

Generous Teacher Inspires Student to Life of Service

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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The inspiring story of Lee Li-se began when she was a student in fourth grade at a primary school in central Taiwan more than 50 years ago. The daylight was fading, class had ended and Lee was standing at the end of a line of students; her teacher walked past and discreetly slipped three five New Taiwan dollar coins into her pocket. “Bring the money to your mother,” she said.

The teacher, Ms Chen Cui-qiong, repeated this act every month, to help Li-se’s mother pay for her tuition fees. She was able to pass the entrance exam into middle school; she was inspired to follow Ms Chen’s example and become a teacher. She remained in this profession until her retirement in 2007 and took a special interest in children with special needs. Since then, she has devoted her energies to the Tzu Chi Foundation, becoming a commissioner at the end of 2001. Age has not tired her desire to serve.

Three Coins Sowed the Seed of Compassion



Li-se comes from a poor family of eight people who lived in a cramped thatched cottage with less than 10 square meters of space. At the beginning of every month, her mother borrowed money from others in order to pay for her tuition. Realizing what was going on, Teacher Chen secretly gave money to her to give to her mother, so she could use it to pay back what she had borrowed. This was a routine that was repeated every month.

The three coins represented soil, rain water and the rays of the sun; they silently nourished the heart of Li-se’s heart. This led her to take a vow and become a teacher like Ms. Chen, a teacher with wisdom and compassion. At middle school, she studied hard and earned a scholarship each semester. Combining this with her wage as a laboratory assistant, she managed to pay the NT\$400 school registration fee herself; this provided some financial relief for her family. After several years, she came to realize that she was the first and only work-study student at the school. The teachers had come up with this carefully thought-out plan in order to protect her dignity and self-esteem.

Blessed with this abundant love and her strong self-control, Li-se advanced on the journey to achieve her ambition to become a teacher. After graduating from the Teachers' Academy in 1977, she was a teacher at Shi Dong Elementary School until her retirement in 2007. For 30 years, she maintained the spirit of giving and worked hard to be a competent teacher.

Repaying Teacher's Kindness by Educating Others

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