

Volunteer Comes to Terms With His Disability

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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He Ruilin (何如林) sits in front of his computer, his eyes fixed on the screen as he pieces together the small snippets of video. At that moment, a searing pain tears through his left calf and he has to massage it. This small movement not only relieves his pain but also reminds him of his mother's warm and loving caresses after the fateful day 20 years that changed his life.

He was serving in the army in Taichung and was followed his squad to an abandoned castle for a drill; he accidentally dropped a document he was holding and it fell to the bottom of the castle. He went down to pick it up but, as he was climbing back up a ladder, he suddenly lost his balance and fell three meters to the ground. With his tall, straight frame of 185 cm, he had never imagined such an accident changed his life forever.

One tragedy follows another

His parents, who lived in Tainan, rushed to see their son; their faces were full of pain and worry. He was badly wounded and lying on the hospital bed; he was in such pain that he could not clearly see his parent's anxious faces. He had seriously injured his spine and had multiple fractures in the rest of his body. His life became a series of surgeries and countless treatment sessions; at the beginning, he clung to the hope of recovery and being able to standing on his feet again. But his sister, who is a doctor, knew how unlikely it was told him, in the hope that he would accept the reality.

He spent a long time in a state of confusion. But, thanks to the love and care of his family and encouragement from the doctors and nurses, he became resilient and never once threw a temper tantrum. The pain reminded him that he was still alive, to cherish life and learn from the hero of the book "A boat in a tumbling ocean" – the biography of a man who made his mark in life despite severe physical disabilities.



Throughout the two years that he was hospitalized, his mother stayed with him in the ward. She had long suffered from anemia and constant dizziness. Within a year of his being discharged, she died because of her poor health. He was overcome with guilt. He thought that, if everyone had not been preoccupied with caring for him, they would have paid more attention to her symptoms. Then, unexpectedly, another tragedy befell the family: his 36-year-old sister died of an unexplained respiratory failure, leaving behind two small daughters.

Her death made him grieve even more. He always wondered to himself: "why didn't I die? Why was I the one left behind to face all this pain?" Living in the hospital as his home and seeing family members going through the intensive care unit, he was burdened with all this pain and unexpected tragedies. He saw no alternative other than to face these realities as they were.

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In Editing Work, he sees beauty of life

He never expected to join the documentation team of Tzu Chi as an editor. Because his former office was above the Kaohsiung Tzu Chi branch, he often saw on his commute the volunteers in their blue and white uniforms. As recommended by his co-workers, he started to donate to them regularly, with a heart of giving back and gratitude for all who have helped him. After his company closed, he stopped looking for work; he had to look after his wife who was in poor health and his father when he came to stay with him.



With all this free time, he needed something to do. So he asked Tzu Chi volunteer Zeng Meng-xian what he could do to help. She said that the parent-child classes in Kaohsiung needed someone with editing skills: "you are good with computers, so why do you not come to learn about how to do it?" Rui-lin considered his physical limitations and decided that editing was something he could do.

When another volunteer Yan-cun came to his house to install the software, he told Rui-lin that editing required a lot of patience. Knowing how impatient he was, Rui-lin hesitated for a moment. But when he saw how the installation process was running smoothly, he thought that he could not turn back. He thought to himself: "what else can I do apart from editing? Maybe cultivating my patience is a good thing." So he joined the editors of the documentation team.

"It's time to turn and move around a little." The dryness in his eyes and numbness in his legs reminded him to make a cup of coffee and take a break, while he thought best how to lay out the video content. "Taking a break" is something that he had to constantly remind himself to do; if not, his body will start to protest.

This video-editing project is about an 80-year-old lady who collects cardboards in the markets, works in the recycling stations and participates in dharma study groups at night. She donates all that she earns over and above her basic living costs. Her diligence makes Rui-lin feel deep admiration and inspiration. Knowing how doctors re-built his body from fragments, he wants to tell this old lady's touching story from the fragments of video.

Living in the moment without regret

Apart from video-editing, Rui-lin also listens to Dharma Master's talks on Da Ai TV. He really likes the aphorism "charity and loving your parents are urgent tasks that cannot wait"; when his mother passed away, he was stricken by guilt, and his father's bad temper drove a rift between them. Since he was a child, relations between them have been poor. Of the three children, he got the lowest grades at school -- his older brother earned a PhD and his sister went to medical school, but he only graduated from junior college. His father paid great attention to academic achievements but had low expectations of him. When Ruilin was young, his father would scold him sternly or even beat him up, if he had poor grades. After his injury, his father's

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disappointment was even more obvious; his father even seemed to disapprove of his marrying a disabled woman.

Rui-lin often massages his amputated calf and looking at its flaws; he uses a prosthetic. Although his father has his regrets, he knows that, for all his strictness, his father cares about him. Every time Rui-lin goes home to visit him, his father goes to the market early in the morning to get a basket of groceries and make a meal for him. He often asks about Rui-lin's job and his wife's health.



Rui-lin knows deep down that, during this lifetime, it may be his karmic retribution. He has two contrasting thoughts -- one that his life is a tragedy, the other that he is doing really well now. He is really thankful that he can spend time with his father in his old age. Although Rui-lin cannot look after him, he finds that just talking to him and serving him as best he can gives him a chance to love him before it is too late.

Last year, he joined a program to train Tzu Chi commissioners; on the way back to Hualien Jing Si Abode, he almost gave up due to his health. But the volunteers from Hualien called him to ask his needs; they prepared appropriate bed and accessible shower amenities, to help him complete the training. Their concern for him made him feel that he was part of the family. And having a wife who supports him in their daily life helps him realize that obstacles in life have to be faced, that there is nothing that he can change and that it is most important to live in the moment.

Now we can see Rui-lin's work in recording community events and volunteer stories on Da Ai TV. Because of his health, he will take the work as long as it is not too pressing. Sometimes, when he is not editing videos, his wife is puzzled and asks: "why aren't you editing today?"

He vows that, as long as his body and eyes allow it, he will continue this work, putting together the colors of each true story in life.

(Reported and written by Chen Yin-tai, Kaohsiung, Jan 30, 2013)

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