

## Care, Is More than Just Saying Good Luck

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Tuesday, 01 September 2015 00:00

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When I was sick in bed, many people encouraged me to get well soon. But nobody ever tried to understand my needs. Five years ago, Tzu Chi volunteer Ya-Chi Tsai came to my bed and asked me caringly: "What do you need help with?" This sentence forever changed my life...

I was born in Zuozhen District, Tainan, Taiwan in 1967 and moved to An-Nan District with my family at the age of eight. When I was young, I was an energetic and outgoing boy, always curious about the little things in life.

After graduating from junior high school, I started working part-time while continuing to study. I worked at an electronics company during the day and attended night classes after work. A month before enlisting in mandatory military training, I was on a long road trip making a delivery when I fell asleep at the wheel on my way back home. When I woke up, I was lying in a hospital bed. That was when I realized that I had been involved in a car accident.

My head felt tight and I could not turn it to the left. The doctor told me that my C1 and C2 cervical vertebra had shifted and that I needed rehabilitation. However, I proceeded to pack my bags and went to fulfill my military obligation, without thinking much about rehabilitation.

During the second month of military training, my neck began to ache and my right leg went numb. I was not able to function properly within my army squad and was sent to a military hospital. The doctor recommended that I undergo surgery; but there was only a 50% chance of success and it would cost around NT\$500,000. I felt helpless. I got myself discharged from the hospital and ended my short military career after only two months and two weeks.

### **Paralysis and a shattered future**

After leaving the army, I underwent rehabilitation while trying different jobs. I worked as a delivery man at an electronic compartments factory as well as in a timber company. I also traveled to Mainland China to help a friend manage his factory. One day I met a good friend of mine and, while we were fooling around on a bench, I lost my balance and fell backwards. With a loud bang, my head hit the wall behind me and I reinjured my cervical spine.

After the incident, I went for my annual medical check-up; the doctor told me that the shift in my cervical spine was even more severe than before. My mind became clouded with worries for my future.

After starting work, I saved money to buy myself a car and began traveling around the world. I also got to know a beautiful and friendly girl.

When we first started dating, I told her about my condition and that I might have difficulties walking or even be bed-ridden in the future as a result. However, perhaps because she was

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optimistic or because I seemed no different to any other average person, she did not seem to sense any risk. Even when I proposed that we break up, she always said: "Impossible!"

Therefore, with an ambivalent mixture of happiness and anxiety, I married her.

After getting married, I began working for an electrical company driving an excavator to bury power lines underground. One day after work, I was driving the excavator up onto a truck for it to be sent back to the company; the machine suddenly turned and I fell to the ground. I could not move my arms or legs; I could not speak and was sent to the hospital.

With my cervical spine injured yet again, I was paralyzed from the neck down. Although I knew before that I could become paralyzed, I did not expect it to occur so soon. Before the accident, I was completely fine; but now I was suddenly paralyzed.

Living in an intensive care unit for more than a month, my mother and my wife would take turns to help me with my stretching exercises. After half a year of intense rehabilitation and seeing no progress, my wife demanded a divorce.

At that time, I was only 32 years old. I still had dreams, but my heart was full of regrets. All I could do was lie in bed, crying.

### **A mother's love-no complaints, no regrets**

My mother worked the night shift at an auto parts warehouse. She started working at 5 p.m., came home at 11 p.m. to give me medicine and then goes back to work until 6 a.m. the next day. As she dragged her tired body from work, she fed me breakfast, did housework and then took me to the Spinal Cord Injury Association for rehabilitation.

After rehabilitation, we returned home at noon. My mother quickly brushed my hair, gave me medicine and went back to work at 5 p.m. With barely three hours of sleep a day, Mother's face became thin and palled, as if she would crumble at any moment from fatigue.

With my lively and energetic personality, staying at home was simply unbearable. I had no one to talk to. I started to refuse my mother's arrangements and my immature, childish side emerged. I intentionally refused to eat my meals and take medicine, in an attempt to fall sick from hunger and be admitted to the hospital, so that my mother would have to stay with me.

For my mother, the biggest challenge was not attending to me, but dealing with my emotions that every day. Afterwards, her health began to deteriorate and she had to give up her job to take care of me.

In the past, I never liked asking people for anything. But now, I had to get help just for a drink of water. As I lost my health, my freedom, my friends and my dreams, I became quick-tempered and impatient. Whenever I wanted something, I wanted it immediately. I could no longer control my body. I always lost my temper, and my mother became the object of my anger.

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Whenever I heard something I disliked, I lost my temper. When something did not go smoothly, I cursed. My bad temper scared away many therapists. Despite this, my mother never said anything nor scolded me. She would only tell me softly and patiently: "You have to recover soon. If I pass away one day, what would happen to you?"

I knew I was being disobedient and a burden to my mother, but I was helpless and could not control my body. Emotions conquered me and I struggled to escape their reins.

### Care and support-finally seeing what one truly needs

During this time, many people came to visit me. I did not like to see them because they would only say "Good luck, work hard!" There was no use to my body. Deep in my heart, I only wanted to recover and stand up. Who would be able to help me achieve this dream?



One day, volunteer Ya-Chi Tsai and other volunteers from Tzu Chi came to visit me. As usual, I used a towel as an eye mask and cotton as ear plugs to avoid people.

Ya-Chi is an exceptionally playful and joyful person. It seemed the more I ignored her, the more she wanted to help me. She would visit again and again, trying to get close to me. Once she even removed my blindfold. I was thinking to myself: "Who is this person?"

Ya-Chi is meticulous and able to pick up clues to a person's inner feelings and needs. One day she asked me: "Dear, what is it that you want?" I had waited a long time for someone to ask me this. I finally replied "I want to walk out of this place. I want to see the ocean." It was not long after that that Ya-Chi and other volunteers took me and my mother to the Gold Coast. Seeing the waves, smelling the familiar ocean breeze and being surrounded by caring people, I was happy for the first time in a very long while.

After that, my heart was opened. I began to look forward to the visits from the volunteers. One day, volunteer Chung-Cheng Lin said that he wanted to help me shower. I was nervous and excited at the same time. I was excited because, since the accident, my mother had to give me sponge baths to keep me clean. It had been a long time since I felt the rush of water over my head. At the same time, I was nervous, because I was not comfortable with someone helping me shower. I was truly moved by Chung-Cheng's selflessness.

### A change of mind-Relying on myself to stand up again

Afterwards, Ya-Chi planned many field trips to nearby scenic spots in Tainan, for example Dongshan River Water Park, Nan Kun Shen temple and Four Grass. Under the warm embrace of the sun and luscious trees, the Tzu Chi volunteers listened intently to my worries; they also shared Master Cheng Yen's Dharma with me. They gave me so much heartfelt support and care.

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"We should contemplate the right way and face life's maelstroms with a heart of gratitude": "Adversity makes one stronger and matures people". Like a sudden breeze, these words of wisdom gave me so much warmth and strength. I began to learn how to view life anew from a positive light, to appreciate everything I have instead of focusing on how much I have lost.

I saw my mother, a mother who loved me dearly. I saw the Tzu Chi volunteers, who cared for and supported me. Although my physical condition is so different from how it was been in the past, my mind is clear and I am able to properly interact and communicate with the world. I never noticed all this before.

I started to learn how to control myself and contain my old, bad temper. Every time I thought of the Jing Si Aphorism "If you have a bad temper and foul mouth, then no matter how good your heart is, you are not a good person", I would not say any unpleasant words. Now my mother does not have to live with my ever-changing temper.

As I watched my mother grow old and frail day by day, taking care of and massaging me and performing strenuous tasks, I was filled with regret, remorse and sadness. I decided to rely on myself and work hard to recover, so that I can reduce my mother's burden.

When I shared my thoughts with volunteer Ya-Chi and Ching-Chun, they immediately contacted TIMA member Ching-Tsai Lin from the Tzu Chi Medical Association, volunteer Ying-Zhong who specializes in stainless steel tubing and other specialists in home rehabilitation. After assessing my physical condition, they designed a wall-mounted rehab bar at home on which I could practice.

When I started, I grasped the bar with both hands and hoisted myself up, to strengthen my leg muscles. I also attached 2000-cc bottles of water to a thick rope and pulled it to exercise my arms. These rehab bars finally helped to lessen my mother's burden. My deep sense of guilt towards my mother started to dissolve.

### **Happiness begins with giving**

Ya-Chi is a cancer patient. She treasures every minute, every second of life. She lives to serve others. She often says: "When faced with a challenge, you have to face it and head on. You cannot look for excuses or reasons to run and hide!"

When I looked back at myself, I thought what can I do to repay my parents' sacrifice and contribute back to society? I decided to be a volunteer, share my life experiences with everyone and encourage those who have been struck by life's adversities to never, ever lose hope.



To fulfill my wishes, Tzu Chi volunteers brought me along for community home care visits. We went to visit an ichthyoids patient in an apartment in Tainan City. The old house does not have

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an elevator, so three volunteers had to carry me up to the third floor in my wheel chair. My heart was filled with deep gratitude. Because they saw me as a part of their family, they did not find me heavy.

When we entered the home, the patient was lying on his bed. As he was bedridden, he could not bend his body. The skin on his whole body was peeling like the scales of a fish. He looked lonely and melancholic. Compared to him, at least I am able to go outside and see the world and have so many people who care about me. Originally, I just wanted to give to people, but in the end I was able to see how fortunate I really am.

There was another home care visit near my home. The head of this household-a 70-year-old man who was bent and had a humped back-needs to take care of his wife and two sons who have mobility issues due to diabetes. His eldest son has been physically weak since he was young. In the past one to two years, he lost the ability to walk and ended up bedridden. He had to rely on his aged father to take care of his meals and bodily functions. Meanwhile, his younger son has had to undergo dialysis for more than 10 years. This son's relationship with his family is not harmonious and he does not help out with household chores. His tired, worn-out father has to prepare three meals a day for him too.

To be honest, his eldest son was in much better physical condition than I am in. The only problem he had was that he had weak legs, but did not have people to support him while walking. With my past experiences, I persuaded him: "Don't always lie in bed. Your parents are already very old. What will you do in future? Strength is something that needs practice. You should use the strength in your arms and pull yourself up with the stair railing to train your leg muscles. This way you will improve."

With many people's support, his eldest son who initially did not dare to try ended up extending his arms, grasping onto the stair railing full of determination. And finally, he stood up...

It feels wonderful to help people. I extend my heartfelt gratitude towards Ya-Chi and other Tzu Chi volunteers, as well as my beloved mother whom I respect the most. In the darkest moments of my life, they have helped me all the way, giving me support and care, and prevented me from losing my direction in life.

As the saying goes, after the rain comes the rainbow. The rainbow may be beautiful but fleet. However, I will always hold on to this beautiful moment, forever keeping its trace in my memory.

(Dictated by Ying-Jie Mu. Transcribed by Hui-Zhu Huang. Selected from Tzu Chi Monthly Magazine, Issue No. 545)