

## Volunteer Inspired by Example of Mother

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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Volunteer Hong Qi-ling (洪琪齡) was inspired to join Tzu Chi by the example of her mother. In the face of many challenges, she never shirked her responsibility. And she was happiest when she was working as a volunteer. This example has helped her through more than a decade of service in the foundation.

One of Qi-ling's clearest memories is when her mother had to take over the debt of her great-aunt. The two were contributing to a private group of individuals who each contribute to a common pool; the highest bidder borrows money from the other members and pays them back with an interest rate that everyone has agreed. On this occasion, her great-aunt had won the bid and taken the money but did not pay back; so it fell to her mother to repay the debt. "Qi-ling, you must remember this," she told her daughter that day. "No matter how rough life gets, we must answer the call of duty." She remembered that her mother held her hand and pressed it hard. She raised her tiny face and gazed at her mother. Her tone and expression were no different to those of a normal day. Relieved, she nodded and said: "Yes, mum, I know."

The family was overwhelmed by unexpected financial troubles. A few years later, her mother had to travel to Japan and work as a dishwasher to pay the debt. After returning to Taiwan, she trained as a Tzu Chi volunteer; it was the happiest part of her life.

Since her birth, her mother had had poor eyesight and was far-sighted. So she always brought Qi-ling to help record visits to senior citizens who lived alone. As she told Qi-ling what she had seen, she often cried. Qi-ling was puzzled; "my mother has always been a symbol of strength and has never sobbed despite all her hardships," she said to herself. "But now why is she crying over a stranger's predicament?"

### Continuing her mother's work



After the great Taiwan earthquake of September 21, 1999, her mother became extremely busy with relief work. She was fund-raising on the streets, laying out bricks for the restoration projects and doing cleaning work. The children were always worried about her health because they rarely saw her. At around 6 a.m. on Christmas Eve 2000, her mother was washing her face and getting ready to visit and clean a hospital. Suddenly, the children heard a loud noise and something fall to the ground; their mother had collapsed.

An ambulance rushed her to the hospital. A CT scan revealed a broken tumor which was increasing pressure on the brain; the doctors decided to operate at once. But the cerebral pressure did not come down after the surgery and she was still in a coma. As her mother slept in the Intensive Care Unit, her body connected to various tubes, Qi-ling touched her face and

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hair and whispered: "Mum, you are only sixty years old, your life is about to be good finally... you said you will bring me along as a Tzu Chi volunteer. I promise you, you have to wake up quickly..."

On the morning of the eighth day, the last of the millenium, her mother's cheeks were drooping severely. Qi-ling saw this as a bad omen; she felt her mother was like an exhausted marathon runner on his last breath. She wrapped her arms around her mother, leant on her and said with great emotion: "Mum, my younger brother and I are both grown up, please don't worry, we will take good care of Dad..." To stop her tears from flowing, she swallowed hard and continued: "I will continue your good work in Tzu Chi, please be at peace and follow Buddha on your departure..." Qi-ling hoped that time could stop right then.

Tzu Chi volunteer Qiu Shu-zhen encouraged her to write a eulogy. She made many attempts to start writing; she saw the first few lines drenched in tears. At the memorial service, Qi-ling heard, through her teary eyes, the master of ceremonies reciting the eulogy in a deep, low voice: "...Mother has always been my role model. I will continue her unfinished work and mission..." Qi-ling saw the audience wiping their tears away and felt a surge of energy within her. In these Tzu Chi volunteers, she saw a shadow of her mother. "Mother has never left, she left so much of herself in these people," she said to herself. She smiled through her tears.

### A biographer of touching stories



Qi-ling was certified as a commissioner in 2002. When SARS broke out in 2003, the He Ping Hospital was shut down and the Wan Hua district of Taipei designated the contact point for the Northern Region. The Tzu Chi Documentation Team had just been established and people were needed to record the history of Tzu Chi. So Qi-Ling joined as a writer.

In 2005, she took part in a training course for writing biographies and feature stories. In the classroom, she shared her experience of writing about her mother. She sobbed a few times; everyone in the audience was captivated. At that moment, she realized the inspiring power of a true story. Two years later, she took up the role as the Northern Region biographer; she inspired everyone to see the significance of feature stories and see her unlimited potential.

She thinks of her mother when she wears the Tzu Chi uniform. One evening she was returning from a three-day retreat of the Tzu Chi International Humanitarian Aid Association. When she gets into her room, she carefully takes off the uniform dress, shakes the edge of the skirt to remove its creases and lays it on a hanger. After carefully removing the lint and dust, she puts her hands on the inner seams that have been repeatedly sewn together after splitting many times. These fine stitch-marks are the records of the conversations she had with her mother. For the past 10 years, she has found a warm, steady force in the dress, as she sees and records countless events in Tzu Chi.

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