

Guarding Love

By Pi-yu Lin

Translated by Alice Chang

Spring showers continue to fall in March. The unpredictable weather is at times sunny and sometimes cloudy. First thing in the morning, I attend the Silent Mentors funeral ceremony held in Tzu Chi University with a reminiscent and grateful heart. My mind wanders as the ceremony progresses. Familiar images of the silent mentors flash in my thoughts. I remember details of Master Shih De en when he's alive, as well as the bodhisattva-like gestures of the late Tzu Chi brothers and sisters. They reminded me of the impermanence of life and to ponder how to seize every moment and live life to its fullest.

Suddenly, I see Sister Yen Huei-mei, the experienced volunteer in the hospital, standing by gracefully. She bows as the emcee asks the family representative to take position to offer incense, I wonder which of her parents is deceased and being honored here as the Silent Mentor. As if she could hear my inner thoughts, Sister Yen turns around and gently says, "He was a war veteran." Ah, I am deeply moved and touched, for the lonely veteran who spent most of his life in Taiwan, is without the presence of his family in the last few moments of his life.

I recall the devastating flood in Hua Dong, China in 1991. Master Cheng Yen

encouraged and led Tzu Chi volunteers to help the victims in China despite all obstacles. For one to two years, I frequently traveled back and forth from Taiwan to China. At the Hong Kong airport, I often saw many elderly veterans eager to return to their hometowns. Many of them could not read and often looked embarrassed in the airport. Accompanying sisters and brothers would naturally approach to assist them and listen to their memories of leaving home when they were young and finally returning home as old men. Their homeland still exists but faces are no longer familiar. Many have changed since leaving home and can no longer be accustomed to the ways of life at hometown. They've lived tough, humble lives and longed to return home since they've left. However, most find themselves packing their bags to leave their birth places and return to Taiwan, their second homes.

I witness them missing their home country and finally returning to their living place. They're anxious to return, but are unfamiliar with the changes and usually can't put their feelings into words. The veterans feel guilty for leaving their loved ones behind so they bring their humble savings back to their parents, wife, or children, but choose to

return to Taiwan to live in solitude.

However, Tzu Chi volunteers frequently visit various veterans' homes and care for the veterans like their own families. The veterans rely on the volunteers and seek comfort in them when they are sick and in pain. Many veterans, moved by the great love of Master Cheng Yen and the Tzu Chi volunteers, donated their bodies to medical schools for students to dissect and study. They also vowed to be Tzu Chi volunteers in their next life to help others. Sister Yen is deeply trusted and appreciated by the veterans, who often entrust her with the last important task in their lives. As such, Sister Yen has served as the family representative for these Silent Mentors for several times. Tears welled up in my eyes as I watched her bow as the family representative.

Tzu Chi's medical mission has been established for 20 years, and Sister Yen has been a Tzu Chi medical volunteer since the beginning. Soon after the hospital began operating, Sister Yen and Mrs. Tu, wife of the superintendent of the hospital then, began comforting the patients and acted as the bridge between the hospital, patients, and their families. As volunteers, they also eased awkward disputes amongst patients and relatives, led volunteers into every ward to entertain the patients, and listened to their deepest concerns. They even washed the patients' hair, fed them meals, or followed them home to ensure they received proper

medical treatment. They also accompanied medical teams to neighboring communities to provide medical services, and even cleaned the homes for patients. They tried to bring those who live in solitude or with limited mobility back to the hospital to receive treatments.

I remember once how Sister Yen spent a lot of effort locating an elderly homeless man living under a bridge. He refused to return to the hospital for treatment, and only after persistent pleading by Sister Yen did he consent under one condition – to return by foot. To ensure that the man received proper treatment, Sister Yen accompanied him and walked a few hours to register him in the hospital. Another patient who came to the hospital from the central-southern region wished that Sister Yen could pay a visit at home. As promised, Sister Yen and local volunteers brought blessings from the medical staff to the patient and his family. Tzu Chi volunteers have met the goals of the Tzu Chi medical mission.

Sister Huang Ming-yueh of Dalin plays a similar role to Sister Yen. Saddened by the fact that a young patient became incapacitated, she fought for Tzu Chi's charity support and a next to the hospital helped the patient's family to rent a house. She often visited the family with other volunteers and joined the parents in calling the patient's name. They never gave up hope throughout the years, and one day, a miracle happened! While

the phone was ringing in the house, the patient said, "Phone call." The entire family shrieked ecstatically! Mission impossible was completed. Was it the persistent efforts of the family or the love of the volunteers that touched the heavens above?

At Tzu Chi Hospital, every time a veteran stays in the hospital for treatment, the volunteers must devote their love to him. The veterans do not have families so volunteers take turns caring for them at the bedside. After the patients discharged from the hospital, volunteers pay them visits from time to time, cook delicious meals, and be their company. The veterans are very touched and treat the volunteers like their own children. Mr. Chen Chai, one of the veterans, earns a living by picking rocks on the beach. He donated his life savings to Tzu Chi, which was intended to pay for his own funeral and burial expenses. He believes that he will be well taken care of by his Tzu Chi children, so he shows his love by contributing to the society. His actions are greatly respected in the community.

Devoted in the Medical Mission, the medical volunteers have been serving the community for 20 years. As the Medical Mission grows, volunteers increasingly devote their time and efforts to the cause. They pay for their own travel expenses without expecting any reimbursements. They have committed themselves since they were young and gave their love without

asking for anything in return. In the early days, they were misjudged as spies for the hospital medical staff. If it weren't for their unswerving determination to follow Master Cheng Yen's compassionate vow, their unwavering desire to learn Buddhism, and their deep compassion to love and help those who are suffering, how could they overcome numerous obstacles and inspire the medical team to march into the future? What motivates them to guard the hospital and the patients, and love all year round without taking time off?

Listen to the soothing sound of piano coming from the hospital's lobby. Listen again to the joyous singing by the patients. In the past 20 years, Tzu Chi Medical Mission treats illness, people, and hearts. Patients are happy as volunteers and are jovial in their continuance to learn to serve the community. With joined hearts, the medical team helps the patients reduce suffering and find happiness. This will always be the mission of love. 🌀

