

The Woman in My Life

by Nancy Xia

The woman in this story is a very typical Chinese woman: short black hair that perfectly suits a middle aged female, black eyes that reflect a loving mother's character, yellow skin that shows how cruel the passage of time can be, and a mouth that speaks not much English. Although she seems to be ordinary, she is so special to me, and her ageless beauty is definitely extraordinary in my eyes. This woman is the most important person in my life, my dearest mother.

My mother used to have a good career in China. She worked as a biologist. When I was in the eighth grade, my parents decided to immigrate to Canada, because they believed their daughter would receive a better education in a free country. Therefore, without thinking of the consequences, they left behind their aged parents, beloved careers, and everything else in the motherland where they had lived for forty years, and bravely entered a new country that was unpredictable and full of strangers. There were no thoughts of turning back.

Like most immigrants who were not native speakers of English, my parents could not find a job that was similar to what they used to do in China. In order to live, my parents became blue-collar workers. The first two years in Canada were very unstable and unpleasant. My father had six jobs before he settled down with his current job. My mother had even more difficulties finding a suitable job. Although money seemed to be much harder to earn and life seemed to be much tougher to sustain, my parents never regretted coming to Canada. They deeply believed that one day in the future, their daughter would rely on her brain to earn money and have a much brighter life. That was their only hope.

June 20th, 2003, my parents felt extremely hopeless after I jumped off the 8th floor balcony and attempted to end my life in my 18th year. Seeing their only daughter lying motionless on the ground, they cried, they screamed and they did not know what else they could do.

God definitely showed mercy to my parents. He refused to let me leave this world. Unbelievably, I survived from that 25 metre fall without any brain damage or internal injuries. But because I had landed on my back, I sustained a serious spinal cord injury at the level of T12, L1 and L2. This

portion of my spine looked like a smashed walnut on the x-ray pictures. That was the last time I would be able to physically jump.

My mother's heart was smashed into pieces as well. She has had trouble sleeping since that day. Whenever she tried to close her eyes, the moment I disappeared from the edge of the balcony flashed back like a scene in a movie. That's right, like a movie. It was a scene that could only be seen in a movie; it was unreal. She never thought it would happen to her own daughter. After a couple of sleepless nights, my mother realized that there was no use regretting and grieving, The only way to make things better was to be brave and strong. She wiped away her tears, regained her strength and even started to comfort my broken-hearted father. They decided to face the problems and move on with life. So the next day, they went back to work, since they could not afford to lose their jobs at this time of crisis. They aimed to work harder and earn more money to treat my injured body and wounded soul.

I was hospitalized in Sunnybrook for six months. Five days a week, for a total of 120 days, my mother went to work at 7:00 a.m. in the morning, then got off at 11:00 a.m., and took the TTC for an average of 90 minutes every time, just to visit me. When she finally arrived in my room, the first thing she would always ask was, "How are you feeling today? Did you sleep well?" Then she would gently wipe my entire body with warm water, put baby powder on my skin, and comb my hair. After she fed me lunch, she would take out a Chinese newspaper and start to read interesting stories of the day. Once in a while she would bring me books written by inspirational authors and read me passages that she thought were encouraging. Listening to the encounters of those people who had experienced the real pain in life, and being showered with their touching words, my spirit was gradually uplifted, and my will to carry on living was getting stronger and stronger every day.

I particularly remember one rainy Wednesday, when my mother got off work and wanted to take the bus to the hospital. As she saw the bus approaching the bus stop, she automatically started to run and attempted to catch it. For some reason, no matter how desperate she was, she felt she was not getting any closer to the bus stop. It seemed like the bus stop was an ocean apart from her. The bus left the stop, but my mother did not stop running. There were tears and rain all mixed together, and it was not possible to separate them.

Every time my mother came to visit me, I could see the exhaustion and bitterness in her eyes, but her looks also let me know that she would never think of giving up under any circumstance, and therefore, I should not either. On the other hand, my father worked nine hours each day and tried

to earn as much money as he could to help me. It was a period during the SARS crisis, and the hospital only allowed one visitor per day. Because of this, my father could not wait to come to see me on the weekends. For the first time, I felt how much my parents loved me and thought how much I had hurt them. Thinking about my parents while lying in the hospital bed was like taking a pain killer. I would not feel the constant pain from my back anymore, because I knew that if I felt pain physically, my parents would feel a hundred times more pain emotionally. Therefore, I tried my best to overcome the soreness. With proper medication and tremendous support from my family, my depression was treated successfully by the end of my hospitalization at Sunnybrook. But during that same six month period, my mother lost twenty pounds and looked about ten years older than her actual age.

I was then transferred to Toronto Rehab Lyndhurst Centre – a special hospital for patients with a spinal cord injury. For the first time, I sat in my own wheelchair and actually felt excited while wheeling very fast down the hospital hallway. What I did not notice were the two streams of tears hanging from my mother's eyes, as she stood behind me and watched me from the behind.

My time spent at Lyndhurst was very memorable. I met a lot of amazing people with physical disabilities. They inspired me in many different ways and helped me understand that I could not create my destiny, but I could definitely change it. So I decided to start my life all over again, and this time, I would make it better than ever.

In September 2004, I started attending University of Toronto in my wheelchair as a first year student. It was the first step in approaching my ultimate goal, which was filling my parent's hope of becoming somebody. Despite the fact that I always felt I was being stared at by strangers - whether the looks came from curiosity, sympathy or sarcasm - I never stop loving school. I felt the only way I could repay my parents was to become a university graduate, and to start a good career. One day in the future, when I have my own income, my parents will be able to quit their tiring jobs, and enjoy the sunshine on a peaceful Hawaii beach or maybe take a cruise in the beautiful Caribbean. That's my biggest dream and strongest motivation in working hard, every single day.

It's been seven years since my injury. I thank God for letting me live until this date. I also thank my mother and my father who have loved me throughout my journey, and have finally realized that a person's life does not belong to that person only, but it is shared by everyone who loves that person. Life is so precious. Sometimes, our life is more precious to others than to ourselves.

Therefore, none of us holds the decision to extinguish the life candle; only God is allowed to blow it out... naturally.