, "Thank you, Tzu Chi people. Thank you for responding to our calls for help."

### Ready or not

By August 3, water and electricity had been partially restored to the affected areas. That ought to have been welcome news, but the high school seemed to be filled with uneasiness instead.

The shelter was scheduled to close that day, and those who could not return home yet would have to be transferred to Puxian Temple or the Labor Education Center. The news prompted Tzu Chi volunteers to say goodbye to the people with whom they had spent much time in the previous few days. One of them, Zhou Xiang-mei, held the hand of a volunteer and cried.

"Actually, going home scares me because I feel lonely there," Zhou said. "I was planning on staying here a couple more days. With you people around, I feel better. Though I've been picky about where I sleep because I can't fall asleep in an unfamiliar bed, I've had no problem with your folding bed—I can go to sleep very quickly. But now I have to leave...."

Her house was not totally ready yet: Unstable water and power supply and a lingering strong odor from the explosions had made it uncomfortable to live in. But unwilling to go to another shelter, she chose to go home.

In the final hours at the school, people, some in tears, chatted with their acquaintances.

**Sitting on folding beds, shelter residents feel relaxed enough to chat with Tzu Chi volunteers.**

Much work and many uncertainties awaited them at home.

Ke Qing-an knew that his home still did not have water and power, but he chose to go home anyway. He got on his electric scooter, but he did not turn it on, not until he saw the volunteers who had been caring for him the last couple of days. The air was thick with the sadness of departure. A volunteer put several bottles of water and packs of tissue paper on his vehicle and asked him to take good care of himself. They also promised him they would visit him. With that, he went home.

The darkness of the night descended on the classrooms that had been temporary quarters for those victims. Volunteers folded the beds and got them ready to be shipped back to the local Tzu Chi office. After that, the original students' desks and chairs were put back in the classrooms, ready for the students to return.

From August 1 to 3, Tzu Chi volunteers put in more than 4,000 person-times at the school to help those taking shelter there. Many more volunteers from around Taiwan followed up with the tasks of caring for the victims and helping return their lives to normal.





# Thus I Saw and Heard

*I witnessed and heard about episodes of courage while volunteering for Tzu Chi in its disaster response efforts after the gas explosions in Kaohsiung: a mother consenting to donate her son's organ; a man helping eight victims escape from danger. Writing down their stories, I asked myself: Would I ever be as courageous as they were in the face of impermanence?*

**By Zhong Wen-ying**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

**Tzu Chi volunteers chat with a Mr. Zhang who was injured in the explosions. The bowl of adzuki bean soup in front of him was brought to him by the volunteers.**



I reached Kaohsiung Veterans General Hospital a few hours after the gas explosions and went directly to an intensive care unit, which was on the second floor. The entrance area to the ICU was packed with family members, people from the media, and volunteers from charitable organizations. To keep the noise down and clear access to the unit, hospital personnel eventually asked the volunteers and media people to move to a conference room on the sixth floor. After some time, the crowd in the conference room gradually thinned out and Tzu Chi volunteers went back to the area outside the ICU to keep family members company or to be available to help. Some of them talked with anxious family members so they could have an outlet for their emotions.

Before noon, 30 boxed meals, prepared at the local Tzu Chi office, were delivered to the hospital and given to the waiting family members. Some of them did not feel like eating, but volunteers reminded them that it was important for them to keep up their energy so they could take good care of their loved ones. This suggestion touched their hearts, and gave them courage to brace up for a future that might be tough to face.

## Good wishes

Many family members at the hospital had not slept since the explosions, 12 hours earlier. Having skipped a night's sleep, many of them looked weary as well as worried.

Amid this glum atmosphere, one couple in a corner of the room appeared particularly calm.

Mr. Wang, who himself had a loved one injured in the explosions, told us that the woman, Mrs. Hong, had been crying very hard when she first arrived at the hospital, around 2:00 a.m. Her son was critically injured. But she seemed to have calmed down during the past hours. When Mrs. Hong learned that her son probably would not survive, she said to her family, "Let's not cry. Our calmness and peace of mind are the best things we can give him now."

The son's girlfriend of seven years, Miss Huang, had rushed from Dajia, central Taiwan, to the hospital. She could not believe what had happened. "He only went out to buy some things. How could this happen?"

Miss Huang could not stop crying. Volunteers hugged her, and Mrs. Hong said to her, "His body has been badly damaged, so let him go get a new body and come back to this world." Mrs. Hong—whose own parents had even chosen to become a Buddhist monk and nun—and her husband were devout Buddhists and believed in reincarnation. As a result, they were able to draw strength from their faith and accept their son's death.

The hospital informed the Hong family that their son's national health insurance card showed that he had previously agreed to donate his body and organs in the event of his death. However, his body had been badly damaged in the explosions, leaving only the corneas of his eyes still viable for donation. The family decided to go ahead and donate what they could.

After the surgery to remove the corneas was completed, Mrs. Hong said with moist eyes that the remains of some victims could not even be found, so she thought that her son was fortunate to be able to donate his corneas. "My son didn't do much for society when he was alive, but he could at least help someone after his death."

I was truly impressed by Mrs. Hong's composure in the face of life's impermanence and how she was able to let go in such a short period of time and display such a courageous and positive attitude. I believe that the young Mr. Hong, with his parents' good wishes, will go to his next destination in perfect peace and joy.

At the same time, I asked myself: Will I be as courageous as they were when impermanence strikes me?

## In shock

Lin Xin-liang (林信良), a Tzu Chi volunteer, owns a vegetarian restaurant. After the explo-



sions, one of his employees, Mrs. Xie, asked for his assistance. Her son, 38, went to help rescue the injured after the explosions and didn't return home until after dawn. He had been unable to sleep well ever since. He said that as soon as he closed his eyes, he saw all over again the ghastly sights that he had witnessed. "Mom, why are human beings so fragile?" he asked her in tears.

On that fateful night, the son helped rescue eight people. One of them was a firefighter whose legs were trapped under an overturned fire engine. The truck had severed his legs almost all the way through, but not quite—so he remained stuck there.

**Volunteers visit a family in the vicinity of the explosions to show their care and find out if the family needs help.**

Beside Mrs. Xie's son, there were three other people around the firefighter, but none of them knew what to do. The injured firefighter, wanting very much to live, begged the four people to just pull him away from his legs. The four men, however, couldn't bear to do that. As they hesitated, the firefighter begged them repeatedly to just pull him free. "I will not blame you whatsoever for doing what you have to do," he said.

The men finally mustered their courage and yanked him out. Then an ambulance took the firefighter to a hospital. Mrs. Xie's son later heard that the firefighter died anyway because of an excessive loss of blood.

After going through such a heart-rending tragedy, the son was emotionally shaken. He even contemplated suicide. That was when Mrs. Xie asked Lin Xin-liang for help. Lin rounded up some volunteers and went to Xie's home.

"You were like a bodhisattva helping people like that," they told the son. "You were very brave. You've done noble deeds, so don't be sad or sorry. Life is like a play. When a person's part is over, he or she gets off the stage. We should all learn to let go."

After the visit, Lin often called the son to talk with him and see how he was doing. Gradually, he felt better. Mrs. Xie was extremely grateful for the volunteers' help. She hopes that more people will join charitable organizations to do good and make society better.

### Home visits

Tzu Chi initiated a home visit project soon after the calamity to help comfort people traumatized by the disaster and to identify families who needed help. The seemingly nonstop rains in early and mid-August did not stop volunteers from carrying out the project.

One morning, volunteers gathered in a heavy rain at San Sin High School. They held the gift packs to be distributed to the affected families under their ponchos to protect them from the rain. Then they set out.

Jiang Meng-qian (江孟倩), a volunteer from Taipei, carried one gift pack in each hand and an information packet under her arm. The rain was coming down hard, and the wind blew down the hood attached to her poncho. She pulled the hood back on only to have it blown off again. I asked if I could help her carry anything, but she declined.

She put the hood back on and clamped its edges in her mouth to keep the hood in place. Then she marched forward in the rain. "Are you okay?" I asked. She answered, "Sure. We're here to help. This rain is nothing."

Actress Chen Shu-li (陳淑麗) was in our group. She said that she couldn't stop tears from rolling down her face when she watched news reports on TV about the explosions. Then she heard about the home visit project, so she signed up.

"Did the explosions scare you?" Chen asked a Mr. Lin, who lived on Wuying Road. He replied that he had indeed been quite scared. Chen took a book out of a gift pack, handed it to him, and said, "I joined Tzu Chi over 20 years ago because of *Jing Si Aphorisms*," referring to the book that she had just taken out. Then she added, "We all live on the same land. You're just like my family." The man thanked Chen. He was grateful to Tzu Chi volunteers for visiting in such a heavy rain.

Dr. Lee Yi-pang (李彝邦) of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, who was also among the volunteers, greatly impressed me. His hair was cut so close to his head that he looked almost bald. He called it a hairstyle of "five savings": It took less water, electricity, time, shampoo, and money to wash his hair.

In one home that we went into, a disagreeable smell seemed to be coming from somewhere in the house, yet the living room was quite neat. Dr. Lee noticed that our host seemed to have difficulty walking freely, so he asked him to sit down and examined the wound on his foot.

A volunteer had told us that the oldest son of this family had lost many teeth and could definitely use some advice on oral hygiene from a physician, but he would not leave his room to meet the doctor in the living room. Dr. Lee went into his bedroom and discovered that it was the source of the foul smell. The smell did not deter him, though the heat in there made him sweat profusely. The son was playing computer games. Lee talked to him and tried to engage him in conversation, but the son simply ignored him.

Still, the doctor was not daunted. He said, "You're awesome, working two computers at the same time." Surprisingly, the son answered this time, "I'm playing several roles." His back was to the doctor, and he didn't look once at Lee. Lee continued to talk about online games to engage his attention, but all the while the son only nodded or shook his head in response, saying next to nothing.

Eventually Lee told the son how to care for his teeth, and the volunteers left this family. Though they did not appear to have accomplished much during the hour-long visit, Lee thought that they had at least learned that the family could really use some help. Volunteers would continue to care for this family and give what help they could to nudge the son out of his reclusion.

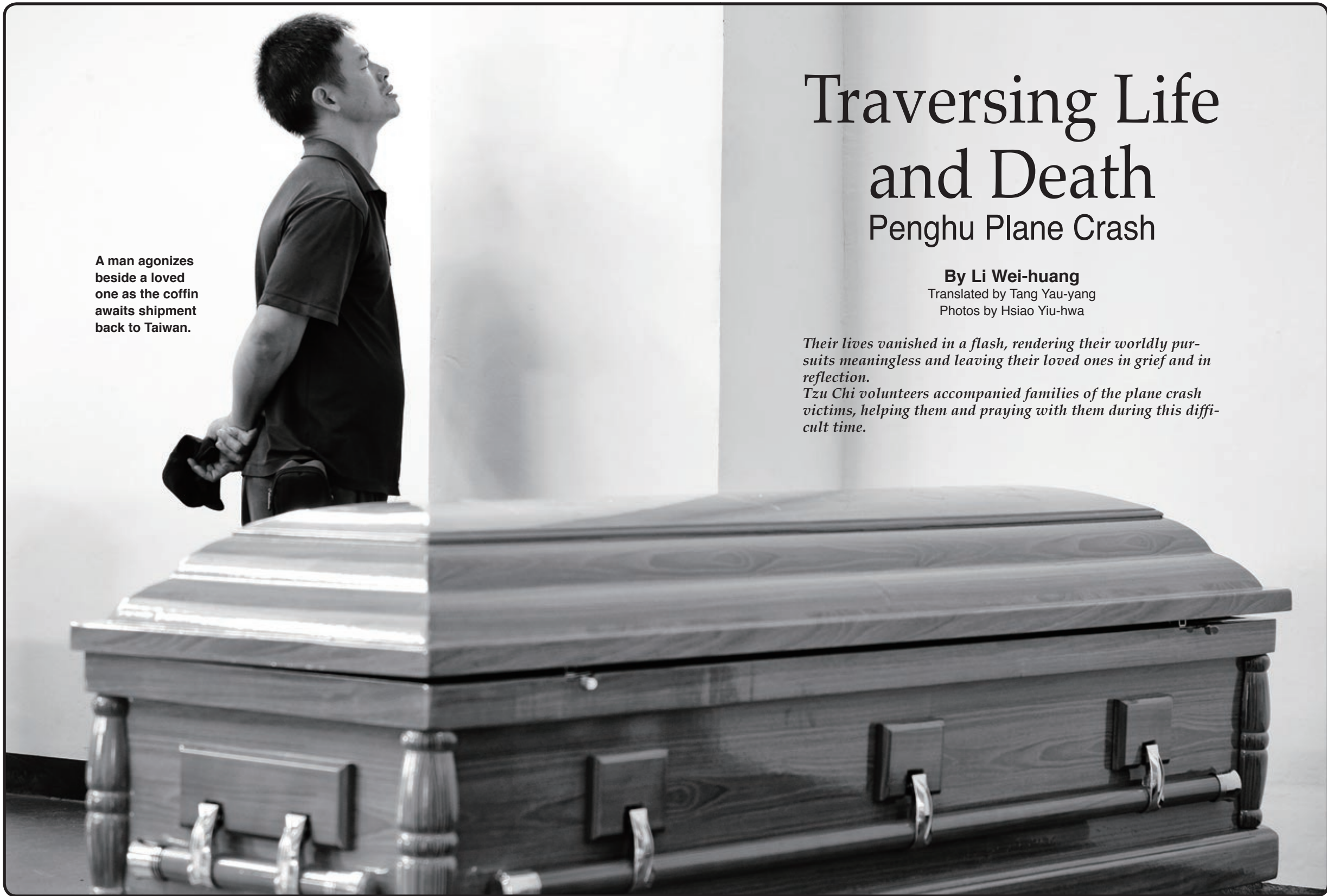
For more than a month after the explosions, I took part in the home visit project. What I saw taught me that I was blessed to be the one who gave instead of received, and that the blessed should go to the less fortunate to give them warmth and light.

Let us pool our love together and allow it to ripple out to every corner of the world. With such a great power of love, we'll be better able to help everyone gain happiness and live better lives.



WANG ZHONG-YI





A man agonizes beside a loved one as the coffin awaits shipment back to Taiwan.

# Traversing Life and Death

## Penghu Plane Crash

**By Li Wei-huang**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

*Their lives vanished in a flash, rendering their worldly pursuits meaningless and leaving their loved ones in grief and in reflection.*

*Tzu Chi volunteers accompanied families of the plane crash victims, helping them and praying with them during this difficult time.*



Policemen and firefighters inspect pieces of the plane wreckage scattered in Xixi Village. Fourteen buildings were damaged.







In the funeral home, family members check photos of recovered items which might have belonged to their loved ones.

### The crash

On July 23, 2014, Typhoon Matmo brought heavy rain, thunder and lightning to Penghu. In the bad weather, TransAsia Airways flight GE222, travelling from Kaohsiung to Magong Airport in Penghu, crashed into Xixi Village. Of the 58 passengers and crew on board, 48 were killed and 10 were injured.

When Chen Xiu-yun heard the news, she hurried to Kaohsiung International Airport to console family members of the passengers and crew who were waiting anxiously for news of their relatives. Within less than 12 hours, she and 38 fellow volunteers, setting aside their own affairs and carrying just a few changes of clothes, flew to Magong to provide what help they could.

The crash damaged 14 private homes. A section of the fuselage landed near the house of a Miss Yang without her even knowing about it, and a big piece of the airplane tail got stuck beside a wall of her house. When she realized that something had gone wrong, she put on a raincoat and went outside to take a look. Huge fireballs prevented her from getting too close, so she returned home and went to the second floor. From there, she saw that many emergency responders, without wasting time to put on rain gear, were scrambling to search for survivors or to remove bodies.

She would later find the sharp cries of some crash victims hard to forget. Yet despite the grisly sounds and sights, the rain, and the abhorrent smell, the responders—soldiers, police, and firefighters—handled the bodies or body parts with composure, respect, and without the slightest hesitation. She was very moved by what she saw.

Though the crash totally turned her life upside down and relatives and friends advised her to move away for a while, Miss Yang insisted on staying put. She had seen stories of the deceased in the news. They were all decent, good people, and her heart really went out to them. At the same time, she had seen heartwarming scenes of people helping out in the aftermath of the tragic event, such as the Tzu

Penghu, an island county located off the southwestern coast of Taiwan, was as sunny as ever on this hot afternoon, but the usual quiet was pierced by harrowing cries and wails, making Xixi, an otherwise serene village, not so peaceful. Family members of the

deceased cried loudly, while the smell from the burnt wreckage of the plane mingled with and seemed to add to the sadness in the air.

“My son lost his eyes [in the crash]. I’m afraid he can’t find his way home,” wailed one mother. Standing next to her was Chen Xiu-yun (陳秀雲),

holding an umbrella up to shade her from the scorching sun and putting her other arm on her shoulder as a gesture of comfort. Chen was one of the Tzu Chi volunteers from Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, who were on the scene to provide support to the families of the plane crash victims.



**Volunteers listen to a bereaved family member as she shares her sadness.**



Chi volunteers clad in their blue shirts and white pants. They showed up at the scene soon after the crash. They accompanied family members to the site, extended care to emergency responders, and did whatever they were asked to do. Miss Yang really admired what these people did, and her heart was soothed by what she witnessed.

In addition to helping out at the crash site, Tzu Chi volunteers held a prayer service for local residents four days after the disaster at the activity center in Xixi Village, hoping to bring peace to minds traumatized by the calamity. People whose homes were damaged took comfort in knowing that it could have been much worse, and they were glad that they had emerged from the disaster largely unscathed.

#### **By their side**

The 39 volunteers from Kaohsiung joined local Tzu Chi volunteers in serving people affected by the crash. They set up a service center on the grounds of a funeral home on July 24 so they could be close to mourning family members.

The local volunteers were generally at least 50 years old, mostly housewives, owners of small stores, public servants, or retirees. They divided up into three groups: One group covered the hospital, another the crash site, while the third covered the funeral home.

Volunteers accompanied the bereaved, chanted the Buddha's name for the deceased, visited families whose houses were damaged, delivered emergency cash and hot food, and helped in whatever other ways they could. They did this right up until the service center closed on August 3.

Xue Pei-qi (薛佩琪), despite being already 86, worked at the service center from morning till night. Guo Mei-jing (郭美靜) and her husband operated a breakfast truck, but during this time they often had to put off their business in order to drive other volunteers or care for the bereaved. Gao Zheng-fang (高正方) and his brother Gao Zheng-fu (高正福) repaired boats for a living, and they, like the Guos, put their volunteer work ahead of their business for the duration.

On July 23, Weng Shun-an (翁順安), who worked as an electrician at the Magong Airport, was in the airport traffic control tower repairing equipment damaged by lightning. As soon as he got off duty the next morning, he changed into his volunteer uniform and hurried to the funeral home to help out.

At the service center, 68-year-old Huang Jing-xing (黃景星) sometimes helped look after grieving family members, and sometimes he just sat quietly in a corner. He did not look particularly well. It turned out that his whole stomach had been removed because of cancer ten years earli-



Volunteers set up a service center after the plane crash, providing assistance and support in whatever way they could.





er. As a result of that, any food he ingested went straight from the esophagus to the small intestines. He could only eat small quantities of food at frequent intervals, and he was often bothered by acid reflux. Nevertheless, he wanted to offer what help he could.

At the time of the calamity, Huang was caring for his father-in-law at a hospital. He asked the old man to excuse him so he could join the Tzu Chi effort. His request was granted, and he quickly hired a substitute sitter before he and his wife, also a Tzu Chi volunteer, started their daily shifts at the funeral home.

When family members broke down, Huang and his wife would step up to help steady them, utter gentle words of comfort, or offer them tissue paper. It was hard for volunteers to be in this environment and not be affected by the emotions on the scene, but still the couple persisted in doing their best.

About two dozen of the deceased were registered residents of Penghu, and local volunteers

**The plane crash took lives and broke hearts. Volunteers were there for the bereaved, hoping to help make their excruciating journeys less painful.**

knew some of them personally. The volunteers therefore really wanted to help ease the pain that the family members felt and help them through this difficult time.

### Two crashes

Xu Chang-ci (許常次), another volunteer in Penghu, was in his 70s. When he arrived at the hospital after the plane crash, he heard a man say, "Oh, no! My son and daughter were both on this plane." The man was in such agony that he was almost unable to stand. As a parent, Xu could really feel for him.

The scene reminded Xu of another plane crash, on May 25, 2002, when a China Airlines plane disintegrated in midair near Penghu, killing all 225 onboard. Pieces of the wreckage and human remains fell into the ocean.

Xu volunteered to help that time too. He remembered meeting a father who was there to identify his son. Since recovery of human bodies in the sea is a much harder and more time-consuming task than on-land recovery, it took almost a month for his son's body to be found.

The father took two suits, one larger than the other, with him when he went to claim the body.

He did so because he did not know how swollen his son's body would be after being in the water for so long. Sadly, neither suit fit the remains. The father cried out, "How can he go to meet our ancestors without being properly dressed?"

For the crash in 2002, Xu and his wife shut down their clothing store for more than a month and devoted themselves to helping victimized families. Now, 12 years later, he was experiencing the aftermath of another crash. These experiences taught him that the physical body of a person is quite fragile, and he does not want to become attached to his own body. He has already instructed his family on how to handle his corpse when he passes away: "Go ahead and donate the entire body or viable organs. After the rest is cremated, just scatter the ashes into the sea or on land. It doesn't matter to me either way." He has seen through life and death.

Like Xu, Chen Yong-ting (陳永庭), a professional undertaker who has volunteered with Tzu Chi for more than 20 years, still has vivid memories of the 2002 crash. He remembers Taiwanese Coast Guard boats travelling back and forth on the sea recovering cadavers. There were so many corpses that the sailors were exhausted from moving them. They had nightmare after nightmare at night. Chen recalled clearly the sights and smells that he experienced when he accompanied family members to identify their loved ones. "I'll never forget them," he said. The sights and smells were so horrendous that they could knock one down. But Chen knew he could not shrink from the task at hand; he had to hang in there for the grieving families.

### Lesson learned

Wang Yu-mei (王玉梅), a longtime Penghu volunteer, was in Taipei visiting her family when the 2014 crash occurred. The next morning, she flew standby and arrived in Penghu just before noon. She rushed straight to the funeral home, without even taking time to eat lunch. Once there, she served meals to the families, did the dishes, cleaned bathrooms, picked up empty beverage bottles, and collected food waste from meal boxes, some of which had not even been touched.

She was in and out of the funeral home every day, and inevitably the atmosphere got to her. "I

go home and I can't help crying," she said. One of the victims was a friend's son.

Wang, too, has volunteered for Tzu Chi for more than 20 years, and she also clearly remembered the 2002 crash. Though that aircraft disintegrated in midair, she heard about the bodies of a couple found amidst the wreckage, their seats still next to each other, still holding hands.

In 2002 she worked through the entire care process from beginning to end. "I was busy for one month and 27 days—57 days in all," she recalled. The experience left an indelible memory.

Now, helping out in the 2014 crash, she knew that in moments of extreme pain and sadness, anything she could say to the bereaved would seem entirely superfluous. So, when she saw them crying, sometimes she just cried with them.

Some of the volunteers' voices became hoarse after chanting the Buddha's name for days in a row, but they didn't return home to rest. Instead, they toughed it out and stayed by the side of family members.

After being identified, some of the corpses were shipped back to Taiwan. One volunteer said that a family that he had accompanied said that at least they had found their beloved's body—even though it was incomplete—and they could now take him home.

Life is unpredictable. No one knows what will happen in the next moment. Some people had moved up their schedules and boarded the fateful flight while others had cancelled their reservations and avoided the tragedy. Neither could have known what their decisions would mean for them. Pondering the unpredictability of life, volunteers learned from the disaster to be less attached to worldly things. Penghu volunteer Wang Li-yun (王麗雲) said that when it was her time to go, she just hoped to have a piece of cloth over her body.

Kaohsiung volunteer Huang Mei-yu (黃美玉), on the other hand, learned from this experience to cherish her loved ones. Having seen the pain of the bereaved families as they wailed in anguish for losing their loved ones, she said, "For those of us who still have our families around us, we must appreciate these 'blessings at our fingertips,'" she said. "Love people around us and treasure every moment—this is all we can do." ❀





# A New Recycling Experience

*Pingdong, a city of 200,000, is located in the far south of Taiwan. The city government has implemented a new model for handling its recyclables. Now on a designated day and time each week, residents take their recyclables to one of about a hundred locations throughout the city. There, Tzu Chi volunteers and private recyclers take over.*

**By Ye Zi-hao**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang  
Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

At one recyclables collection point, a resident helps label baskets for plastics, metals, or other types of recyclables. The red-on-white signs say, "Property of Pingdong City. Do not remove. Violators will be prosecuted."







**A Pingdong city sanitation worker leaves collection baskets at a designated site before Tzu Chi volunteers arrive. Since the fixed-point, fixed-time collection program came into effect, recycling trucks have stopped tagging along behind garbage trucks to pick up recyclables; consumption of petroleum and emissions of carbon dioxide have thus been cut down. That's one more benefit for the environment.**

One Tuesday evening, a loudspeaker in the Dazhou neighborhood of Pingdong blared out a public message: "Our city and Tzu Chi have joined together in doing recycling. From seven to eight tonight, take your recyclables to the square diagonally opposite Chaofeng Temple."

Before seven that evening, Tzu Chi volunteers were already at the square guiding residents to deposit their recyclables into the proper collection baskets. If volunteers found that someone had mixed garbage in with the recyclables, they advised him not to do so. They also reminded people of the need to clean their recyclables by rinsing off containers of sugary liquids or greasy food before bringing them to the collection point.

About an hour later, a Tzu Chi volunteer drove a city truck to the site, picked up the recyclables, and delivered them to a nearby Tzu Chi recycling station. Other volunteers cleaned

up the collection point and restored it to what it was before.

This scenario repeats itself every week at this square, as well as at more than a hundred other sites throughout the city. This joint program, the first public and private collaboration of its kind in Taiwan, has been in operation since March 17, 2014.

### **The heritage program**

Before the new program came into effect, city recycling trucks used to tag along behind garbage trucks as they made their rounds through the neighborhoods. Back then, the city contracted out the recycling part of the pickup service. The pickup trucks were provided by the city; the contractor was responsible for the operating costs, such as truck drivers, other workers, and gasoline. Part of the proceeds from the sale of collected recyclables went to the city, and the contractor kept the remainder.

This arrangement worked until recently, when the prices of recyclables plunged and more individuals collected recyclables to sell for themselves. The profits of the city contractor were severely diminished.

The contractor's income was further reduced by the large amounts of actual garbage that city residents threw in along with their recyclables. After collection trips, city employees examined the stuff residents had brought and found that garbage made up as much as 30 percent of what was being picked up by the recyclers. Garbage fetches no money, and it takes a lot of time to clean up when it contaminates otherwise good recyclables.

Eventually, the contractor's profit margin decreased so much that he was willing to pay a penalty to terminate the contract with the city. The city did not have the resources to take over the recyclables collection. In the end, city officials were able to sweet-talk the contractor into honoring the terms of the contract, although he would not renew it after it expired.

The city started calling for bids from prospective new contractors in October 2013, but the initial bid process failed to produce a new contractor. The city tried three more times to secure a bid for the job, but all without success.

To attract bidders, the city later waived its share of sale proceeds, leaving all the money to the successful bidder. Still there were no takers. City officials were now really worried. They began to consider the worst-case scenario, that the city's sanitation staff would have to take over the responsibility.

But that would not have been a happy solution. To handle recyclables in-house, the city would have had to increase their budget US\$330,000 per year for personnel, fuel, and vehicle maintenance. The total revenue from the sale of recyclables in 2013 was only US\$60,000. It would have cost Pingdong citizens US\$270,000 a year if the city itself had taken over the job of handling the recyclables. Submitting a budget request for such a large sum was not very appealing to government officials. They were eager to find a better solution.

### **A new idea**

In the midst of their brainstorming for a way forward, one government official threw out a question: "Why not try Tzu Chi?" Although the foundation had never done anything like that with the city before, it had been actively involved

with recycling for more than two decades. City officials saw a glimmer of hope.

Tzu Chi was open to the idea, but there were details to be ironed out. In late December 2013 the two sides started negotiations on the matter. Initially, city officials suggested maintaining the current model for picking up and processing the recyclables, the only difference being that Tzu Chi would step in to take the place of the contractor. In other words, volunteers would drive recycling trucks behind city garbage trucks. Then they would deliver the collected recyclables to Tzu Chi recycling stations for further processing and sale. The proceeds would go to the foundation to support its charity work.

However, Tzu Chi volunteers pointed out that such an arrangement would probably not address the knotty old issue of collecting a lot of garbage mixed in with the recyclables. They believed that this problem could only be solved if the environmental awareness of the city residents could be raised. Volunteer Huang Li-xiang (黃麗香) implored city officials to lead citizens in a grass-roots effort to recycle. Only through widespread civic involvement could their joint efforts, limited in manpower and other resources, be expected to bear fruit throughout the city.

Their discussions gradually converged toward a new idea: Residents would be instructed to take recyclables to a fixed central location in their community between seven and eight o'clock on a fixed evening of the week for collection. The new proposal contrasted sharply with the old way in many points. Instead of several days a week, city residents would take out their recyclables just one day a week. Before, residents used to take recyclables to a curbside in their immediate neighborhood for truck pickup, but now they would have to take their recyclables to a central collection point in their community, generally a longer trip for most people. Instead of putting all their recyclables in one big bag, residents would be expected to sort their recyclables and put them into appropriate baskets at the collection point in their community. Instead of following garbage trucks on their routes, recycling trucks would pick up at central collection points only. Most importantly, only clean recyclables would be welcome.

City officials and Tzu Chi volunteers decided the roles that each organization would play in this program: Officials would work with neighborhood administrators to ensure that suitable collection sites were available, and they lined up



enough collection baskets to accept deposits from residents. Tzu Chi volunteers, on the other hand, would show residents how to properly sort their recyclables at the collection points, transport recyclables to nearby Tzu Chi recycling stations, and clean up the venues afterwards.

### Preparations

The proposal appeared very feasible, but in the face of this unprecedented collaboration, city officials and Tzu Chi volunteers wanted to make sure that all bases were covered.

Volunteers sought approval from Master Cheng Yen, who encouraged them to go for it. Since the proposal would require grassroots involvement of many people in Pingdong, it would be right in line with the Tzu Chi ideal of getting everyone and every family to recycle. But she reminded the volunteers to steer clear of politics and elections. She also told them that detractors would most likely appear. She added the wise advice that if the volunteers were certain that the program was the right thing to do, they should not let different opinions distract them from their efforts.

City officials, for their part, consulted legal authorities on the propriety of such a public-private collaboration. "The expert legal opinion

**A city resident puts her recyclables into the appropriate baskets.**

we obtained was that since Tzu Chi would need to put in more than it would get out of this collaboration," said Pingdong Mayor Yeh Shou-shan (葉壽山), "there would be no risk of cronyism or illicit kickbacks."

Once the proposal had been cleared on both sides to proceed, the teams got to work.

The city printed 70,000 flyers and distributed them to city households to announce the new program. Then, in mid-March 2014, about a thousand neighborhood administrators gathered at the city hall for a workshop. Tzu Chi volunteers explained to them why recycling was necessary, why it was important to collect only clean recyclables, and how to conduct the fixed-point, fixed-time recycling campaign.

To raise awareness and to prepare constituents for the project, volunteers conducted four information sessions for city residents and four more for foundation volunteers who might be involved with the campaign.

Volunteer Guo Yi-zhang (郭宜彰) was in charge of the awareness sessions. He pointed out that citizens would be doing at least three good things by taking part in this program.

The first good thing occurs when a person puts an item into a collection basket. This simple act embodies love for Mother Earth.

Secondly, when a person removes filth or dirty contents from a recyclable item before taking it to the collection point, the person is doing



**Xie Lin Jin-zhi (right), 91, works at a collection point near her home. Baskets supplied by the city are labeled for paper, plastic bottles and glass bottles.**

another good thing, because he or she spares the Tzu Chi volunteers who process the recyclables the foul smells and insects that such contents often exude or attract.

Thirdly, the proceeds from the sale of recyclables go to help the foundation do good. Donors can take comfort in knowing that they're contributing to a good cause, simply by recycling.

### Implementation

The city sanitation team divided the city into four zones with about a hundred collection points. The joint recycling program takes place in the north, south, west, and east zones on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, respectively. On those nights between seven and eight o'clock, city residents may take their recyclables to the nearest collection point for disposal.

Tzu Chi volunteers work at 85 percent of the collection points, and private individuals handle the rest. This is done so as not to deprive individual scavengers of their livelihoods.

A dozen or so large city-supplied baskets are placed at each collection point just before the event opens for the night. Each basket is clearly labeled to receive a specific category of recyclables, such as paper, plastic, or metal.

It is fairly straightforward for people to deposit their things into the proper baskets, but volunteer workers are on hand to help any one who is uncertain about or unfamiliar with the process. If a resident brings in recyclables mixed with rubbish, volunteers will point that out and advise the person to bring only clean recyclables to the venue. Residents have been receptive to this kind of on-the-spot education, and they mindfully do their part to help protect the Earth.

### Participating volunteers

With regard to volunteer involvement, since the program started it has logged a weekly average of 460 person-times, or nearly 2,000 person-times a month. That's the number of times volunteers have served for the project.

Most of the participating volunteers work at collection points, where they help people with proper sorting, keep an eye on things so that garbage does not slip through, and sort through collected items so they become easier to handle





LIN MEI-YU

**Tzu Chi volunteer Guo Yi-zhang explains the new recyclables collection program to Pingdong residents at an information session.**

after they are delivered to a recycling station. Some volunteers drive city recycling trucks to pick up items at collection points and transport them to Tzu Chi recycling stations. Drivers start to work at eight o'clock, when the collection points close, and it is usually after nine by the time they finish.

Volunteer Yang Zhi-cheng (楊志成) is a cooking oil wholesaler. Out of his own pocket, he paid his three company drivers to drive recycling trucks. Despite having to work so late, the drivers agreed to take part in this program. After they had witnessed how Tzu Chi volunteers gave of themselves, they even refused the extra pay. They have been serving for free ever since.

Xie Lin Jin-zhi (謝林金枝), 90, walked slowly from her home to the collection point across from Daitian Temple. "I work here from seven to eight every Wednesday," she said. "It's good for my health and good for the earth." Wang Jiu (王就), 82, and Wu Cai-mei (吳彩眉), 77, also worked there that night. They may be a bit slow because of their age, but their mindfulness is unrivaled. They usually volunteer at the local recycling station, so working at the collection point is not really extra work for them.

After trucks haul away the day's collection, volunteers clean up the sites before leaving for the night. When people walk past these sites in the morning, they see no signs of the recycling activities the night before.

It has been several months since the program took off. The residents of Pingdong have grown accustomed to the new routine, and they respect the need to clean their recyclables before taking them to a collection point.

From March to May, the city collected a thousand tons less garbage, a 9.35 percent reduction compared to the same period in 2013. This means that people are paying more attention to recycling stuff instead of simply throwing away everything as unrecyclable garbage. In addition, whereas the city contractor used to collect recyclables that contained 30 percent garbage, it is now not even one percent.

When you and I take part, we can really make a difference. ☸





# Bringing Light to Lives Darkened by **AIDS**

*Prisoners with AIDS are not covered in Singapore's well-run 3M healthcare systems. In an effort to help this neglected group of people, the Tzu Chi Foundation offers them subsidies for AIDS medications without regard to ethnicity or religion. Foundation volunteers also share Jing Si aphorisms with inmates, hoping to help nourish them spiritually. They do what they can to help brighten the world of these AIDS victims.*

Tzu Chi volunteers wait to get into an AIDS patient's home.



By Zheng Ya-ru

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

**T**hough he offered his hand in a friendly and grateful gesture, I hesitated for a split second, quickly calculating whether to shake his hand or not. In the next instant, I had taken his hand in mine, giving him a firm handshake, and with it my best wishes. But after we parted ways, I could not help checking my hands for signs of open wounds. I could not stop wondering if we had stood close enough that his saliva might have somehow landed in my mouth. I could not even resist examining a mosquito bite on my arm. I was clearly getting carried away, my fear getting the best of me.

“Working with AIDS patients is not as unsafe as most people think,” said Karen Lim (林祖慧), a social worker who for the past 15 years has worked at the Tzu Chi Singapore branch. Her composure and steady tone made me feel a bit more secure.

It dawned on me that, despite my ostensible acceptance of AIDS patients, I actually wasn’t without doubt and fear when I was in their presence. I still had a ways to go to really accept them, not to mention be a good listener to them and provide care and moral support for them.

Fortunately, a group of volunteers in Singapore have been doing just that. Instead of maintaining the general indifference of mainstream society, these volunteers have learned the facts about the disease and are unafraid to go into communities and prisons to accompany people afflicted with this dreaded disease.

#### The stigma

Lily (not her real name), 49, lives in an old flat. She is divorced, an ex-convict, and suffers from bipolar disorder and AIDS. Her life spiraled downwards years ago after her divorce, and she started using drugs as a way to ease her pain. She was committed to prison in 2010. After



A woman in Tzu Chi's AIDS drug subsidy program embraces a Tzu Chi volunteer visiting her home.





**An ex-con receives a copy of *Tzu Chi Quarterly* from volunteers. The summer 2013 issue contains stories of ex-convicts who have turned over a new leaf.**

she was diagnosed with AIDS, she was relegated to an isolation cell and was granted a mere half hour of activity time out of her cell per day.

This treatment certainly did nothing to help her live with AIDS. She did not know the facts about the disease, and the bits of misinformation that she had heard through the grapevine scared her half to death. She felt that the medicine she was taking was useless and worried that she would die in jail.

She was released from prison in 2011, but she had nowhere to go and nobody to whom she could turn. She stayed away from old friends because she did not want to fall back into her old ways. Instead, she sought help from charities, including Tzu Chi. She worked odd jobs but tired easily because of her illness. She was often depressed. Though she was a Christian, she dared not go to church; every time she went, she

felt that Jesus Christ was crying for her. She blamed herself for making her savior cry.

She is currently out of a job. The only thing that keeps her going is her twice-a-week visits to her boyfriend in jail, even though he used to beat her after he had taken drugs. His violence put so much pressure on her that she lost ten kilograms (22 pounds) in a short time. Despite that, she waits eagerly for his release. "I told him about my disease, but he said that he didn't mind and he still wanted to be with me," Lily said.

Madan (not his real name), 42, also suffers from AIDS. He is of Indian descent. He was in and out of prison twice between 2011 and 2014. He had planned to join his girlfriend after his second release, but when he went home she was nowhere to be found. She had disappeared with all the valuables in his house. Madan was in poor shape financially. He was desperate, hav-



**Madan, left, talks with volunteer Hong De Qian in a park after work. Madan is depressed because his girlfriend left him and took all his assets. Hong tries to cheer and console him.**



ing lost his love and his possessions in one fell swoop. It was at this time that he remembered the Tzu Chi volunteers who had visited him in jail. They had told him that he could call them if he ever needed help. He called them and received some emergency assistance that carried him through that hard time.

He now lives with his mother and works in the transportation industry. His vision has deteriorated because of AIDS. When he skips work because he does not feel well, his mother chides him for being lazy. She does not know that her son has AIDS.

He was alone when he met with us. His old-fashioned cell phone still showed an intimate photo of him and his ex-girlfriend on its home page. He was mostly quiet while he was with us and did not smile once the whole time.

#### AIDS subsidy program

Since 1985, when the nation identified its first AIDS victim, there have been 6,229 confirmed cases. These patients face many challenges, many of which are not even medical. In addition



to dealing with fear and prejudice, they have to manage their finances well to pay for expensive medications. The average bill for drugs runs about 190 Singapore dollars (US\$147) a month. Individuals pay more or less depending on the severity of their illness. Some people pay as much as 1,200 dollars (US\$928) a month.

The financial challenge that accompanies AIDS is often the last straw that breaks patients' will to fight the disease. When that happens, they simply skip treatments and let the disease destroy their bodies. This could have happened to a Mr. Chen in 1998. His family was overwhelmed by his medical expenses, so much so that his wife sought help from the Tzu Chi Singapore branch. As a result, the foundation issued a check to the Communicable Disease Centre (CDC) of Singapore to help defray Mr. Chen's drug expenses.

A social worker at the CDC noticed that check, which eventually led Tzu Chi to an organized effort to provide care for AIDS patients. "The CDC contacted us in 1999 and asked us to subsidize drug costs for AIDS patients," recalled Karen Lim, the social worker at Tzu Chi Singapore. Up to that time, the government of Singapore did not subsidize AIDS drugs. "Subsidizing medication for AIDS thus became an area in which our foundation could help out."

When the CDC notified Tzu Chi of individuals needing aid, volunteers began the assistance process. They also made home visits and organized gatherings for patients. Feeling encouraged and cared for, some patients even began participating in Tzu Chi activities or helping with the foundation's recycling work.

Then in 2010, Singapore's Ministry of Health extended Medifund assistance to cover HIV treatment. Medifund is an endowment fund set up by the Singaporean

**Volunteer Ooi Hooi Cheng, 71, received in 2014 a Certificate of Appreciation for Pioneer Generation and a Five Year Long Service Award from the Singapore Prison Service. He has worked with inmates with AIDS for five years.**

**Volunteer Chee Meng Yan is a taxi driver. His flexible hours have enabled him to help inmates on a long-term basis. Inmates wrote to him last year to wish him a speedy recovery after an operation.**

government to help needy people who are unable to pay for their medical expenses. This was great news for AIDS patients in Singapore, who were then generally able to afford their drug therapy.

However, prisoners with AIDS were excluded from this government health-care coverage. Tzu Chi thus shifted the focus of its AIDS subsidy program from the general public to prisoners. Karen Lim explained that prisoners were largely unable to afford AIDS drugs, and as a result they could die while incarcerated. "They really needed help, so in 2009, at the invitation of Changi Prison, Tzu Chi officially started subsidizing AIDS drugs for inmates."

#### Behind bars

In the beginning, the assistance that Tzu Chi gave to inmates was confined to drug subsidies. Then, in an effort to meet the spiritual needs of the inmates as well, Lim inquired about the possibility of giving inmates lessons on Jing Si aphorisms by Master Cheng Yen. Prison management allowed volunteers to give such lessons provided that each volunteer first took a training course, passed a test, and was issued a prison volunteer ID.

Hong De Qian (洪德謙), a Tzu Chi volunteer who attended the course, said of the prison training program, "They taught us how to interact with inmates, explained to us some crimes and criminal codes, and pointed out prison rules and regulations for us to follow. We had to sign our consent to obey their rules."

Hong is one of ten Tzu Chi volunteers in this prison-visiting program. They average 60 years of age. Most of them are either retired or have jobs that allow flexible work hours. All of them have years of experience visiting people in need. In a typical weekly visit, they show their prison volunteer IDs to enter the main entrance. They



sign in in a building separate from the prison, go through other required procedures, and leave their personal effects behind. Only then do they enter a cellblock. After several checkpoints, they finally reach a room where they have two hours with the inmates.

It is not a lot of time to spend with the inmates, given the amount of effort to get there, so volunteers strive to make the best use of every minute. Each of them does his or her job. Most of the time, Lo Hsu Hseh Yu (徐雪友), a senior volunteer, and Hong De Qian, an eloquent speaker, do the talking. They mostly discuss Jing Si aphorisms and share related stories. They also show films to supplement their message. They encourage inmates to share their thoughts in an attempt to get to know them better.

Most volunteers can speak both Chinese and English, but they choose to speak only Chinese in class. That way, they can ask class participants to translate the lessons into English. Experience tells them that student interpreters often get much more out of the class than they normally would otherwise.





Tzu Chi volunteers regularly visit prisons to work with inmates suffering from AIDS. After years of service, volunteers have won the trust of the inmates.

“We explain the aphorisms in terms that people can relate to in their everyday lives, and we steer clear of religion so that we can appeal to people of any faith,” said Lim. The residents of Singapore are primarily of Chinese, Malay and Indian descent, and an analysis by the Pew Research Center found Singapore to be the world’s most religiously diverse nation, so messages about universal values are often the most widely accepted.

Ooi Hooi Cheng (黃暉卿), 71, has served on the Tzu Chi prison-visiting team for five years. This year he received a Certificate of Appreciation for Pioneer Generation and a Five Year Long Service Award from the Singapore Prison Service. Ooi has made it a point to memorize the names and backgrounds of the prisoners who have taken classes. With such information readily available, he can better console them when they feel down. He often encourages inmates to look at the bright side. “Though you can hardly do much while locked up, you can at least work to enrich your mind and improve your health,” he tells prisoners that he meets.

His fellow volunteer, Chee Meng Yan (朱明仁), also received a Certificate of Appreciation for Pioneer Generation this year. What Chee knew of inmates, before his first prison visit, was formed mostly from what he had seen on TV, which generally portrayed convicts in a stereotypical and unflattering light. “After visiting them in the prison, I find out that they, like us, cry and laugh too.”

#### Heartfelt embraces

Tzu Chi volunteers write case reports for inmates in the foundation’s drug subsidy program, just as they do for needy people or households they regularly visit. In gathering data from inmates for the reports, Hong De Qian was particularly impressed by Gary (not his real name), a 28-year-old prisoner. “He had a very bad attitude when I asked him for information,” Hong recalled. “He felt that he was just getting some medicine—why did he need to answer so many questions? He was very impatient.”

But his attitude changed later, as evidenced by the following episode. About a year after Tzu Chi volunteers had started the aphorism classes,



Gary told Hong during a class that his mother had recently visited him and told him that his four-year-old daughter had died of illness. Though shocked and sad, Gary said to her, "Mom, I love you." His mother was at first surprised by his unusual expression of feelings. Then tears streamed down her face. The two of them embraced and cried. Gary told Hong that he had felt much better after that big cry.

Prompted by Gary's sharing, Hong asked the class how long it had been since they had last expressed their love to their families. His question unexpectedly

caused several inmates who had usually appeared strong to cry. The effect of this episode remained with those present. Many inmates subsequently opened up and expressed their care and regrets to their own families when their families visited them.

Hong said that almost every one of the inmates has a copy of Jing Si aphorisms compiled by Tzu Chi volunteers. "Many have committed the sentences to memory, and some of them can even tell you where sentences such as 'We mustn't delay in doing good deeds and practicing filial piety' and 'Getting angry is temporary insanity' appear in their copy." But what moved Hong the most was not their capacity to recite but their courage to put these wise words into action.

Volunteers never ask their subjects on their prison visits why they are in prison or how they got infected. They talk to them only about the present and the future, not the past. They also do not treat prisoners like contagious patients. Instead, they hug and shake hands with them quite normally.

"We are aware of the need to protect ourselves," said Chee. "We don't have body contact with them if we have open wounds. In those situations, we tell them so frankly and ask them to understand." Chee believes that being frank and open is the best way to win the acceptance of inmates.

The volunteers have worked with the inmates for a long time and have won their trust and friendship. Inmates asked after and sent their regards to volunteers Lo Hsu Hseh Yu when her father passed away, when Chee Meng Yan had an operation, and when Hong De Qian hurt his foot.

The inmates also show their appreciation in other ways. They are allowed two outbound letters a month. Some inmates used both of theirs to write to volunteers.

Some of them wrote a joint letter to volunteers saying, among other things, "We're but a group of people who have done wrong for which we're serving time, but you come to care

for us all the same. Thank you for helping us without regard to our religions. That really warms our hearts."

### Long road back to society

Volunteers currently teach aphorism classes to male inmates at Cluster A and Cluster B and to women at the Changi Women's Prison, which are all within the Changi Prison Complex. Close to a hundred inmates attend these classes; 56 of them are in Tzu Chi's AIDS drug subsidy program.

After each class, Lim informs correction officers on what transpired in the class. "I've also invited the officers to watch a sutra adaptation staged by Tzu Chi volunteers, and I've talked to them about how to do recycling in the prison," Lim said.

The favorable impression that Tzu Chi volunteers have made on prison management can be shown in the following two examples. Prison rules do not allow visitors to bring in their own containers for drinking water. Therefore, volunteers used to have to use prison-supplied single-use cups. After being exposed to the volunteers' conservation messages, prison officials placed ceramic mugs—made by inmates—in Clusters A and B for Tzu Chi volunteers to use. Officials also invited Lim to give a lesson on AIDS prevention at the end of each month for inmates being released from incarceration into society.

Tzu Chi offers emergency assistance to ex-cons to help ease their reintegration into society. Volunteers also encourage them to repair their relationships with their families. In addition, Lim and her fellow volunteers do presentations or lead activities at halfway houses. "We hope to help ex-prisoners learn more about Tzu Chi, and we hope that they will seek us out when they need help in the future," Lim said.

Some of them, like Lily and Madan, have sought help from the foundation. Lim firmly believes that on-going follow-ups with ex-convicts are essential to helping them in a substantive manner. "If we don't follow up, we'll never know what their real problems are," she asserted.

Ivan, 38, was released not long ago. Perhaps because of the considerable difficulties of returning to society, he had thought about giving up on

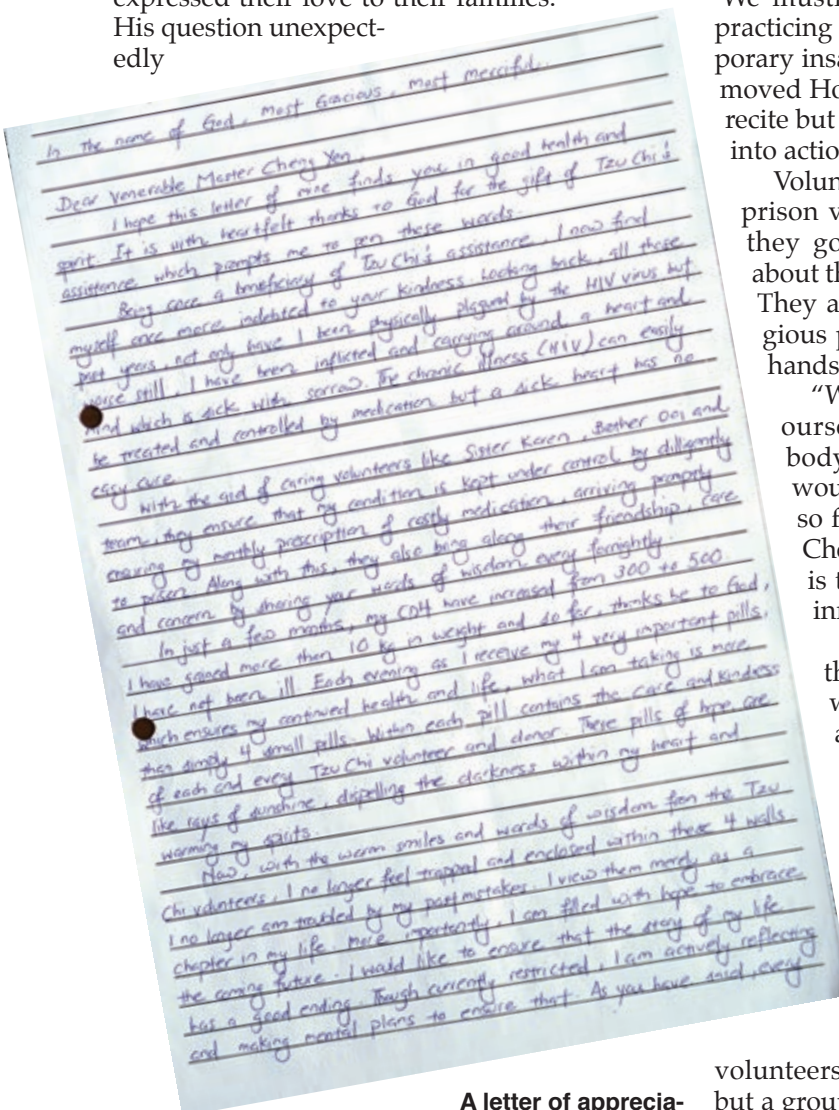
himself. But the Jing Si aphorism classes that he had attended in prison helped him kindle positive thoughts towards the future. He has since found work and returned to a normal life.

Ivan was not entirely forthcoming in the process of looking for work. He told his current employer that he had AIDS but said nothing about his imprisonment. "My boss is really nice to me. He knows that I have a weak immune system due to AIDS," Ivan said. "One time I was out sick for three months, and he still let me keep my job."

There is no denying that difficulties abound on the road back to normalcy for all ex-convicts, and their situations only get tougher when they have AIDS. When they encounter prejudices and all those other things that are stacked against them, they get frustrated. Who would not feel the same? At times like those, Tzu Chi volunteers become a safety net for them. They listen to what is on their minds, give them support, and take slow steps with them as they attempt to reestablish themselves in mainstream society.

That reestablishment process is long, and, as if the stigmas and prejudices were not enough, ex-cons face the real danger of relapsing into their old ways by re-associating with their previous bad influences. "When I met my old buddies after my release, they asked me to peddle drugs for them again," Lily remarked. "But I said 'no way.' I don't want to touch drugs ever again. One bad thing about drugs is that they lead you to contract diseases." Having already had a disastrous experience with drugs, she said that she had no more time to waste on them. "All I want is to live a normal life."

The image of my hesitant handshake with a friendly AIDS sufferer at the beginning of this article suddenly flashed back in my mind. Anybody could have that kind of hesitation, and that is proof enough that there is an invisible wall between those of us in the mainstream, and people on the fringes. They want very much to climb over that tall wall to reach us, to become us. Let us be among the first to remove a brick from that wall. Let us be the ones to help bring the wall down.



A letter of appreciation from an inmate



# Foreign Seafarers Go Ashore

## Sobirin Gets a Health Checkup

By Hu Qing-qing, Xu Yue-e, and Zheng Chun-chun  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang

*Although Sobirin works on a Taiwanese fishing boat, he originally hails from Indonesia. He is like so many others, men that left their home countries and work hard to support their families back home. On water for long durations of time, they have to endure cramped living conditions and loneliness.*

*The law restricts shore access for foreign seamen when their boats are moored in ports in Taiwan, but this day Sobirin and many other foreign fishermen got ashore for a special occasion—to get health examinations. This was Sobirin's first medical checkup ever.*

Sobirin, a fishing boat worker from Indonesia, stands on the deck of the boat he works on and looks at the goings-on on land. The law prohibits foreign seamen like him from going ashore without cause when their boats are moored in port.



ZHANG JING-MEI



Though it was already mid-September, the scorching sun pounding down made it as hot as summer in southern Taiwan. Donggang, a fishing port in Pingdong County, was packed with fishing boats, but it was quiet with few pedestrians walking around in the 90-degree heat.

Sobirin lay lazily in a hammock on one of the boats, swinging rhythmically to and fro, his legs dangling over the sides of the hammock, his eyes loosely closed. The boat was moored in the port to pick up supplies, but because he was a foreign seafarer working on a Taiwanese boat, by law he was not allowed ashore. Instead of stretching his legs on land, he whiled away his time in this hammock in a cramped space aft.

He had been a crew member on this boat for 18 months. As the salty, moist sea breezes wafted across the boat, he thought of his hometown in Java, Indonesia. That brought a smile to his face as the hammock rocked gently back and forth.

"Sobirin!" someone called out. He sat up and looked towards the voice. A middle-aged man and a few people dressed in uniforms of blue shirts and white pants were standing by the boat. "Hurry up and follow me to the fishermen's association for a health checkup," the man said in Taiwanese to Sobirin, pointing at a building onshore.

Sobirin and his fellow workers knew this man: Huang Jin-tiao (黃金條), a representative of the local fishermen's association. But they did not dare to move. "It's OK," Huang added, trying to reassure the foreign fishermen. "I already cleared this with your boss." Just then the owner of the boat arrived. He motioned to his workers that it was indeed okay to get off the boat. With the owner's express permission, the men quickly walked from the stern to the bow and jumped off the boat.

Sobirin and his fellow foreign workers kept pace with Huang, their boss, and the others. As the group of people walked along a path flanked by Taiwanese rain trees, a breeze rattled the branches and sprinkled yellow flowers around. Though still not sure about the exact purpose of this visit, Sobirin was glad for the chance to go ashore and walk on solid ground. He felt cheerful.

**An interpreter explains to foreign workers things they need to pay attention to while they wait for their ultrasound examinations.**

### Clinic by the wharf

It was barely 9:00 on this Sunday morning, but the area outside the Donggang fishermen's association building was already bustling with people. Above the entrance to the building hung a red banner that read, "Donggang Healthcare Event held jointly by the Tzu Chi International Medical Association and the National Immigration Agency."

A few rectangular tables draped with blue cloths were set up neatly in front of the building. A line of medical and translation volun-

teers sitting at the tables were busily attending to some foreign fishing workers. The volunteers collected the workers' personal information, took their blood pressures, and measured their blood sugar.

Inside the building, volunteers on either side of the busy lobby offered their services in dentistry, ENT, ophthalmology, and pharmacy. On the second floor, other medical volunteers provided ECGs, abdominal ultrasounds, traditional Chinese medicine, and internal medicine.

Sobirin and his cohort followed their boat owner and volunteers into the building and then got in line to receive some documents. After a quick glance at the documents he received, Sobirin was just about to ask questions when a volunteer approached and spoke to him about the event in Indonesian, Sobirin's mother tongue. Only then did he understand that all of this was a joint effort of the Immigration Agency and a private charity to provide health checkups to foreign laborers in the fishing trade.







An ophthalmologist (above, left) explains Sobirin's eye condition to him. The internal medicine station (below) is the final stop for the checkup. Through an interpreter (left), a doctor sums up the findings from the checkup items and tells foreign workers how to care for themselves.



Sobirin had never had a health checkup. They are very expensive in Indonesia, and most people cannot afford them. Working on the Taiwanese fishing boat, he only took over-the-counter medicine whenever he felt unwell, whether at sea or in port. Seeing a doctor was an unimaginable luxury to him, not to mention having a medical checkup. He said excitedly through an interpreter, "This is my first health checkup ever."

Between two hundred and a thousand foreign fishermen like Sobirin pass in and out of the Donggang fishing port every day. Though some are Filipinos, most of them are from Indonesia, working to help support their families back home. However, the laws are such that foreign seamen are not free to go ashore when their boats are in port. Getting medical care is, as a result, inconvenient for them. The Immigration Agency has therefore actively sought out private organizations as partners to alleviate the situation. Their efforts led to the inaugural health checkup held in conjunction with the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) on March 23, 2014. Many foreign sailors were out at sea when that event was held, so TIMA and the agency conducted another checkup on September 14. The second event is the one featured in this article.

Chen Si-cun (陳泗村), from the Immigration Agency, is very positive about the contribution of foreign laborers to the fishing industry in Taiwan. "In an effort to reach every targeted laborer for our September 14 event," he said, "our agency notified employment agencies [through which foreign workers find work on boats in Taiwan], customs brokerages, and boat owners. We even got the word out through local radio stations. Consequently, we have a larger turnout this time."

Based on their experiences with the first event, organizers knew they'd need more interpreters for this one. As a result, they rounded up more than 20 interpreters who could speak Indonesian or English. The Immigration Agency contributed seven of the interpreters, and employment agencies and Tzu Chi provided the rest.

### Familiar tongue

Sobirin was curious about every checkup item. When a medical worker took his blood pressure, he watched another worker close by check a man's blood sugar. None of these procedures were familiar to him. An interpreter by his side explained everything to him.

When ophthalmologist Zhuang Cong-ji (莊聰吉) examined Sobirin's eyes, Sobirin told the doctor through volunteer interpreter Lin Cai-wei (林彩葳) that he had accidentally splashed diesel fuel into his left eye while refueling at sea. He had only rinsed it with fresh water, and for several days he had felt a dull pain in the eye. He paid no heed to the discomfort until he noticed that he could not see as well as before with that eye. He eagerly wanted to know what had gone wrong.

After a careful examination of the eye, Dr. Zhuang found that the diesel fuel had caused inflammation of the cornea. Though it had already scabbed, Sobirin's vision had been seriously damaged. Lin, the interpreter, relayed the message as the doctor explained the situation. Sobirin looked grave as he listened. He asked worriedly, "Will it heal? Will my vision return to the way it was?"

The doctor shook his head, but quickly added, "I'll give you some ointment. If you care for your eye nicely from now on, at least the condition won't get worse. But remember to wear goggles when you perform that sort of operation again. Be sure to protect your eyes." Lin took the ointment from the doctor and showed Sobirin how to apply it, and she repeatedly told him to remember to take protective measures in the future.

Sobirin's mood was affected by what he had learned from the ophthalmologist, but by the time he had taken the abdominal ultrasound and ECG tests and learned that the results showed that he was largely all right, he lightened up quite a bit. He chatted cheerfully with another boat worker while waiting for his turn in the internal medicine station, the last stop. Later, Dr. Lin Rong-tsung (林榮宗) read the results of all the examinations that Sobirin had been through and said to him, "You have signs of a fatty liver. You need to watch your weight."

To help Sobirin understand Dr. Lin's message, a nurse, unable to speak Indonesian, ran in place and swung her arms back and forth while pointing at Sobirin's distended belly. He looked at her well-intentioned but comical motions and burst out laughing. "You're saying that I'm overweight?" he asked in Taiwanese. His question astonished all the people within earshot.

Someone blurted, "You can speak Taiwanese?" "Just a little," he replied.

"Why didn't you say so earlier?" the nurse said with a smile. "That woulda saved me a lot of work!"





**A Tzu Chi volunteer and a fishing crew member in the cramped living quarters on a boat**

On this day, 123 foreign fishing boat workers had their health checked. The event could not have gone as well without the help of the interpreters on site.

Lin Yu-zuan (林玉鑽) was responsible for translating between Indonesian and Chinese at the dental clinic. She had carefully written down simple phrases in both languages for the dental service providers and recipients to help things proceed more smoothly. Some interpreters even brought their own children with them to the event. These children knew enough about the languages to function as ushers of sorts, leading patients to where they needed to go.

Lin Cai-wei, who had helped interpret for Sobirin, was a Chinese Indonesian. She had moved to Taiwan when she married a Taiwanese man 23 years earlier. Though she already had known a little Taiwanese before moving here, she still had a hard time adjusting to her new life. Therefore, she could really understand the tough times that the fishing crew from abroad had had to endure: "In addition to the language barrier, they must also face homesickness, which is the most difficult to deal with." She had wanted to help as soon as she found out about the health checkup, and she drove over half an hour from Kaohsiung early that morning. "We're all from Indonesia, and I want to do what little I can to help give them warmth."

#### **A glimpse of boat life**

After Sobirin and his fellow workers had finished their checkups, they walked back to their boat. A few Tzu Chi volunteers got permission from the boat owner and followed them aboard.

The inshore fishing boat, 20 meters by 6 meters (66 by 20 feet), had a crew of six. When

the volunteers boarded, they saw a worker scrubbing his clothes on deck while other clothes had been hung on ropes to dry in the sun. The man doing his laundry was astonished to see the strangers. Sobirin explained to the visitors that ordinarily only the boat owner and the crew would ever show up on deck. Other people had almost never had the occasion to visit.

Sobirin had also made a living by fishing back in Indonesia, but the life was very difficult. "We weren't paid cash. Instead, we divided up the catch among us, and it was up to each person to sell his fish. If we caught nothing, we ended up with no income." That made for fluctuating incomes, a source of tension for Sobirin, a married man with two young children. So about 18 months ago, in 2013, he found his current job through an employment agency. Though he had to leave his family behind and come to live in Taiwan, it was a job that offered a steady income. A fellow Indonesian worker on the boat, after working for only a few years in Taiwan, had already been able to earn enough to build a new home for his family in Indonesia. Sobirin envied him.

The volunteers followed Sobirin through a one-square-meter (3.3-sq.ft.) opening in the deck beside the galley, which led to the crew's living quarters down below. What they saw shocked them. "It's so low and so narrow. How do we get in?" After gauging the situation for a little while, they proceeded forward on all fours through a passageway that was about 80 centimeters wide and less than one meter (2.6 by 3 feet) high.

Small, box-shaped recesses were set into the sides of the passageway, each only large enough for a person to lie down. "These are our bunks," Sobirin pointed out. In the dim glow, clothes, comforters, water bottles, and other things jammed each sailor's berth. An unpleasant diesel smell filled the air in the trapped heat.

Sobirin sat on his bed, but his feet stuck out into the narrow passageway. At times he had to pull his feet up onto his bed to let others through. He seemed to take the cramped space in stride: "It's not just us Indonesian crew members who live here—the Taiwanese do, too." Tears welled up in the eyes of Lin Shu-hua (林淑華), the interpreter for the volunteers. Her husband worked on a boat too, but she had never boarded his vessel since marrying him and moving from Indonesia six years ago. "I only see that he's really tan from working on the sea. But I could never have imagined that he lived like this...."



**Sobirin shows Tzu Chi volunteers a photo of his daughters on his cell phone. Working for a better life for their loved ones is a potent force that sustains workers like Sobirin while working in a foreign country.**

Afterwards, the group of people crawled out of the hot, stuffy cabin. "Does your family know that you have such a tough job here?" a volunteer asked Sobirin. Sobirin shook his head, his eyes teeming with emotion. He sat on his hammock quietly for a while before taking out a cell phone from his pocket. Showing the volunteers a photo of his two daughters on the phone, he smiled contentedly and said, "For them, no work is too hard for me."

When the boat owner came on board to check how his workers had fared on the health checkup, Sobirin produced from his pocket a piece of crumpled paper and handed it over to him. The owner read it through and said to the volunteers, "This doctor of yours was very thoughtful." He then said to the boat's cook, "From now on, use less salt and oil when you cook and refrain from deep-frying as much as you can."

The piece of paper was a note that a doctor at the health checkup had written and asked Sobirin to pass on to the boat owner. The doctor's mindfulness helped the boat owner understand the need and the way to better care for his workers. When workers win, the owner wins too, and that was exactly what Huang Jin-tiao,

the fishermen's association representative, loved to see happening.

Huang used to work on a boat when he was younger, so he knew first-hand the hard life of fishing workers. "The hard work is only one part. Coupled with that are the monotony and boredom of life on board as well as the homesickness, which is the hardest feeling to deal with," he said.

Huang hoped that, through activities such as the health checkup, foreign boat workers could feel loved and cared for. "We must not discriminate against them. Instead, we should treat them like our own family or fellow countrymen. With mutual respect we can perhaps avoid unnecessary conflicts among us."

Suddenly, the boat rattled violently and somewhere an engine roared to life. A neighboring boat was setting out to sea. Its workers shouted to be heard above the noise of the engine. Sobirin ran towards the bow of his boat and stared at the space between his boat and the departing one, keeping an eye out to prevent a collision from happening.

The boat sailed away. It was the beginning of another journey.



# Short Pieces

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Since 1986, Chen Mei-yi (陳美羿), a retired teacher and well-published author, has left her marks on the written history of Tzu Chi, directly through her own writing and indirectly through that of her students. Over the years, "Teacher Mei-yi," as she is fondly called in Tzu Chi, has taught many volunteers how to write, and many of them are still actively writing about the foundation. Here we have translated a few short pieces from her works for you. The accompanying artwork was done by Su Fang-pei (蘇芳霽).



## Sometimes It Takes a Busybody

From the back seat of the taxi, I saw in the rearview mirror that the young driver was wearing a poker face. I tried to strike up a conversation with him. "It's cooled down quite a bit recently," I chirped. But he didn't reply.

Just then a car raced past us, too close to our car. As it whizzed by, it hit and broke the side wing mirror on the taxi. Seeing the car speed away as if nothing had happened, my taxi driver floored the gas pedal in hot pursuit.

I tensed up and said to the driver, "When you get to him, just talk to him. Don't get worked up and do anything rash."

He ignored me and just sped ahead.

He caught up with the other car. The two men got out of the cars and had a few words before they got in their own cars again. Then they drove ahead. I figured that they were going to pull over to the side to talk again, but the offending car took off instead. My driver cursed and resumed his chase.

"I know you're mad, but please be sure to keep it under control," I said to him. "Master Cheng Yen once said that getting angry is like punishing ourselves for others' mistakes."

He threw me a glance in the rearview mirror.

I decided to continue to meddle in this affair between the two young men. "I hope you talk to him nicely. Just ask him to pay for the damage," I said. "Don't argue or fight with him. Big trouble often awaits those who lose their cool."

The driver still said nothing in response. He kept on pursuing the other car. After a long while, he managed to force the other car to stop.

Both drivers got out of their cars. I saw them talking and gesticulating to each other. Then the other driver took some money out of his pocket and handed it to my taxi driver. After that they got into their respective cars and got going again. Good, a crisis averted.

When the taxi arrived at my home, I took out 150 NT dollars (US\$30) to pay the fare, but the driver refused to accept it.

"I'm sorry that it took me so much time to get you here," he said to me. "Furthermore, if it hadn't been for your advice to keep calm, I could have gotten into a fistfight with him."

"Oh by all means, you shouldn't have done that. Otherwise you would have had to pay for it," I said.

"Right. That would have been a big waste of time, not to mention that I might even have had to go to the police station to make a statement. And if there had been any injuries, I would have had to go to the hospital," he said. He still looked cool, but he had become more talkative. "You said getting angry is like punishing ourselves for others' mistakes. That's well said. Thanks!"

With my money in hand, I watched him drive away, feeling very happy. It's sometimes nice to be a busybody.

## The Old Woman Who Picks Up Dog Pooh

Early every morning, she leaves her home with plastic bags in one hand and a wet towel in the other.

Despite a head of gray hair, she is still quite nimble. Maybe her daily morning "exercise" explains her vigor.

Her exercise is nothing if not unique. "She picks up dog pooh in the neighborhood every day," a neighbor said. "And then she uses a wet towel to wipe the ground clean. Her spirit is admirable."

Dog owners need to walk their dogs. As the dogs walk, they leave their waste products behind whenever and wherever they want. They don't use a toilet like humans. It is entirely up to their owners to pick up after them, a duty discharged thoroughly by many dog owners. Some owners, however, totally ignore this responsibility of theirs. Stray dogs, of which Taiwan has its fair share, only exacerbate the situation.

Nobody takes pleasure in stepping on dog shit; some curse out loud when they do. You can even slip and get hurt. A retired Japanese man who came to Taiwan for an extended stay once said of the town he stayed in, "There's too much dog waste in Puli [in central Taiwan]." His comment caused quite a sensation and, as can be expected, some residents there felt offended.

Dog droppings are avoided by all. When you see them, you most probably give them a wide berth. This old woman in Sanchong, northern Taiwan, however, makes it a morning routine to patrol her neighborhood streets looking for dog waste. When she sees a pile, she puts her hand inside a plastic bag, picks the pile up, and drops it into a bigger plastic bag. Then she uses the wet towel to wipe the ground clean.

I saw her story on a video clip shown in a Tzu Chi year-end blessing ceremony. She was just identified as Ms. Wu—no other personal information was revealed about her. The film showed that after her rounds, she took the wet towel home and washed it. "A Tzu Chi recycling volunteer gave this to me," she said of the towel. "It doesn't stink after I wash it, and then I can use it again."

The clip lasted just a few short minutes. There were no flashy displays or gimmicks—the film simply followed the woman around as she walked the streets, picked up dog waste, and wiped the road. Then the camera zoomed in on her wrinkled, smiling face when she said, "I enjoy doing this. That makes the foul smell go away and makes the work easy."

Buddhists aspire to be reborn in a Pure Land after they die, but we can actually create our own Pure Land in this very world. If all people were like Ms. Wu, this not-so-perfect world of ours would indeed be a Pure Land.





## Watermelon Fields on the Border

Master Cheng Yen once told a story.

In the Spring and Autumn period in ancient China, from approximately 771 to 476 BCE, the two states of Chu and Liang shared a border. The climate and soil in the areas on either side of the border were hospitable for growing watermelons, so many people in both places cultivated the crop for a living.

The people in Liang were industrious. They weeded, watered, fertilized, and did all that good farmers would do. As a result, their watermelons grew extremely well and they always had bumper harvests. On the other side of the border, however, the people of Chu were indolent, so their harvests were often poor.

When they saw the ripe, juicy, sweet watermelons across the border, the Chus became envious. They crossed the line into Liang in the middle of the night and vandalized the fields and fruit there. The Liangs were furious when they found out what had happened. They reported the incident to their county magistrate, Wu Jiu (吳就), and demanded revenge.

Wu was very wise, though. He said to his people, "An eye for an eye only leads to an endless cycle of antagonism. Let me tell you a better way. You just do as I say, and they'll quit coming to destroy your fields."

Wu told his people to cross the border into Chu, also in the middle of the night, to water, fertilize, and do whatever else they would do to

their own farms at home. He also told them to keep the whole thing under wraps and not let the Chus know.

Under the care of the Liangs, the watermelons in Chu grew to be plump and juicy. The people in Chu were befuddled. What had happened? They launched an investigation and found that their fruit was growing so well because the Liangs had been doing the unthinkable by actually helping them. When the truth came to light, the Chus were embarrassed.

The ruler of Chu was touched when he heard the news. He sent a worthy gift to his opposite number in Liang. Relations between the two states became friendly, and there was never another border dispute between them.

Magistrate Wu's solution may at first glance have appeared outrageous and ridiculous to the uninitiated among us, but it turned out to be a brilliant strategy, the best of the best. Large-heartedness can thoroughly dissolve animosity, while any thought of resentment or revenge only leads to more of the same and to a never-ending cycle of tension—the worst of the worst.

Wu Jiu's wisdom still applies now as it did then. What a wise man he was. There is much that we can learn from him. ❧



# Resolve Bad Karma, Sow Blessings

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Translated by Teresa Chang

Chen Wei (陳微), a Tzu Chi recycling volunteer from Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, started collecting recyclables in her neighborhood more than ten years ago. She began one day when she went to a market and heard that Tzu Chi was calling on people to do recycling. She's 91 this year, but she's still agile and fit. Sometimes she collects enough in just one week to fill a truck. When she sees plastic bags or pieces of cardboard, no matter how hard they are to reach, she picks them up—even if she has to bend down low or get down on her knees to get them out from where they are stuck. At times she collects cardboard boxes taller than she is, but she has no problem flattening them and tying them up neatly.

Not only does she love the Earth and cherish resources, but she has also formed good affinities with many people. Her neighbors give her recyclable garbage, which they have taken care to clean. Her children take very good care of her too. Her son even asked her to move in with him and his family, but she declined because she said only her old house had adequate space to store the recyclables. Seeing how doing this work was making their mother healthy and happy, her children all supported her decision.

Chen says that doing recycling is good for her health and has kept her happy and content. She has nothing to ask from life except two wishes: that she can pass on the spiritual merits she

has accumulated to her children and that she can live a few more years to help me with more charity work. She will continue to contribute until she no longer can.

Chen is very blessed to have good children and good neighbors. People meet each other in this life because of the karmic conditions they created in their past lives. If they developed good relationships with others in previous existences, they will be happy to meet one another in this life. It is therefore important to cultivate good affinities with everyone around us. If we can give to others and sow abundant blessings, we'll be liked by everyone we meet.

### Sow what you want to reap

In *The Sutra of Miscellaneous Treasures*, there is a story about two brothers. The older one thought that farming was backbreaking work and too

much for him, so he handed over his farming duties to his younger brother. Believing that he'd fare far better by seeking heavenly blessings, he visited a shrine every day with sumptuous offerings and sincerely prayed to a deity there for blessings.

With his supernatural power, the deity saw that the older brother had never helped others in his previous lives, nor had he done anything to benefit mankind in this life. All he had ever done was seek good fortune for himself. "Since he has never sowed any good karmic causes, how can I give him good fortune now?" Yet on the other hand, the deity saw how sincerely pious the brother was. If he did not receive the



CHEN YOUNG-FENG

This article is excerpted from a series of speeches delivered by Master Cheng Yen from October 1 to 20, 2014.





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**After a series of gas explosions hit Kaohsiung, causing severe damage, Tzu Chi volunteers visited the disaster area and offered aid.**

blessings he sought, he might become angry and start saying bad things about the effectiveness of praying. That would not be good, either. After thinking it over, the deity decided to instill some good sense in the man.

The deity transformed himself into the man's younger brother and showed up in the shrine. Upon seeing what he thought was his younger brother, the older brother blurted out, "Why aren't you working in the fields? Why did you come here?" The younger brother replied, "Like you, I also want to ask the deity to bestow blessings on us so that our fields can produce a bountiful yield without us having to work at all." At this explanation, the older brother scolded him: "How would that be possible? How can anything grow in our fields if you don't sow seeds and cultivate the land?"

"Exactly!" the deity said, as he appeared in his real form. "As you sow, so shall you reap. It's impossible to reap without sowing. You never planted any seeds of good fortune in your past lives, nor have you done any good in this life. How can I possibly give you blessings now? I suggest that you start helping the needy and contributing to the welfare of society. When the conditions are ripe, you will reap the good fruit without ever having to pray for blessings."

We create our own good fortune or our own misfortune. This is the karmic law of cause and effect. If we want blessings, we have to sow the seeds for them first. If we can embrace Right

View, Right Thought and Right Mindfulness, if we can deal with all people and events with sincerity and relieve suffering with great compassion, we will reap good fruit. We must also keep a broad mind when we interact with people. When others say unpleasant things to us or give us bad looks, we shouldn't give in to anger or resentment. Instead, we should be grateful at all times and constantly reflect on ourselves and improve ourselves as a way to dissolve bad affinities and create good ones. This is the way to lead to a blessed life.

#### **Make positive impacts with love**

The Buddha teaches us that the world is impermanent. This teaching was proved true once again on July 31, 2014, when a series of explosions caused by underground gas leaks killed 32 people, injured over 300, and damaged more than 600 homes in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. Tens of thousands of people were affected by the calamity.

In the month following the disaster, Tzu Chi volunteers put in over 43,000 person-times to render aid. They offered meals, provided daily supplies, and visited households affected by the calamity. They also gave out relief cash to families whose houses were damaged as well as tuition aid to needy students. They are currently still caring for more than 500 households.

Since Tzu Chi was founded, over 48 years ago, our volunteers have paved their paths with sincerity and love, always working together to give timely help to suffering people. By giving to the less fortunate, they gain a deeper understanding of the truth of suffering and come to cherish their

own happiness, peace and safety. As they learn to count their blessings, they hope that everyone around the world will also enjoy the same peace and safety.

On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan hit Leyte, the Philippines, causing widespread devastation and turning cities into ruins. When Tzu Chi volunteers went to the disaster area to survey the damage, they saw survivors, benumbed and helpless, sitting around in the ruins. Our volunteers felt for them, and they decided to do what they could to help the people and the land recover.

One delegation of volunteers after another, coming from 11 countries, visited the disaster area and worked in relays. They gave survivors hugs and heartfelt care. They delivered relief goods, conducted free clinics, and kicked off a large-scale work relief program in which survivors were paid for cleaning up their own communities. During a course of over 20 days, Tzu Chi volunteers, energized by an abundance of love, helped revive hope and confidence in the hearts of the victims and bring life back to the ravaged cities and towns.

After providing prefabricated classrooms for schools damaged in the typhoon, our foundation continued to plan the construction of prefabricated houses in Ormoc and Palo, both in the province of Leyte, for survivors who had lost their homes. Volunteers in Taiwan worked hard to prepare the housing materials. In September 2014, materials for over a thousand houses were shipped to the Philippines. Volunteers flew from Taiwan to teach local residents how to erect the temporary housing. Another cash-for-work program was initiated by Tzu Chi. Men did the heavy construction work while women and children prepared bamboo sticks to be embedded in concrete flooring bricks to reinforce the bricks. Whole families worked together to build their own homes.

**Children play in front of prefabricated houses under construction in Palo, in the province of Leyte, the Philippines. The temporary housing was provided by Tzu Chi for people who had lost their homes in Typhoon Haiyan.**

The weather over there was changeable, and many volunteers caught cold. Despite that, the first thing they all said when they shared their experiences volunteering in the disaster area was: "I'm grateful that I had the chance to go to the Philippines." They paid all their expenses from their own pockets and did hard work, but still they were full of gratitude. They truly epitomized what I often say: "Blessed are those who derive joy from doing good." When you give willingly, then no matter how difficult the work is, you feel happy. At the same time, you help your own wisdom-life [as opposed to physical life] grow.

With love, we can all make a difference. When all of us nurture kindness in our hearts and act on it, our world will be filled with peace and every family with happiness.

#### **The karmic law of cause and effect**

The world is full of all kinds of sufferings, which can arise from natural and man-made disasters, from aging, illness, or death. What's the ultimate cause of this endless suffering? It's all from the karmic law of cause and effect.

In our daily lives, we plant a karmic seed with everything we do, think, or say. Each seed sprouts at some time in the future, and we'll have to bear the result of what we did.

Another story in *The Sutra of Miscellaneous Treasures* illustrates this. In a kingdom called Kophen, there was an accomplished spiritual cultivator who had become an arhat [one who has reached enlightenment according to Theravada Buddhism]. He lived alone deep in the mountains while his disciples traveled to dif-



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ferent places to spread the Buddha's teachings. One day, he went out to pick some plants to dye his monastic robes. After he returned with the plants, he boiled a big pot of water and put the plants in. When the water had changed color, he threw in the robes.

At the same time, a cattleman who had lost a cow was searching high and low for his missing animal. He came to the cultivator's hut and went in. When he saw the boiling pot of red water with something resembling a cow's skin floating in it, he jumped to the conclusion that the monk had killed his cow. In the heat of anger, he filed a lawsuit and had the monk arrested. Instead of defending himself, the cultivator didn't say a word. He was locked up for 12 years.

During this time, the monk's disciples looked everywhere for their master, but to no avail. Then, 12 years later, while he was meditating, one of them saw that their master was in prison. They hurried to the jail to find him.

Having endured hard labor every day for the past 12 years, their master had become thin and haggard, and his hair had grown very long. He was much changed. Still, with just one look, the disciples knew for certain that he was their master. They went to the court and explained that their master was a spiritual cultivator who had reached arhathood and that he was virtuous and upright in conduct. They explained that there was no way that he could have killed the cow. The court summoned the cattleman.

The cattleman said, "I'm very sorry. When my cow got lost, I was so upset that when I saw the blood-red water in the pot, I was convinced that the monk had killed my cow. Yet, some time later, the lost cow returned. I didn't lose it after all."

When the court apologized to the wronged cultivator, a smile spread across the cultivator's face. Then, using his supernatural power, he shed his long hair and beard. His prison clothes disappeared and were replaced by a monastic robe. Looking once again like a monk, he levitated above the ground and sat in lotus position in midair. Everyone knelt down and prostrated themselves before him.

An official asked, "Since you have supernatural powers, why did you endure all this for 12 years?"

With an aura of peace, the master answered: "Once in a past life, I was also a cattleman. One day when I was looking for a missing cow, I ran into a pratyeka-buddha [one who has achieved

enlightenment on their own, without the help of teachers or guides, according to some schools of Buddhism]. He was cooking something in a pot. Without clarifying the matter with him, I went straight to the court and accused him of killing my cow. Because of this bad karma I created, I was reborn in hell for many lives. Through those many lives, I repeatedly repented and vowed that if I could leave hell, I would do my best to cultivate myself. Now, having been imprisoned for 12 years, I've repaid all my karmic debt. I am grateful and at peace now."

Even if we have supernatural powers, we are no match for the power of karma. If we don't understand the Four Noble Truths and the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, we are likely to complain when we encounter adversities. We might even back out of our commitment to our spiritual practice. On the other hand, if we truly understand that everything is due to the karmic law of cause and effect and sincerely repent of all the bad karma we have created, we will have peace in our heart and accept all tribulations willingly. When that happens, we will be able to turn afflictions into paths leading to enlightenment.

Birth, aging, illness, and death are all parts of the natural course of life. No one is exempted from this cycle. When we get old, our energy naturally declines, and if we fall ill, we might feel that we're near death and our hearts might panic. Actually, this is a good time to examine ourselves. We should ask ourselves whether through our lives we have been dedicated to improving ourselves, making life better for our families, and contributing to the well-being of society, or whether we have just allowed our time to slip by in vain by sitting around idly or engaging in idle pursuits. We should ask ourselves whether we persisted in doing something that we knew was the right thing to do. And when we knew something was wrong to do, did we immediately stop doing it? If our minds are constantly wavering and we have no command over ourselves, we are bound to lead an aimless and purposeless life. Such a life is actually not pleasant at all.

It's up to us to determine the direction of our lives and to decide whether we want to live a life of value. The Dharma can nourish our minds and lead us to a fuller life. When we have been exposed to the Dharma, we must take it to heart

and cultivate ourselves accordingly. We must do so in earnest, and not slack off whenever we feel like it. Let us embrace and live out the Dharma at every moment. That way, our hearts will be filled with spiritual joy and we won't stray from the right path.

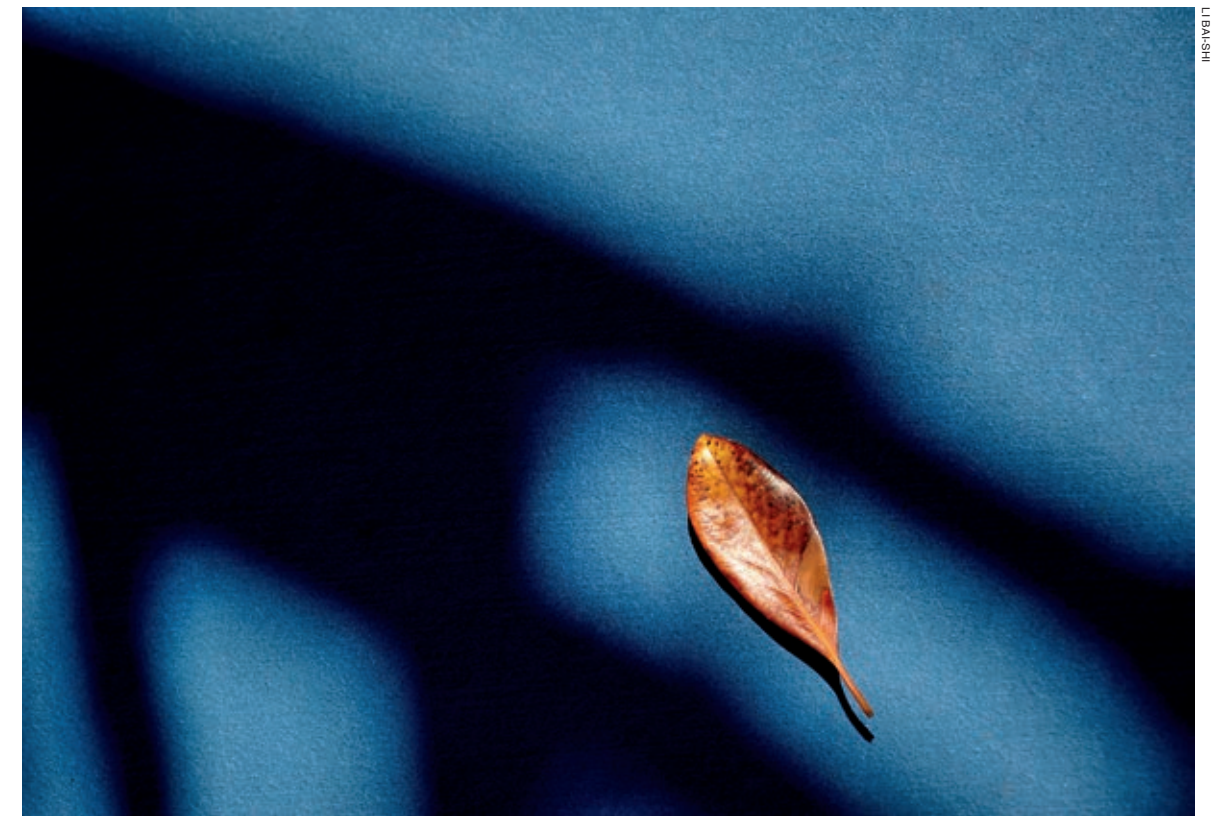
In an effort to help free people from all kinds of mental defilements and afflictions, the Buddha preached the Dharma to them according to their levels of understanding. He hoped very much to guide everyone to the path leading to awakening. When the Enlightened One was about to enter nirvana, having expounded the Dharma for 49 years, his mind was still on all living beings, on passing on the Dharma and keeping it alive. Bodhisattvas from other worlds appeared before the Buddha and told him not to worry; they said they would continue to propagate the Dharma after he entered nirvana. But the Buddha did not give them his approval. Instead, he fixed his eyes on his disciples that were present. Finally Sariputra, the wisest of his disciples, stood up and said, "We truly want to take up the responsibility of passing on the Dharma, but the people

in this world are too recalcitrant and stubborn to be taught. Thus we have qualms about accepting the challenge."

Human beings are indeed recalcitrant and stubborn, but since all of us in Tzu Chi have committed ourselves to Mahayana Buddhism [the "Greater Vehicle," concerned with the salvation of all living creatures], we must forge forward and bring help to the wider world. No matter how much hard work we have to endure, we have made it our mission to give to others. We must remain undaunted by any hard work and keep our hearts pure and unpolluted while carrying out our mission.

Time ticks by second after second. Our lives dwindle away minute by minute. How can we afford to squander our time? We must seize time to learn the Dharma, stay true to our original aspirations, and prevent mental impurities from entering our minds. When we do our best to enrich ourselves with the Dharma and accumulate blessings, our wisdom-life will grow day by day, even though our physical life gradually decreases.

Let us be ever more mindful.



**Time marches forward relentlessly. Master Cheng Yen encourages everyone to cultivate themselves the best they can and lead a full life instead of letting time slip by in vain.**



# A Field of Blessings in a Sink

*Cheng Huang Jin-zhi has donated clothes to the disadvantaged for more than 40 years. She used to buy new clothes to give away, but now she recycles gently used clothing. She washes the clothes by hand, sun-dries them, folds them, and carefully boxes them for delivery to the needy. She fully intends to keep doing this work for the rest of her life.*

*That she had tough going in the first half of her life only makes her benevolence shine all that much brighter. Her work lights up dark corners of the world. She helps make Taiwan beautiful.*

**By Ju Rui-yun**

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Chen Hong-dai

Used with permission of *Rhythms Monthly Magazine*





The concrete sink, with its outer layer of red and white tiles of various sizes, looks ordinary enough, but it has served a great cause well over the years. Cheng Fu-yuan (程福源) custom-built the sink especially for his wife, Cheng Huang Jin-zhi (程黃金枝), at just the perfect height to suit her in her work: hand-washing second-hand clothes to be given away to the needy.

Jin-zhi, 78, is small and thin. Though she looks frail, her back is always straight when she works in front of the sink, her petite arms and hands vigorously scrubbing and rubbing the clothes that she is washing. She is always well groomed, her gray hair pulled up neatly into a bun. Her captivating smile makes people look beyond the wrinkles on her face, wrinkles carved out by many years of hardship.

When Jin-zhi is at her sink washing clothes, she is in a world all her own. Others may watch her, keep her company, or wait for her, but nobody may meddle in her business. "My mother-in-law is firm in what she wants to do," said Qiu Shu-hui (邱淑惠), the wife of Jin-zhi's second son. "Automatic washing machines don't cut the mustard for her, so she insists on washing clothes by hand."

After the wash, Jin-zhi hangs the clothes out in the sun until they are thoroughly dry. Afterwards, she carefully and professionally folds each garment, the way a clothing retailer would, before laying them neatly in a box. Filled boxes are then delivered to orphanages or nursing homes.

Cheng Li-na (程麗娜), one of Jin-zhi's daughters, often arranges transportation for her mother to deliver the clothes. Not knowing the rationale for using boxes, she used to complain to her mother that they took up too much space in the car. She suggested to her mother that she stuff the clean clothes into plastic bags so that the car could hold more clothes on each trip.

Jin-zhi explained to her daughter, "I like things to look nice, not all scrunched up." The daughter gradually came to appreciate why her mother was so insistent: It was out of respect for the recipients that her mother wanted to deliver the clothes to them in great shape, as though they were brand-new.

Jin-zhi is also mindful about things that the recipients cannot see. For example, people usually hang their wash up to dry and do not return until late in the afternoon to collect it. Jin-zhi goes beyond that: After she has hung the freshly



**Cheng Huang Jin-zhi and her family (left) sort used clothes. From left to right, Cheng Li-na, Cheng Fu-yuan, Cheng Huang Jin-zhi, and Zhang Zhi-lang. After hand-washing and sun-drying the clothes, Jin-zhi (above) folds them and puts them into paper cartons for delivery to the needy.**

washed clothes in the sun to dry, she repeatedly returns to check on them and move them to areas which get the most sunlight. She repeats this sun-chasing ritual many times before fondly collecting the clothes for folding and boxing. Because of that level of care, she ends up being in the sun quite a bit. "That's why Mom gets so tan," the daughter said. "I really admire her perseverance."

There have been occasions where Jin-zhi's hands have hurt from continual washing or, in winter, suffered from chilblains from being exposed to cold water for too long. She even developed an eye condition as a result of her being

in the sun so much. But in spite of it all, she insists on doing the washing, drying and packing herself. "The pains go away in a couple of days. They don't bother me. Actually, I often wash clothes all day long without eating or drinking."

Though her family worries that the work might be overtaxing her, she pays them no heed. She just wants to do it. Her mission is front and center in her mind so much that when she talked to her family about how she wanted her affairs handled when she died, she said, "Make sure that the last box of clothes is delivered to people who need them."

#### **Lifelong devotion**

Jin-zhi lives in a mountainous area in Keelung where it rains more often than in many other areas in Taiwan. For more than two decades, she has dedicated herself to her mission of washing and giving away used clothes to the needy. Over the years, she has hand-







Chen said that Jin-zhi arrives at the home in a private car with her boxes of clothes to donate. Her husband is always with her. In winter she brings them warm clothes, and in summer light clothes. "She always wears a smile," Chen observed. "She has a kind heart." At first, Jin-zhi did not even let people at the home know her name or where she lived, so they simply called her "Sister."

Jin-zhi brings many clothes with her on every visit, and they are all washed very clean. "I admire her," Chen added. "She's getting on in years, and she's not all that well-to-do. Still she keeps doing it. You just don't see people like her every day."

Back when the nursing home was still an orphanage, the excited children would surround the boxes that Jin-zhi had brought with her. They would take the clothes out of the boxes and check them all one by one. "She's brought us much joy," Chen concluded.

Jin-zhi brings people joy, and she is all smiles in front of them. But in private, she is quite serious about her devotion to giving out clothes. Her mission takes precedence over other things. When she has planned a visit to an orphanage or nursing home, any of her children who is free will have to drive her. If her visit is delayed, she becomes upset. As she got older, she stopped delivering clothes to far-off locations, but she continues to send clothes to those places by courier.

washed over 10,000 garments and given out more than 500 boxes of clothes.

She likes to personally put the clothes into the hands of the recipients, so she has traveled to many places in Taiwan to deliver the labor of her love, including New Taipei, Yilan, Taoyuan, Hsinchu, Zhanghua, Kaohsiung, and Pingdong. But of all the places she has delivered clothes to, the Jingren Home for the Disabled in Taoyuan and the Hongde Nursing Home in Yilan have formed the most enduring ties with her.

**Jin-zhi delivers clothes to the Hongde Nursing Home in Yilan (above), and visits the seriously ill there (right).**

The Hongde Nursing Home, which cares for older people who have nobody else to turn to, started out as an orphanage located in Xindian. Director Chen Xiu-chun (陳秀春) said of Jin-zhi, "She has been donating clothes to us since we were still in our old place in Xindian, and she followed us here to Yilan."







Jin-zhi volunteers once a month at a Tzu Chi recycling point near her home.

### Compassion leads the way

How did Jin-zhi's mission start? How did she become a clothes-giving angel who has warmed many people's hearts? To answer that question, we have to go back four decades.

In October 1973, Jin-zhi, not yet 40, heard on the radio that rain had been leaking into the home of a mentally disabled mother and her four young children, the oldest of whom had just graduated from elementary school. The woman's husband, an old veteran, had died not long before, leaving the woman to fend for their children alone.

Moved with compassion, Jin-zhi set out to visit the family, taking daily necessities such as rice and canned food with her. She had to change buses twice before she reached their home. That marked the beginning of what would become a long list of her benevolent acts. Soon after, she started to donate clothes to the needy.

At first, she bought out-of-season garments from stores at reduced prices and gave them to the young and the old. However, she herself was not well off. Buying new clothes to give away was not all that easy on her pockets, especially as some mentally disabled recipients wore out their clothes more quickly. In order to continue her mission, she decided to collect and give out second-hand clothes.

She was very mindful of what she selected to donate. She would pick out only clothes that met the needs of her recipients—for example, items that had buttons or zippers on them did not suit recipients who did not have the dexterity to manipulate such fasteners. She and her husband, Fu-yuan, ten years her senior, often scouted neighborhoods and markets during that time for used clothing that would be just right to give away.

Later, Jin-zhi joined a charity in Keelung which delivered emergency aid to families in need. One year when she and the group held a winter distribution of daily necessities, the press came to cover the event and learned about her work in giving away garments. When her kind-hearted efforts made the news, phone calls flooded in offering to give her used clothes. She sent her son-in-law, Zhang Zhi-lang (張志郎), to pick up clothes from some donors' homes but turned down offers from people living too far away.

Whatever the source of her donated clothes, she hand-washes the clothes clean and folds





Cheng Fu-yuan always stands by his wife in everything that she does (above). He put up an arbor so that she can grow vegetables like pumpkins (below).



A certificate of thanks, an appreciation banner, and a notebook in which Jin-zhi made notes show traces of the good that she has done.

them neatly before giving them out. She volunteers for other charity groups too, such as Tzu Chi, where she does recycling.

#### A difficult past

Jin-zhi said that she took up charity work for one purpose alone: to love and help others. She had a very hard life growing up, so whenever she thought of people like orphans who were in need of clothes to wear, she wanted to help them. She wanted to spare the children the agony of deprivation, a feeling which she knew only too well.

She had a deprived childhood herself. When she was little, a fortuneteller said that she would have to be given up for adoption to survive. At four years of age, she was given away to a mine-worker in Sijiaoting, outside Keelung, who made little money from his job. He lived with a woman and her son. The son often mistreated the young Jin-zhi.

The man who adopted her could not really provide for her. She had to walk barefoot to a market in Keelung to scavenge for vegetables for her family, such as it was. The round trip was 13 kilometers (8 miles). She started to cook for the family when she was seven years old. In those early days, she had to make a fire to cook, but lighting a match was a big challenge for her. Often as not, as soon as a matchstick flared up, she would be so scared she'd toss it to the floor.

There were other poignant memories. For example, when the son of the woman stole food from the kitchen, he would shamelessly accuse Jin-zhi of the deed, and she would invariably get a good thrashing.

One day when she was nine, her adoptive father had a fierce fight with the woman with whom he lived. Jin-zhi took advantage of the opportunity and escaped back to her birth home. She began working as a domestic helper when she was 18, making about two American dollars a month. Illiterate, she enrolled in a night class for four months to learn to write.

When I was at her home interviewing her, she showed me a notebook in which she recorded things. The notebook was packed with characters that were quite neat, not an easy feat for someone with little formal schooling. Sometimes she used alternate ways to represent some Chinese charac-



ters that were particularly complicated. Take Liugui, a place name, for example. "Liu" means "six" and "gui" means "turtle." The former character takes just four strokes to write, but the latter requires 16. Instead of writing "gui" out in full, she simply drew a turtle, complete with legs and claws. "Don't you think that I drew pretty well?" she asked with a mischievous smile.

These days, she smiles a lot. So when she took out a portrait of hers created for her when she was 30 years old, I was drawn to the poker face in the drawing. Her face not only lacked a smile, it was devoid of any expression at all.

The portrait was made in 1966. She paid 13 U.S. dollars, a huge sum for one who had always been frugal, to have that portrait drawn. Her husband was having an affair at the time. Never much of a breadwinner, he worked extra hard so that he could give money to his mistress, not to his own wife and children. That really hurt Jin-zhi to the core. His affair made her feel so bad that she attempted suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. If she had succeeded, that portrait would have been displayed at her funeral.

Because of her husband's infidelity, she had to make money to support her five children herself. She sold fruit, vegetables, bread, and even bus tickets to make a living. For ten years, she ate no more than two meals a day. "I used to buy two pounds of noodles for 12 cents," she said. "Then I'd make noodle soup, split the noodles among my five children, and keep only the liquid for myself. I did the same thing when I cooked mung bean soup; my kids ate the beans, and I only ate the clear soup." As she recalled that sorry period of her life, she tilted her face up to keep the tears from spilling from her eyes.

Despite the pain in the early years of her life, those trying times helped instill compassion in her, making her particularly willing to reach out to the old, weak, sick and needy.



### A new chapter

She eventually divorced her husband and gave him custody of her first, fourth and fifth children, leaving her to raise her second and third children herself. She was also expecting her sixth child at the time. To make money, she worked as a domestic helper, cooking and doing whatever chores she was asked to do. She left her children to the care of her oldest brother's wife, to whom she paid ten American dollars a month.

She contemplated remarrying, although if it were not for finding a home for her children, she would not have considered it at all. Out of more than ten candidates, she picked out Cheng Fu-yuan, who had served in the military for a long time, to be her husband. They had met each other just once, and "it was a done deal in a week," they said in unison. When asked why she chose Fu-yuan to be her other half, she couldn't name a specific reason, only mumbling that she had once known another person by the same name and that man had been very nice.

Fu-yuan treasures Jin-zhi very much. He said that if it weren't for her, he would probably be roaming all around now and leading a rootless existence.

Their gratitude is mutual. A popular saying goes, "Behind every successful man there is a great woman." But the reverse is true for Jin-zhi: Her husband has always been her most important support. With his own hands, he made a sink on a raised base for her to wash second-hand clothes. Without this sink, she would have had to squat down to do the job, and that would have been much harder on her joints and muscles. To make it easier for her to hang her wash out to dry, he made a chain out of a discarded electric cable with small loops to keep hangers in place. When she expressed a wish to grow pumpkins and passion fruit, he promptly built an arbor on which the vines could climb. When she needs to collect or donate used clothes, he takes her on his motor scooter. He often video-records the good deeds that she does. All their children agree that their father has been extremely good to their mother, to the extent that he pampers her and grants her every wish.

His goodness to her is indisputable. Years ago, when she thought about aborting her sixth child, Fu-yuan convinced her to keep it. Ever since they got married, he has treated all her children like his own.

Fu-yuan left the military after they were mar-

**Jin-zhi collects her wash after the clothes have been sun-dried. Looking at her bright smile, it's easy to overlook her painful past.**

ried. To support his family he worked as an assembly line worker at a match factory, a laborer, a deck hand on a fishing boat, and finally a longshoreman at Keelung Harbor. He has always been a reliable man, and because of that Jin-zhi has been able to help others without worry.

### Channeling sorrow into good works

Sadly, Jin-zhi's life didn't become a smooth ride after she had tied the knot with Fu-yuan. More tragedy was in store for her. Her fifth child, Jian Qiu-fu (簡秋福), and her oldest son, Jian Qiu-fa (簡秋發), died one after another in accidents. Their deaths were cruel, devastating blows to Jin-zhi. Though she gradually was able to come to terms with the harrowing shocks, she still grieves to this day.

After the second tragedy, which happened in 2001, Jin-zhi's daughter Cheng Li-na asked her and Fu-yuan to move in with her so she could better help her mother heal. The mother and daughter grew closer. Over time, they have been more able to focus their energy on helping others around them rather than feel sorry about their loss.

Jin-zhi, once dirt poor, no longer needs to worry about being hungry or cold, but she does not sit idly in that modest comfort. Instead, she extends her arms to embrace less fortunate people. Even though she herself was dealt the heavy blows of a divorce [considered a very serious event in her generation] and the passing of two sons, she did not give in to resentment. Instead, she continues to feel compassion for the suffering of others.

She gives out what she has, including the gift money that her children give her. She either donates her money to the needy or puts it into education funds for her grandchildren. "I don't want anything," she said. "It's more of a blessing to give than to receive."

She has even signed consent forms to donate her organs and body following her death. Her compassion for this world pushes her to give with love. Throughout the vicissitudes of her life, she has remained consistent in her desire to help others. She has unquestionably touched many people's lives. Anyone who has received the clothes she carefully washes and gives away will, without any doubt, agree wholeheartedly. ☸





# Farewell to a Paragon

By Xie Ming-fang and Huang Zhen-yi

Translated by Tang Yau-yang



ZHANG QING-MEN

*In more than 20 years of volunteering for Tzu Chi, Lu Jin-yong watched out for everyone with whom he worked. His maxim was "Give people peace of mind, joy, convenience, and a shoulder to lean on." When work was assigned to him, he always responded with a smile: "OK, I'll do it!" Words like "difficult" or "impossible" weren't in his lexicon. He was truly a beloved member of Tzu Chi.*

*This year in June, he passed away at the age of 64. Although he is no longer around, he remains alive in the loving memories of all those who knew him.*

The memorial service was simple but dignified. The fragrance of the flowers was redolent of a life well-lived.

On June 20, 2014, family and friends, many of whom were Tzu Chi volunteers, gathered at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital in southern Taiwan to pay their last respects to Lu Jin-yong (呂進泳), a beloved volunteer.

"Even before he went in for the surgery, Brother Lu told his wife, Sister Lin Li-xia [林麗霞], where he kept the key to the recycling station," Lai Ning-sheng (賴寧生), superintendent of the hospital, told the gathering. He was referring to the last operation that preceded Lu's death. After pointing out what a committed volunteer Lu had been, the superintendent went on to say that Lu had even donated his body for anatomical pathology. He was giving back to society, even after his death. Many people in the audience could not hold back their tears.

Volunteer Wu Mei-sui (吳美隨), who had attended the autopsy of Lu's body on June 17, said that Lu appeared to her in a dream that very night, in which they talked and laughed about recycling. "When I woke up, I cried out loud—I suddenly realized that he really was no longer with us." She hoped they could become fellow volunteers again in a future life.

When Lu's wife spoke, she poured out all her emotions as she talked about her husband's dedication to Tzu Chi. She said that after the 921 Earthquake, he knew how sad Master Cheng Yen was over the devastation, and he pledged to do his best to help with the relief efforts and take some of the load off the Master. He called Lin that very morning and asked what she was doing. When she answered, he said, "This is not the time to make breakfast. Go to the disaster area, quick."

After Typhoon Morakot ravaged southern Taiwan, he helped direct a work relief program for the construction of the Shanlin Great Love Village, which Tzu Chi built for people left homeless by the typhoon. He was needed to assign work to people and to manage things. His oldest son had just had an operation around that time and was still in Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. Because Lu was busy, Lin had to care for their son by herself. She was so exhausted that she was on the verge of collapse. Just when she was feeling unhappy that her husband was not around to help, he called her and said, "It hurts me that I can't be with our son, but I trust that someone as wise as you will take very good care of him. He's recovering, but many people here have lost their homes and families to the typhoon. They really

need help. I'll be of better use here." That phone call removed any bad feelings she had. Their son was very understanding too—he knew why his dad could not be with him.

Lin, also a foundation volunteer, was quite busy herself. On Lu's birthday this year, she did not stay home to spend time with him. Instead, she attended the graduation ceremony at the Tzu Chi College of Technology in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. Lin told the audience at the memorial service that her husband had intended to spend some quality time with her that day. To make up for the lost time, she had come to this very room, where Lu's body lay, for several days with a cup of coffee for him [as an offering to his spirit], and she had talked to him just like in the old days.

Lin fondly remembered: "He had told me that if I died before him, he would do Tzu Chi work day and night to fill the time without me. If he were to go first, he wanted me to go to the Jing Si Abode [where Master Cheng Yen and an assembly of nuns live]. He knew I'd be very sad and that I'd be very well cared for there."

## Dedicated

Born in 1950, Lu forged a career working for a Japanese company as an accountant. When he joined Tzu Chi in 1990, he became actively involved with recycling work and home visits to the needy. In 1995, he was certified as a Tzu Cheng Faith Corps member. He was among the first batch of people receiving such a certification in Kaohsiung, a large port city in southern Taiwan.

In 1996, Lu's employer decided to move the company to China. Lu was faced with a career choice: follow his employer to China or quit. He talked the matter over with his wife, who ran a breakfast shop. They decided they could make do with the income from her shop alone, so Lu decided to leave the company and become a full-time Tzu Chi volunteer. He was just 46 years old that year.

To thank his wife for allowing him to volunteer full-time, Lu donated one million NT dollars (US\$33,300) out of his savings to Tzu Chi in her name. She reciprocated by adding some money to the severance pay that he had received from his company and donated two million NT dollars to the foundation in his name. They were Tzu Chi supporters through and through.

Though Lu was most generous when it came to donating to the foundation to support its philanthropic work, he was on the opposite end of

the spectrum when it came to spending money on himself. He never traveled abroad for pleasure; the only time he went abroad was to help with an international disaster relief mission. He continued to wear his clothes and socks even after he had worn holes in them. "I wear those clothes and socks on the inside. Nobody can see the holes, so it's okay," he used to say. "It's more important to save money so I can donate it." His wife recalled that one time when their son was polishing his father's shoes, he found one of the soles was worn completely through. Lu was really thrifty with himself.

Volunteer Chen Ruo-yi (陳若儀), from Taipei, first met Lu when she volunteered during the second phase of building the Shanlin Great Love Village. She remembers that he always planned daily activities in advance to ensure that the project progressed as scheduled. "When it rained, he said it didn't matter, it would stop soon. When he found out that I couldn't handle heavy manual work, he suggested that I switch to administrative work. Whenever I felt that I couldn't take it anymore, his smiles always reenergized me."

Lu got up at four o'clock during that time to prepare hot beverages and to move heavy objects for his wife and their daughter to help them get ready to open the breakfast shop. After that, he would drive volunteers to the Shanlin construction site. When the volunteers had gone home after a day's work, he would stay behind to clean up, check the progress, and carefully plan out the next day's work so that everyone in the work relief program had work to do and all tasks had people assigned to them.

Chen went on: "I saw in Lu what it was like to have faith, perseverance and wisdom, and I learned from him how we should make the best of our time by giving for the greater good." She observed that Lu never questioned other people's abilities. There was no such thing as an inept worker in his eyes—there were only workers who were placed in the wrong places. Lu also expected himself to be congenial to everyone. He greeted everyone with a smile and thanked them for giving unselfishly. His positive attitude helped him develop good ties with other volunteers.

In addition to helping with the construction of the Shanlin Great Love Village, he was involved from beginning to end in the construction of the Kaohsiung Jing Si Hall, a place where Tzu Chi volunteers could gather for spiritual





LU FUSHENG

#### Lu led a full life supporting many people.

cultivation and hold events for the local community. After the hall was completed, he helped keep it spotlessly clean.

He also spared no effort helping with Tzu Chi's recycling work. After much difficulty, Tzu Chi finally established a recycling location in

Qijin District, where many of the residents work in fishing-related jobs. The law stipulated that a recycling location had to be completely cleaned up after being used for recycling during the day. To make sure that the Tzu Chi location was in compliance with this regulation, every day after Lu finished his work at the Jing Si Hall he would take other volunteers to Qijin to help local vol-

unteers collect recyclables. He visited Qijin so often that he became more familiar with that district than many local residents. He must have made a deep impression on the shop owners who saved their recyclables for Tzu Chi. Volunteer Wei Su-xiang (魏素香), who lives in Qijin, said, "Store owners usually don't notice when volunteers are absent, but these past few days I've heard many of them ask why they haven't seen him in days." This showed how much Lu's regular presence and hard work for recycling had impressed them.

Always a person who taught by personal example, Lu inspired many volunteers to take on more responsibilities. When he felt that a new recycling location was running well enough, he handed it over to local volunteers and moved on to start a new location.

He was always working, always doing this or that for Tzu Chi. As a result, his shirt was always wet from his exertions. If his shirt happened to be dry, those around him wondered

if he was unwell.

"No matter what people asked him to do, he would always smile and say, 'OK, I'll do it,'" said his wife. In his dictionary, there were no such words as "difficult" or "impossible." When Lin asked him if he was tired, he would reply, "The Master never says that she's tired. I don't feel right resting."

#### Leaving in peace

Lu had always been healthy, except for some weaknesses in the heart, for which he had regular follow-ups at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital.

On June 9, 2014, Lu felt severe abdominal pains. Examinations at the urology and GI clinics at a hospital near his home revealed nothing unusual. When the pain went away without treatment, he resumed his recycling work and he helped harvest mangos on the grounds of the Jing Si Hall to share with people.

On June 13, the intense pain returned and he went to see a cardiologist. The doctor spotted abnormalities on his electrocardiogram and suggested that he seek help at a large hospital. The next day, Lu and his wife traveled to Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital.

"Our oldest son wanted us to take the high-speed rail, but my husband suggested taking the regular train," Lin recalled. "He didn't want to spend that extra money, and we could have a nice talk on the trip."

Detailed examinations at the hospital indicated that the inner wall of his aorta was torn from top to bottom. The doctors said that the situation required immediate surgery, or it might be too late.

At the time, the only extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) machine at the hospital was being used in another operation, so the doctors hurried to refer him to another hospital. Before going to that hospital, Lu told his wife things that he wanted her to take care of at the recycling station while he was away. He also asked Zhang Hong-fen (張紅芬), a volunteer at Dalin Hospital, to call him when the surgery that was using the ECMO machine was over. He told Zhang that he could come back at any time.

At the other hospital, waiting to enter the operating room, Lu told his family and fellow volunteers not to worry, he would not let the Master down by not making it. If he failed to make it out of the operating room, they should just donate his body to Tzu Chi.

The surgery started at four o'clock in the afternoon of June 14 and lasted until seven the next morning. After the operation, he remained unconscious in the intensive care unit. He passed away that night in peace. He was 64.

His body was sent back to Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital to honor his wish that his remains be used for medical research. On June 17, Dr. Xu Zhi-en (蘇志恩), chief of anatomical pathology at the hospital, led junior resident and attending





LO QUE



TANG JIANG-HU

**Lu Jin-yong talks with a fellow volunteer (above) at the construction site of the Shanlin Great Love Village, where he helped coordinate the work relief program.**

**Lu helps with construction work at the Shanlin site (below).**

physicians in conducting the autopsy. Volunteers from Kaohsiung packed the room in which the procedure was going on and the area outside the room, chanting the Buddha's name for Lu. When the buzz of an electric saw could be heard behind a curtain, many of the volunteers had tears rolling down their faces.

After the pathological procedure, Lu's children knelt by his side and encouraged him to go in peace. He seemed to be smiling, and his body exuded a hint of sandalwood scent. Lin composed herself and said words of gratitude and blessings into his ear.

#### His legacy

Lu introduced many people to Tzu Chi when he was alive, and he helped deepen many volunteers' commitment to the foundation. Even his passing prompted quite a few people to begin

doing recycling work. Yet he probably would be happiest if he learned that his own second son, Lu Yu-xian (呂育賢), had finally decided to follow him into Tzu Chi.

Lu once drove six hours with his son for a visit to the Jing Si Abode in an effort to get him to join Tzu Chi. Sadly, Yu-xian took Lu's money and car keys and drove off, leaving Lu there alone.

Lu did not seem upset, so his wife asked how he could be so tolerant. Lu said, "Our second son is a challenge the bodhisattvas have given me to further me on the path of spiritual cultivation. Having done my best as a father, I won't dwell on what can't be helped. His life is up to him, whatever he makes of it."

At Lu's memorial service, Yu-xian said to the attendees, "The song that you just sang makes me think that Dad would probably have liked to say to me, 'Son, where are you now? I hope your days are filled with happiness.'" He repented to his father and thanked him for never giving up on him. He had left home when he was still a teenager, and he had led an aimless life, doing all sorts of bad things. In the more than ten years he was away, he often thought about coming home to his parents, but he just could not gather enough courage. On June 15, the day when Lu was most critically ill, Yu-xian spent the most time with him, more than on any other occasion. "As I stroked his head, I felt so close to him."

Yu-xian was especially grateful to Sister Huang Ming-yue (黃明月). She held his hand and promised old Lu that she would bring his son into Tzu Chi. "I never imagined that it would take Dad's life to save mine," Yu-xian said to the volunteers, "but I really hope to live a new life and be a good person from now on. In the future when you see me showing up to volunteer, please say hello to me and give me work to do. It'd be really nice to hear you say, 'Brother Lu, there you are. Please come give me a hand.'"

To Lu's children, he was the greatest father one could ever wish to have. "We grew up receiving the best care from him," they said. "He gave us so much, and yet he never asked for anything in return."

To his wife of 40 years, he was a dear, loving husband. She observed that he always gave credit to other people and took the blame on



**Lu Jin-yong and his wife of 40 years, Lin Li-xia.**

COURTESY OF LIN LI-XIA

himself. He did his best to volunteer for Tzu Chi, but he always told people that he was able to do that only because of her support, even though she really didn't do much for him. He often prayed to the bodhisattvas to make her healthier, promising that he was willing to live a shorter life in trade for better health for her. "How could my heart not ache for the passing of such a real-life bodhisattva?"

To many fellow Tzu Chi members, Lu's dedication to Tzu Chi was more than admirable. Huang Zhen-sheng (黃鎮生), head of the construction department at the Kaohsiung Jing Si Hall, had worked closely with Lu over the years. "Every time he came to our office, he would always ask if there was anything that he could do to help. He was always finding work to do."

Lu may not have lived a long life, but he certainly lived it to the full, and he thoroughly lived out his maxim: "Give people peace of mind, joy, convenience, and a shoulder to lean on." The footprints of his love can be found in his family, in Tzu Chi, and everywhere he went. ❀



# The Illustrated JING SI APHORISMS

## The Buddha says:

A person comes in contact with the world through his eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. Those who do not guard their senses and who become confused and tempted by the world are not really cultivating themselves. Only those who firmly guard their senses and keep their minds tranquil are truly cultivating themselves.



IF YOU WANT TO BE LOVED AND ACCEPTED, YOU SHOULD FIRST TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR TONE OF VOICE AND YOUR CONDUCT. YOUR WORDS AND ACTIONS ARE CULTIVATED IN THE MIDST OF THE ADVERSITIES OF DAILY LIFE.



YOU MUST CULTIVATE PATIENCE AND GIVING, BECAUSE CULTIVATION IS A MATTER OF PERSONAL SELF-AWARENESS.

Students nowadays are hard to teach. This is especially true of students who were assigned to our university because of their entrance examination scores, and not because it was their first choice. When they come with a sense of frustration, it becomes more difficult to guide their education.

Just because they are more difficult to teach, more effort from the heart is needed. They can gradually be molded through the influence of the environment around them. True stories of ordinary people who are kind and beautiful in everyday life are the best lessons for these students.

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

## Tzu Chi Events Around the World



Volunteers check aid recipients' personal information at a relief distribution Tzu Chi held for flood victims in Bosnia on October 18, 2014.

### Bosnia

Heavy rainstorms hit the Balkans in May and caused severe flooding in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. Tzu Chi volunteers from Germany traveled to Croatia and Bosnia in June and July to assess the damage. Because winter was approaching, Tzu Chi volunteers in Europe, despite their small number, decided to work together and hold an aid distribution in October for flood victims in the Bosnian towns of Srebrenik and Šamac.

Volunteers from Germany, Britain, France, Ireland, Italy, Austria, Malaysia and Taiwan gathered at the Tzu Chi liaison office in Munich on October 16 to prepare for the distribution. Items to be distributed included cash vouchers, blankets, pamphlets about Tzu Chi written in the Bosnian language, and copies of *Jing Si Aphorisms* by Master Cheng Yen.

Fifty volunteers left Munich on a bus early in the morning of the 17th, destined for the distri-

bution site in Srebrenik. Twelve hours later, at 5:30 p.m., after a journey of more than 800 kilometers (497 miles) through Austria, Slovenia and Croatia, they finally arrived.

The distribution took place on the following day, October 18. The municipal government of Šamac had arranged for two buses to take recipients from that town to the venue in Srebrenik. Police were on hand to maintain order. Many young people and social workers also volunteered to help. Many flood victims took time to read *Jing Si Aphorisms* and information about Tzu Chi while waiting for the event to start.

The event began with volunteers leading the crowd in singing the English version of "Love and Care," a popular Tzu Chi song. Then President Živko Budimir of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed his gratitude to Tzu Chi. He thanked the volunteers who had traveled from different parts of the world to help the flood victims. The president urged his countrymen to fol-





**Guests of honor break the ground at a joint ceremony for the reconstruction of old buildings at five schools in Pingdong County, southern Taiwan.**

low the example of Tzu Chi, whose volunteers always give help without regard to race, skin color, or religion, to help create a peaceful and harmonious society. He said he looked forward to working with the foundation in the future.

Alessandro Milic, an Italian, had previously participated in Tzu Chi events in Italy. When he heard about the planned distribution in Bosnia, he and his son, both Bosnian speakers, signed up to volunteer. Many people in the crowd were visibly moved when Milic read Master Cheng Yen's letter to the gathering.

Jelena Vidakovic, a Bosnian studying at a university in Germany, said that she was touched to see Tzu Chi volunteers helping her people with respect and love. She said she hoped to visit Master Cheng Yen one day.

Flood victims responded with broad smiles and words of gratitude when volunteers handed over the relief goods. A thousand blankets and 332 cash vouchers were distributed on this day, benefiting 332 families, or 1,170 people. Families of one or two persons, three or four persons, or five or more persons received a cash voucher worth 300, 500, or 700 Euros (US\$373, 622, 870) respectively.

#### **Taiwan**

Tzu Chi held a joint ground-breaking ceremony at Kong Cheng Junior High School on October 27, 2014. The foundation will rebuild some buildings at five schools in Pingdong County, southern Taiwan: 50 classrooms at Kong Cheng Junior High School, one dormitory building and 25 classrooms at Gao Tai Junior High School, 28 classrooms at Nei Pu Junior High School, 21 classrooms and one martial arts stadium at Li Kang Junior High School, and 15 dorm rooms at Fang Liao High School. The total cost will be 800 million NT dollars (US\$26 million).

County Magistrate Tsao Chi-hung (曹啓鴻) told the audience during the ceremony that he had informed Master Cheng Yen at the end of last year that five schools in the county were very old and badly needed repair or reconstruction. The county government had estimated that it would need around 500 million NT dollars (US\$16 million) for the required work, but the Ministry of Education could only appropriate 160 million NT dollars (US\$5 million) a year for the improvement of old school buildings in Pingdong. At that rate, the improvement of the five schools would take several years to complete.

Master Cheng Yen asked a team of experts to inspect the schools. Based on their findings, Tzu Chi quickly set the reconstruction process in motion.

Lin Pi-yu (林碧玉), a vice president of the Tzu Chi Foundation, said that the first time she went to Kong Cheng Junior High School, she was shocked to see rebar sticking out from one building and swaying in the air. It indicated how old and dangerous the building was. Old buildings like this should be upgraded at once to ensure the safety of the students.

Huang Chi-teng (黃子騰), from the Ministry of Education, was also present at the ceremony. He said that with its limited budget, the central government couldn't meet the need to repair or reconstruct old buildings in more than 3,400 schools all over Taiwan. He extended gratitude to Tzu Chi for its help on behalf of the Ministry of Education.

The reconstruction is slated to be completed by the end of 2015.

#### **Malaysia**

Tzu Chi Melaka held its annual scholarship presentation ceremony at its office on November 2. Of the 993 students selected to receive scholarships this year, 902 were present and accompanied by their parents, principals, or teachers. The ceremony was conducted in two sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, to accommodate the nearly 2,000 attendees.

**Two recipients of a scholarship awarded by Tzu Chi Melaka smile happily because their hard work this year has been recognized.**



Primary school scholarship recipients received 250 ringgits (US\$74), those in secondary schools received RM300 (US\$89), and high school seniors and students in pre-university education were awarded RM500 (US\$150) each. Each recipient also received a Jing Si bookstore coupon worth RM50 (US\$14).

Fifth grader Yu Jin Xin (余錦信) was very glad when he learned that he had won a scholarship this year. His worst subject had been English, with grades hovering around the passing mark. To improve, he started spending one to two hours every evening studying English, and he never hesitated to ask his teacher for help when he needed it. His positive attitude spilled over to his sister, and they often studied together. His hard work paid off: His English grades improved, as did his class ranking. He was awarded a scholarship for his progress.

Zhang Ke Xin (張可欣), a third-time recipient of the Tzu Chi scholarship, is also a fifth grader. Like Yu Jin Xin, she received a scholarship in the "Academic Progress" category this year. She said that she would donate part of her scholarship to Tzu Chi and part of it to her school to build an auditorium, and then she would use the rest to buy books for her studies. She also received a coin bank from Tzu Chi because she wanted to save her spare change to help needy people.

Liu Shu Fen (劉淑芬), a teacher at SMK Nyalas, had driven two students and their parents to the venue. One of the students, Sathiasilan a/l Ramesh, came with his mother, Santhy a/p Thooraisamy. He won a scholarship in the "Morality" category. He thanked Ms. Liu for recommending him for the scholarship, and Tzu Chi for granting it to him. He promised that he would study harder to get better grades. His mother said with tears in her eyes that her son was a very good child. She said that when she was out working, he always looked after his younger siblings and helped them with their homework. She indicated that she would use the scholarship to buy school supplies and pay tuition fees.

Liu Rong Xi (劉榮禧), a school inspector from the Melaka Education Department, also attended the ceremony. He observed that the Tzu Chi scholarship program was different from others in that it did not consider ethnicity in the selection process. As evidence, 47 percent of the recipients this year were Indians, 44 percent Chinese, 8 percent Malays, and 1 percent other races. The main benchmark was apparently whether a student was in need of help, not ethnicity.





Jagoda Kozikowska (right), a city employee, thanks Tzu Chi volunteers for participating in a tree-planting activity organized by the city government of Coquitlam, British Columbia.

Tzu Chi volunteers hoped that the scholarships and the love of Tzu Chi would be an encouragement to the students, and that when they grew up they would give back to society.

Canada

On October 17, Tzu Chi volunteers participated in a tree-planting event held by the city government of Coquitlam, British Columbia. It was the fifth year volunteers have taken part in such an event.

Despite the windy, rainy weather that morning, You De-kun (尤德坤) led a group of 29 fellow volunteers to attend the activity. Jagoda Kozikowska, a city employee, greeted the volunteers and thanked Tzu Chi for its participation year after year.

Kozikowska demonstrated how to plant trees. She taught the volunteers to gently tap a sapling to loosen the soil around the roots before they placed the sapling into a hole in the soil. The hole had to be the right size, and the dirt all around the hole had to be loosened to make it easier for the roots to spread. Every step had to be done with care and attention.

Volunteer Xu Shui-sheng (徐水生) said that this was the first time that he had taken part in an event like this. He wouldn't say the event was fun because it was really hard work to dig into soil that was very hard and full of rocks. However, he did think that the event was very meaningful and fulfilling, since the trees he planted on this day could become part of a forest in the future.

The area where the event was held was originally a small hill. However, a housing development project nearby had caused extensive excavation, and a marsh had developed as a result. Due to lack of care, the environment had become dirty and many wild animals had disappeared. Volunteer Lin Jian-cheng (林建成) said that he was happy to plant trees to help improve the habitat around the marsh and make it more friendly to wildlife.

The event began at 10 in the morning and ended at 2:45 in the afternoon, with a short break for lunch. Volunteers planted a total of 715 saplings and expressed hope that the saplings would grow into big trees to help the environment.

Directory of Tzu Chi Offices Worldwide

TAIWAN

Main Office  
Tel: 886-3-8266779  
Fax: 886-3-8267776  
Tzu Chi Humanitarian Center  
Tel: 886-2-28989000  
Fax: 886-2-28989920

ARGENTINA

Tel: 54-11-48625770  
Fax: 54-11-43140252

AUSTRALIA

Brisbane  
Tel: 61-7-32727938  
Fax: 61-7-32727283

Gold Coast  
Tel: 61-7-55717706  
Fax: 61-7-55717703

Melbourne  
Tel: 61-3-98971668  
Fax: 61-3-98974288

Perth  
Tel/Fax: 61-8-92278228

Sydney  
Tel: 61-2-98747666  
Fax: 61-2-98747611

BRAZIL

Tel: 55-11-55394091  
Fax: 55-11-55391683

BRUNEI

Tel/Fax: 673-3336779

CANADA

Edmonton  
Tel: 1-780-4639788  
Fax: 1-780-4621799

Montreal  
Tel: 1-514-8442074  
Fax: 1-514-2889152

Toronto  
Tel: 1-416-8868886  
1-905-9471182  
Fax: 1-416-9002048

Vancouver  
Tel: 1-604-2667699  
Fax: 1-604-2667659

DOMINICAN REP.

Tel: 1-809-5300972

EL SALVADOR

Tel/Fax: 1-503-7293905

FRANCE

Tel: 33-1-45860312  
Fax: 33-1-45862540

GERMANY

Tel: 49-40-336806  
Fax: 49-40-32027870

GREAT BRITAIN

Tel: 44-20-88689691  
Fax: 44-20-89334262

GUATEMALA

Tel: 502-22327648  
Fax: 502-23675872

HONG KONG

Tel: 852-28937166  
Fax: 852-28937478

INDONESIA

Tel: 62-21-5055999  
Fax: 62-21-5055699

JAPAN

Tel: 81-3-32035651  
Fax: 81-3-32035674

JORDAN

Tel/Fax: 962-6-5817305

LESOTHO

Tel: 266-22321823  
Fax: 266-22321877

MALAYSIA

Ipoh  
Tel: 60-5-2551013  
Fax: 60-5-2421013

Kedah  
Tel: 60-4-7311013  
Fax: 60-4-7321013

Kuala Lumpur  
Tel: 60-3-62563800  
Fax: 60-3-62563801

Melaka  
Tel: 60-6-2810818  
Fax: 60-6-2812796

Penang  
Tel: 60-4-2281013  
Fax: 60-4-2261013

MEXICO

Mexicali  
Tel: 1-760-7688998  
Fax: 1-760-7686631

NETHERLANDS

Tel: 31-629-577511

NEW ZEALAND

Tel: 64-9-2716976  
Fax: 64-9-2724639

PARAGUAY

Tel: 595-21-333818  
Fax: 595-21-310588

PHILIPPINES

Tel/Fax: 63-2-7320001

SINGAPORE

Tel: 65-65829958  
Fax: 65-65829952

SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Town  
Tel: 27-21-9137082  
Fax: 27-21-9137057

Durban  
Tel: 27-31-5636428  
Fax: 27-31-5791689

Johannesburg  
Tel: 27-11-7826830  
Fax: 27-11-7821261

Ladysmith  
Tel: 27-36-6354397  
Fax: 27-36-6341261

THAILAND

Tel: 66-2-6421888  
Fax: 66-2-6421890

TURKEY

Tel: 90-212-6609825  
Fax: 90-212-6609683

UNITED STATES

Headquarters: San Dimas  
Tel: 1-909-4477799  
Fax: 1-909-4477948

Arlington  
Tel: 1-817-5480226

Atlanta  
Tel: 1-770-9868669

Austin  
Tel: 1-512-4910358  
Fax: 1-512-9261373

Boston  
Tel: 1-617-7620569  
Fax: 1-617-4314484

Cerritos  
Tel: 1-562-9266609  
Fax: 1-562-9267669

Chicago  
Tel: 1-630-9636601  
Fax: 1-630-9609360

Cleveland  
Tel/Fax: 1-440-6469292

Columbus  
Tel: 1-614-4579215  
Fax: 1-614-4579217

Dallas  
Tel: 1-972-6808869  
Fax: 1-972-6807732

Detroit  
Tel/Fax: 1-586-7953491

Hawaii  
Tel: 1-808-7378885  
Fax: 1-808-7378889

Houston  
Tel: 1-713-2709988  
Fax: 1-713-9819008

Indianapolis  
Tel: 1-317-5800979

Kansas  
Tel: 1-913-3976517

Long Island  
Tel: 1-516-8736888  
Fax: 1-516-7460626

Madison  
Tel: 1-608-2687692  
Fax: 1-608-2685705

Miami  
Tel: 1-954-5381172  
Fax: 1-317-6459907

New Jersey  
Tel: 1-973-8578666  
Fax: 1-973-8579555

New York  
Tel: 1-718-8880866  
Fax: 1-718-4602068

Northwest L.A.  
Tel: 1-818-7277689  
Fax: 1-818-7279272

Orlando  
Tel: 1-407-2921146  
Fax: 1-407-9571125

Phoenix  
Tel: 1-480-8386556  
Fax: 1-480-7777665

Pittsburgh  
Tel: 1-412-5318343  
Fax: 1-412-5318341

San Diego  
Tel: 1-858-5460578  
Fax: 1-858-5460573

San Francisco  
Tel: 1-415-6820566  
Fax: 1-415-6820567

San Jose  
Tel: 1-408-4576969  
Fax: 1-408-9438420

Savannah, Georgia  
Tel: 1-912-5988006  
Fax: 1-912-5988002

Seattle  
Tel: 1-425-8227678  
Fax: 1-425-8226169

St. Louis  
Tel/Fax: 1-314-9941999

Washington DC  
Tel: 1-703-7078606  
Fax: 1-703-7078607

West L.A.  
Tel: 1-310-4735188  
Fax: 1-310-4779518

VIETNAM

Tel: 84-8-38475061  
Fax: 84-8-38452585

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*The more mistrust we feel, the less confidence we have.*  
—Master Cheng Yen

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