

## Standing Tall at the Age of Twenty-Six

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Monday, 04 January 2016 13:58

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"Look at the ocean, I am finally here at the beach of Hualien. It is very beautiful!" Those were the words of Miss Chen Tuanzhi (陳團子) when she walked out into the world for the first time in her life on her own two feet. She is from Xiamen, Fujian Province in southeastern China. She came to Hualien, Taiwan for a miracle and spent her 26-year-old birthday in the Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital for treatment.

For the first 26 years of her life, she was disabled and could only barely move using the back of her knees because of her rare condition. She was born with bilateral congenital knee recurvatum, bending her knees backward in an L-shape toward her upper body. In addition, a deformity of her ankles made her rely on only the back of her knees to move forward. Her family brought her to seek various medical treatments, but the results were always disappointing. Add to her predicament was her family's limited financial resources. So her family gave up hope of ever seeing her standing on her own two feet.

Despite all her disabilities, Tuanzhi is always an optimistic person. She learned to take care of herself and share housework, like washing clothes, cooking and mopping floors. She even obtained a steady job in a school for autistic children. However, due to her growing bone structure and increasing daily activities, she began to experience pain in her waist and legs. Her body weight also became a great burden as she lifted herself up on her hands every step of the way.

Fortunately, with assistance from Tzu Chi volunteers in Xiamen, Tuanzhi came to Taiwan for her dream to stand up on her own feet. Over a period of six months, she received seven orthopedic operations in Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. Following by a series of physical therapies, the young girl could finally stand tall on her own and see the beautiful scenery of Hualien.



### Going to Taiwan

In May 2013, another young patient from Xiamen, Mr. Yang Xiaodong (楊小東), also received a life-changing treatment in the same hospital. His condition is known as ankylosing spondylitis, an inflammatory disease of the spine that can cause fusion of vertebrae in the spine, making the spine less flexible and leading to a hunched-forward posture. He underwent surgeries to correct a 140-degree bend of his spinal curve.

On October of the same year, orthopedic surgeon Dr. Liu Kuan-Lin (劉冠麟) and Tzu Chi volunteers accompanied him to a local hospital in his community to discuss his follow-up treatment. Impressed by Tzu Chi's charity work and its medical care, Mr. Pan Shijian (潘世健),

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Deputy Chair of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference of Xiamen, invited Dr. Liu to assess another patient, Tuanzhi, with rare disease.

After a basic check-up, Dr. Liu brought her medical records which were dated 15 years ago for further discussion with his surgical team back in Hualien. To have the updated test results, a couple of months later on December 22, 2013, Tuanzhi and her father in accompany with Tzu Chi volunteers from Xiamen flew to Taiwan for more detail examination.

A medical team was created especially for her care. Dr. Chen Ing-Ho (陳英和), an orthopedic surgeon and honorary superintendent, led the team which included Dr. Chen Pier-Rong (陳平榮), an ENT (ear nose throat) surgeon and vice superintendent, and other orthopedic, rehabilitation and pediatrics specialists. They found that in the medical history, her condition was extremely rare with less than 20 cases ever documented.

Based on her examination results and historical medical records, the team worked hard to design the best treatment plan for her. While the doctors were busy in planning and preparation, Tuanzhi was discharged and went home with her father to prepare for her surgeries that she could only dream about before.

### A long journey to recovery

Tuanzhi spent her Chinese New Year at home with family. After the holiday, she departed for a long medical treatment to fulfill her lifelong dream—stand tall. Accompanied by her mother and Tzu Chi volunteers from Xiamen, she arrived at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital.

On March 11, 2014, the day before her first surgery, Tuanzhi went to Jing Si Abode to express her gratitude to Master Cheng Yen, founder of Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, and Tzu Chi volunteers for all the help she received. Superintendent Kao Ruey-Ho (高瑞和), medical staff and volunteers went with her. At the end of this meeting, Master Cheng Yen put a bracelet of Tzu Chi Buddhist prayer beads on her hand as a constant reminder of Great Love for her. Master also encouraged her to be brave, to have confidence in the medical team, and to be grateful to her parents.

On the next day, she underwent an arthroplasty (joint replacement) surgery for her right knee, which was to straighten her right leg. Ten days later, she received the same procedure to correct her left knee. The procedures had corrected the unusual 130-degrees bending of both joints. However, since the deformity and osteoporosis were more serious on the left knee, the medical team performed a further correction procedure on the left knee.

After the third surgery, her mother looked at her in the recovery room. Beaming with joy, she said, "They are straight! Both of her legs are really straight now!"

Doctors and nurses asked Tuanzhi if she felt anything different after the surgery. "Of course it's different. I can finally sleep on my back," she said joyfully.

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