

中英文对照

[美] 钟丽(Lily Chung Yip) 钟昆(Agnes Chung Wen) 著

海外浮生

浮生海外



 现代出版社

To our children
Felix, Ivan, Alex, and Lauren Yip
Jennifer and Pamela Wen



Lily Yip (钟丽)



Agnes Wen (钟昆)



Lily & Agnes (钟丽和钟昆)



Pamela & Parents (温子玲及父母)



Three Sisters (三姐妹)

Changing Flowers



Agnes' Family (钟昆一家)



Grandma (祖母)

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank my daughters, Jennifer and Pamela, for their encouragement and advice in helping me to prepare the first draft of this collection of stories. Another debt of gratitude is owed to my mentor and friend, Professor John Deeney, who managed to find time in his busy teaching schedule to help improve the final English version.

—A. W.

Authors' Translation/Transliteration Note

Some expressions in the English translations are elaborations of the original rather than strict translations. This is a useful expedient when the original Chinese contains certain difficult idiomatic expressions, traditional sayings, etc. that defy translation. With the exception of some proper names, the transcription system used throughout is *Hanyu Pinyin*.

Contents

Preface	3
---------------	---

Lily' s Stories

I Love Telling Stories	1
Luba	3
Daughters in the House of Yang	28
Forever, Violet	59
Everlasting Love	84
Scandalous Scientists	110
Changing Flowers	126

Agnes' Stories

Wish	140
Silent Love	142
Tina	146
Lucy	149
Good - bye, Taipei	153
Housewives' Lunch Club	158
Second Generation	162

Life, American Style	166
Teacher's Banquet	169
The World Journal and Me	172
Being a Mother	174
Reflection From Illness — Count Your Blessings	178
Tender Heart	181
The Joys and Sorrows of Middle Age	184
Child's Talk	188
Family vs. Career	190
Portrait of An Artist — Xiangmei Guo	194
In Memoriam	198
My Cat	201
Growing Pains and Joys	204
The Auntie Li that I Know	209
Overseas Summer Job	211
Old Times, Old Friends	217

Preface

Mom and E-ma. What do I really know about my mother and my aunt? I know they are very close to their two brothers and one sister. I know they are from Canton. I know they are both loving, hardworking mothers. E-ma (my aunt) is a cancer researcher and science teacher and mother of four and Mom is a librarian and mother of my sister, Jennifer and me.

I close my eyes and let my thoughts wander to memories. Memories of a laughter-filled room and a wooden table full of delicious Chinese dishes at my E-ma's house in New York surrounded by Mom, Dad, my sister, Big E-ma, E-ma, cousins, and uncles. It is one memory of several such gatherings throughout the years. We are laughing, or joking, or telling funny stories that leave us with tear-stained faces and aching stomachs.

Mom and E-ma, they have the gift of words. They can weave them together and captivate the listener into a world of imagination or reality. Their stories come from both real and fictitious events carefully woven to entwine you. Many are based on situations that have affected them about their lives in America.

Mom and E-ma. What do I really know about my mother and my aunt? I know a comforting memory of stories still to be told around a crowded wooden table.

As you read each story, I ask of you to reach into your own memories, and to close your eyes, and imagine...

Pamela Tze-ling Wen

Wish

I have mixed feelings whenever I read a good article in the newspaper. On the one hand, I admire and envy people who can completely express what they have in their heart and, on the other, I am frustrated that I seem to have lost that kind of inspiration. How wonderful to be able to share your emotions with others!

Even when I was in grammar school, I knew that I had a gift for writing. I was never good at other subjects, but in writing, my teachers used to post my work on the school bulletin board to share with others, making me so proud of myself in those childhood years. I still vividly remember that feeling of excitement when my articles were published in the children's newspaper.

Throughout high school, creative writing was always my favorite subject. Among my fondest memories, I will never forget the language teacher from my first year in junior high, Mr. Chia, who had a great impact on me. A little encouragement can really affect a child's confidence. More than once, he praised my articles: "You write with your heart and feelings - it flows from your pen so naturally and smoothly. You do have a gift for writing, so please try to work harder and, one day, you will become a writer." Unfortunately, after only one year under his guidance, he died of cancer suddenly. I lost my mentor and strongest supporter, and my confidence seemed to fade away...

Regretfully, I never became a professional writer. I only published

twice during my college years, I only wrote in my diary occasionally, and I did not pick up my pen much again. Falling in love, coming to America, getting married and raising a family, gave me so many good stories to write about. But laziness added to procrastination, my life seemed empty and I started wasting my days. When your heart is full of cloudiness, your pen becomes rusty and, even when you talk, you find that you've become a boring person. You don't read and you don't write and you turn into a person with no substance. . . .

The last three years, settling into this little town, staying home and being a mother dedicated to my family, I've started to have some free time to reminisce about the life that I used to have. Suddenly the urge to write returns, but the pen that I want to pick up is so heavy - I've lost the confidence of my childhood. After many years of life in a foreign country, I can't even write in my own language anymore. I know that there is so much to write about and that all I need is to gather my courage and persistence to do it. I have to give myself another chance to write about the interesting things in my life, bravely try again: I know I can do it if I really try. First you sit down and concentrate on your thoughts and ideas. Isn't this better than sitting around gossiping all day with your friends? Don't be afraid. To read more and write more, that is my first wish for this spring.

Silent Love

From morning classes until the time she stood waiting for the campus shuttle to take her home, the festive weekend atmosphere around her irritated Yi-yun. She thought, "I'm so alone, there will never be a weekend that belongs to me. I'll never find a loved one to share my weekends." She looked morosely at the young faces around her. "They're all so full of cheer and joy, with rosy cheeks and smiling faces... and me? I'm just like a tortoise hidden in my shell, so afraid to step outside. I'll never be a part of that lively group. Is it my plain looks that cause my suffering?"

There he was, as handsome as ever. "I can only love him secretly. He's so beautiful and charming that he wouldn't notice a girl like me, who adores him so much, standing in the dark." He was talking and laughing with the people around him but he would never know that there was one who secretly cherished him. She watched him change partners all the time but had no right to object, saw the pretty girls that always surrounded him and was jealous but what right had she to be? She pushed her emotions deep inside. But now her eyes were wet because he was talking, looking sweetly at the girl by his side... She had always known that this was a hopeless dream, but still she tortured herself. She was an outsider, watching others play the field, she herself unable to participate. How would she ever forget? The whole thing had started three years ago.

From the beginning Yi-yun realized that, with her dark, skinny face and freckles, she was not a pretty girl. At eighteen she already had a few grey hairs. However, being a freshman in college for the first time, the excitement enabled her to forget her about her looks. Carrying a smile on her face, she walked into the huge building on campus. It was there, at the registration desk, that she met him for the first time. Those deep brown eyes and that fascinating smile captured her heart instantly. She almost forgot to register for her required courses. All day, she dreamed about him, that tall, handsome figure, the elegant smile—the mere thought of him made her heart leap and knock in her chest. After eighteen years of innocence, a stranger had captured her for the first time.

Her extreme shyness and self-consciousness created an insurmountable barrier. She seldom smiled and, since she had never been attracted to boys, she was inexperienced and reluctant to initiate any conversation. It seemed that from the outset, her heart was tightly locked up by him. She worshipped him silently, watching him play ball, argue eloquently during debates, exercise his popularity in the student council. She saw his every move, yet he never seemed suspicious that even his slightest gesture was being watched. Many evenings, she waited to see him get on and off the campus shuttle, desperate out of her hopeless love. Only once in three years did they meet face to face, at the street corner. He looked at her amicably and raised his hand in a hello, yet Yi-yun did not respond and just awkwardly walked away. And so her sole opportunity to get to know him was lost for lack of confidence—she would never have another chance like that.

Her most painful moment was when she looked in the mirror each morning. She felt hopelessly disappointed with the reflection. That was

the face that kept him away from her. New clothes and expensive make-up didn't help her develop self-confidence. Trying to dispel Yi-yun's sadness, her mother had worked two nights in a row to purchase a new wardrobe for her, yet nothing could cheer her up, nothing could fill the emptiness in her heart. Once in a while, Yi-yun had the urge to shout: "Mom, I'm in love with him, the most popular boy in school!" But that would accomplish nothing, except to upset her mother for not having a pretty daughter. Her mother would never understand the deep feelings she had buried away.

In three years, she had gained a reputation among the boys as helpful and nice, quiet and gentle. She was praised by professors as one of the best students in her class. Who could have guessed at the emotional storm twisting inside her? In the last 1000 days, she had tried to control her feelings, always failed, completely collapsed in his presence.

It's just another day, she's going home on the shuttle bus and sees him there with a girl in the front seat. Yi-yun walks past and perches on the corner of a seat in the back, as usual, surreptitiously watching him throughout the ride. He carries that same engaging smile he always has, as if the whole world belongs to him. Since this is the last bus for the day, there are only a few other students. She hears a conversation start: "Hey, Joe, why didn't you invite me to your engagement party last week? I won't let you get away with it!" Suddenly, a lightning bolt pierces her heart. Her last hope is gone. From now on, he will always belong to only one girl, that lucky girl, that girl who, she sees in a daze, is leaning on him so closely. They seem full of love and affection for each other. . .

It's the last stop now, she steps off the bus, she thinks, "I wanted

to go home, but where is my home? I want to cry, cry out all my love for him!" She sets off wandering aimlessly down the street, walking and walking, a dark and skinny shadow disappearing into the noise of busy street traffic.

Tina

Six months ago, the weekend had meant nothing to Tina. It was just the beginning of another day during a period of headaches, the final countdown in a week of school assignments to be completed. Facing her notes and worn-out textbooks, she would feel like crying. She would pray for all of the homework to disappear from her sight. Then she would hear her teacher's voice saying, "Be patient, girls. Once you pass your college entrance exams, you can start enjoying life and no one will ever bother you about schoolwork again." Thinking about that, Tina would smile bitterly and turn on the desk lamp, its yellowish light revealing her once-pretty face, made haggard by too much burning of the midnight oil. She would think of the future, the beautiful dream of college life, and continue with her studies, on and on . . .

Tina had been satisfied with being accepted by her second choice. "What's the big deal in making it into your first choice?" she'd thought. "Ivy League or not, I don't want to be surrounded by a group of nerds. I'm ecstatic about the school that I'm going to!" Tina had walked into college life with a big smile on her face. Her life with short hair and the uniform white shirt and black skirt was now going, going, gone. She buried the last six years of high school – it was just like a bad dream which would disappear forever. She was entering into a new era, full of fun and excitement, and she would live her life to the fullest, to make up for those six lost years.

Tina had not been an especially attractive girl during high school. In her plain school uniform, with straight hair and no makeup, nobody had paid any attention to her. Now, her outward appearance was completely transformed. With her mother having bought her all of the new clothes that her heart desired, a little lipstick adding color and brightening her features, and a stylish haircut perfectly complementing her sweet face and slender figure, she had matured in just a few months. Everyone who had known her was stunned by the difference. They would compliment her, saying, "Tina, you're prettier every day. I can hardly recognize you!" Tina would ask herself, "Am I growing up? Am I pretty now?" Naturally, she knew more and more how to enhance her beauty. College and high school were totally different. You study hard in high school in order to win a place in a better university and now, having reached your goal, it's time to enjoy life. She continued thinking about this. Tina had changed. The old Tina, that naive, innocent, quiet girl was not there any more; instead, you now saw a girl of sophistication, vibrant, beautiful and talkative.

Time flew by in her busy social life, with one date after another each weekend. Sometimes, in the middle of the noisy dance floor, with the music going on, a feeling of emptiness would attack her without warning. She would look up at the boy who was holding her and smiling at her, and realize that all boys seemed to carry the same naughty smile, that no one seemed serious about having a relationship. "Why are most of my dates with the same type, handsome with an empty head?" she would wonder. "Where are the nice boys? Oh, it must be because I'm giving the impression that I'm fun-loving and easygoing." Suddenly, she would feel disgusted and have to leave the party early with a headache.

Another weekend has come. Tina is upset to have a date that she couldn't turn down. In a whim of loneliness, she wishes to go back to her high school life with the white shirt and black skirt, those distant years, when she was like a white lily, pure and innocent, unlike now, with all the troubles that come with growing up. She wants to escape this life and yet she's hooked by the flattery of the boys around her. Is this how it feels for a young girl who wants to be popular? How unbelievable!

"Tina, Tina!" Someone is calling her downstairs. She gathers herself up, glances in the mirror for a final touch-up of her makeup, and goes down to meet the boy and continue her contrary life.

Lucy

There must be a special sense of destiny, to befriend someone for life. That is just what happened to my American friend, Lucy and me. Three years ago, when my family first arrived in this suburb, we moved into a duplex apartment located by a friend. It was a beautiful little neighborhood situated on a hilltop. The minute we stepped off of our truck, a short, plump lady with a smiling face came to greet us. Such warmth from a total stranger chased away all of our uncomfortable feelings about being in an unfamiliar place. She introduced herself and told me that she was a teacher from the local Catholic school and was married, with a seven-year-old daughter.

I invited our neighbors to our apartment for a snack and to get acquainted. They were all very friendly; however, no matter how much I tried, I felt like a foreigner among them, sensed a distance, a gap, with everyone except Lucy. During that time, I was busy at home with my two girls and Lucy was occupied with her teaching, so we didn't have many chances to see each other. Yet we always had a lot to talk about whenever we managed to get together, and I always felt at ease with her around. She had a deep admiration for Chinese culture. She came to check our doors and collect our mail whenever we were away on vacation.

A year after moving in, we decided to buy a new house nearby. When Lucy discovered that we were going to move out, she invited me

over for a delicious farewell lunch and was very sad about our departure. We didn't see each other much after that and I began socializing with our new neighbors. But no matter what I did, I just couldn't break the uneasiness with my new friends, always felt like an outsider, and though we were very polite and friendly to each other, there was no predestined attraction and we had no common interests other than meaningless small talk. I started to really miss my friendship with Lucy.

One day when I was doing some grocery shopping, an old neighbor mentioned that Lucy's family was going to move to a new home about two doors down from us. It was such exciting news that I had to call her right away. It was true: they were coming here. The day they arrived, I cooked a big plate of fried rice and took it over. Lucy and her husband were such an easygoing couple and I was so happy that our friendship would be renewed. Soon after they moved to our area, she became busy again. In addition to her teaching, she began auditing an advanced educational class in a nearby college. Her house was spotless. I always thought that she had exceptional energy to be so accomplished and do everything so perfectly. Her thinking was clear, she was very focused on learning, and she was extremely warm and open.

Last summer, she started tutoring my daughters in English for a few hours each week. One day, she called to cancel the lesson but I didn't suspect anything amiss. A few days later, she came to visit and, during our conversation, smoked heavily and mentioned her job, saying that she was going to quit because the high stress and low salary were wearing her out. I comforted her and said that it might be a good idea to take a break, that we could spend some time together. I said: "Great! You can take the chance to rest for a while, just like me." At the time, I was a housewife and not working as a librarian. "We can keep each

other company. . .” A few days later, her daughter came to play with my daughter and mentioned that her mother was in the hospital. I was surprised, but thought that she only had a minor cold, something caused by being under too much pressure. The truth was that she had been laid off by her school because of the overabundance of teachers, and was so hurt that she suffered a nervous breakdown and ended up in the hospital for two months. I went back to Taiwan to visit my parents for a while and, by the time I returned, Lucy was home again and had given up teaching.

For the last few months we have been together quite often, attending sewing classes and learning Spanish on tape, really enjoying each other's company. I want to use my friendship to mend her damaged feelings. Sometimes we discuss our problems. I've been home for a while—it's already been three years since my last job, the kids are growing up now, sometimes housework seems so trivial and tedious, and I'm constantly bored—so going back into the job market is often on my mind. However, we live in such a small suburban area in a very conservative region, so finding a suitable librarian's job nearby is difficult. I also recall how Lucy had been a teacher for more than ten years before she was forced to resign, so no matter how busy she tries to keep herself with housework, she often feels empty and really hurt over being fired by the school. All we can do is comfort each other. I try to be her moral support. We get together twice a week and are very diligent in our learning.

My husband jokingly says, “Don't push Lucy too hard; otherwise, she will have another breakdown!” It is a joke. It is also true. Lucy has always lived in such a rich and bountiful country like America, and her husband is a highly educated and accomplished engineer

with a decent salary—she has a wonderful husband and a lovely daughter. Yet despite all that she has, she can't handle the stress of life and suffers a nervous breakdown and ends up in the hospital. I think back on our immigrant generation, a group of wanderers, floating about in a strange country, having given up our roots, seeing different faces and cultures, suffering from discrimination sometimes, yet we all survive and stand tall, facing our future with optimism and establishing ourselves, and even becoming outstanding in a foreign land. Honestly, our generation is strong and admirable.

Good-bye, Taipei

My eight-week trip back home last October gave me memories to last a lifetime. That beautiful dream comes back to me whenever I have a quiet moment to reminisce.

As a matter of fact, by the time I made up my mind to go home for a visit with my aging parents, I had already returned many times in my dreams. Twelve years had passed since I left. From a young lady I had matured, entered middle age and become a mother of two. Despite the fading images of Taipei, the old memories are locked in my mind forever. Over there, I had spent the best part of my youth. I was under the protection of my loving parents, when my brothers and sisters left home, I was the only jewel left in their palm, their most precious treasure. I breathed as freely as a bird, enjoyed the blessings of my birth and an abundance of friendships. I had spent some twenty beautiful years over there. I still remember the sadness when we parted ways – how could I ever forget? I wish I could bring back those hours, grasp those golden years and never let go.

A flood of emotions burst from my heart when the flight attendant announced that we were arriving Taipei, like a long-awaited rain after an endless season of drought. I couldn't wait to jump up from my seat and kept biting my lips to make sure it wasn't a dream. I was home at last! My heart almost leapt out of my chest. Taipei, Taipei! I had finally come back!

I couldn't believe it was real, that I was standing right in front of my three best friends after twelve years of separation. Leh almost cried when she set eyes on me, and I felt like crying, too. Her feelings were still so straightforward and without reservation – I just could not believe that her daughter had almost graduated from senior high. With her talkative manner and smiling face, no trace of age showed on her. Violet was as sweet as ever. I saw that a comfortable life had put some weight on her, sensed that she was still my sweet old buddy. I was happy to see Dana, who had been the beauty of our class in my senior year at high school. She had kept her good looks and gained a little weight, which added to her graceful maturity.

I walked out of the airport surrounded by relatives and friends. I was amazed to see the progress of Taipei. Express highways, traffic flowing like running water, bright neon lights shining, subway tunnels connecting everything. . . I was not just fascinated, but dazzled. Taipei had grown, she had changed from a country girl to a sophisticated lady, seemingly overnight. She had lost her simple beauty but gained something much more alluring.

We arrived in my brother and sister-in-law's new apartment, a ground floor, three bedroom unit that they had bought to take care of our aging parents, with a small yard in front for my mother to practice her tai-chi. They told me that our old house on Roosevelt Road had already been replaced with a five-story building. Hearing that, a feeling of loss descended on my heart. I wished that all of the old things could have remained, I wished that time could stand still, that the world could move on but Taipei would remain the same! We talked until two in the morning, and I couldn't wait to wake up at seven. After getting up, I ate the pancakes that my brother had brought home and hurried out to

explore the city.

At the end of the alley was a barbershop, and two blocks away were the markets on the street corner. My old memories finally returned. The smell of the fish, the yelling of that old man, the rugged face of that vegetable lady, all reminded me of my lost youth. I felt so overwhelmed that I almost wanted to hug the passers-by and start talking to them. It had been more than ten years since I'd left and I truly felt that "there is no place like home"! When I looked at the street map I had purchased, I realized how rapidly the city had grown. The countryside had disappeared and been turned into express highways and high-rise buildings. I felt safe with the map in my hand. Public transportation was all different, with vehicles from so many new companies passing by, run by the city or the private sector. Standing at the bus stop, I saw that there were many different stops and confusing street signs. If I hadn't been with Dana, I wouldn't have dared to get on the bus myself; but as it was, no matter how crowded the bus or congested the traffic, I felt great.

The first weekend at home, Leh and Violet invited me to visit all the haunts of our earlier days. The roadside restaurant that we used to go to for those delicious rice noodles was still there. After the meal, we walked and talked along the crowded streets until, suddenly, we arrived at a park entrance. The ice cream shop was still there but, of course, the customers were not the same, and I became saddened by the passing of time. Dusk fell as we talked and remembered the old days. In the evening shadows, young lovers were leaning on each other and whispering quietly in the park - it all seemed so familiar, the past returned with a rush. How precious is youth, how fleeting, never to return! Yet I was happy that the savory meatballs and salted chicken tasted the same

as twelve years ago, that we were laughing and chatting just as if we were still in our carefree high school years.

I stayed with Violet that night, since her husband's late shift at the hospital made an excellent excuse for me to stay overnight. I was pleased to see that she had a good marriage, a beautiful home and two lovely daughters, that she had all the comforts she could desire in life, a piano, antiques, tasteful furnishings. I started to wonder whether my life overseas was actually any better than hers. For what reason had I moved to a foreign country? At that time, the trend was to go to America, to end up in a faraway land, never anticipating the homesickness and wistful memories. It seemed to be a true blessing for those who had been willing to stay in their hometown and live there contentedly.

It was such a pleasure to stroll in Taipei's night market in Taipei, eating snacks and enjoying the passing traffic, feeling like a young girl again. The noisy, bustling streets downtown looked strange to me - after all I had been away for over ten years - however, I was surrounded by dear friends and warm weather, and not even the typhoon that I ran into in my first few days back was able to dampen my spirits. I realized that I had many sweet memories here. I had grown up in that sub-tropical weather, and I cherished the land where I grew up.

A few junior high school classmates found out that I was home and planned to get together. On that day, they escaped from their busy housework and we had a great time. We walked through the streets of Taipei, filling up our stomachs with all kinds of native delicacies, fish-balls, rice noodles, squid stew... you name it, we had it, foods I hadn't had for so long. We toured the grand Shihmen Dam, and I marveled at the beauty of the Sesame Hotel and the spectacular views from the Grand Hotel. What a surprise when I ran into Lily, whom I

had not seen for over twenty years! Despite our feigned reluctance, she persisted and we went back to the night market to have “huo guo”, fresh meat and vegetables stewed in a hotpot. Just like that we returned to our junior high years.

My old student Pa Chia (Bao Jia) came to visit me - I had tutored her when she was in high school and I was a freshman in college. The once naive and innocent girl had become a mature woman, a director in a television station, and now had a celebrity spouse, Lang Hsiung (Lang Xiong), a superb film actor who was loved by all of his fans. We did some shopping together, visited the studio and she cooked a wonderful meal. I could hardly picture the little girl who had turned into the woman before me, someone so successful in both her family and her career.

Time always passes quickly in moments of joy, eight weeks went by in a flash, and it was time to leave again. I did not want to go and was unhappy to say goodbye. On my last night, at a resort hotel, facing the white waves of the ocean, sadness overcame me. It had not been easy to come and it would be even more difficult to leave; however, there is always a beginning and an end, I had come and I would go. I had brought with me a heart brimming with and would leave with everlasting memories. I prepared to go back across the ocean and I wondered, “When are we going to meet again?” I don’t know when, but I know for sure that I will return.

Housewives' Lunch Club

Monroeville is situated to the east of Pittsburgh. It is about thirty minutes' driving distance to the city, surrounded by hilly and winding roads. With all kind of flowers blooming in the spring and summer seasons, it's really a scenic place to live. Highway 22 runs across town, so transportation is convenient and accessible. Monroeville is considered a suburb. Recently, its population reached 80,000.

Most of our friends here are engineers working for Westinghouse, with a few working for U. S. Steel and other companies, and some others in different professions. They are all in very high positions and well established in the community. The children of these Chinese immigrants almost always excel in school. No wonder that an elementary school principle nearby once remarked that Chinese parents are all doing a good job in raising their kids. We felt proud upon hearing such nice comments.

As for the Chinese wives in our area, we number about ten families. Most of us stay home as housewives and socialize with each other once in a while, particularly during the spring and summer when the weather is pleasant. We have organized a club to get together and visit each other's homes for lunch. The hostess makes the most of her cooking skills, filling an entire table with rice noodles, fried noodles, sushi and dumplings, all fragrant and delicious. The conversations among us are always very interesting. We exchange our points of view, share

recipes, and talk about everything from A to Z. These carefree gatherings not only enlarge our understanding and fields of knowledge, but also are a wonderful way to take a break from the endless routine of housework. When you are faced with a hot and greasy kitchen all day, you need a change to relax, so that you won't be isolated in your little corner while the kids are in school. What a wonderful idea to have a lunch club once a while!

I received an invitation from Mei last night and was so excited this morning that, as soon as I had taken my younger girl to school, I headed directly to Mei's house. Mei is our group's Olympic Champion of housework. She graduated from National Normal University in Taipei (the equivalent of an Ivy League university in the U.S.) and is talented in everything: sewing, cooking, makeup, piano, etc. After coming to this country, she simultaneously worked towards her degree and raised two boys, but eventually sacrificed her career for her family. She is dedicated to her family, her house is always spotless, she is attractive and she handles everything well. On my way to Mei's house I picked up Hui, who just moved into the neighborhood. She majored in music and is a very pretty, gentle, soft-spoken lady.

As soon as I walked into Mei's house, I heard a voice that could be none other than Jia, who is our encyclopedia. She knows everything, from astrology to geology, can help you answer any question or solve any problem. She is always eager to lend a helping hand - a patient, kind human being. I could also hear Yung, a dedicated Christian, who conducts bible studies in her house, is an expert in gourmet cooking, and is our driver to town for fresh fruit. From her rosy cheeks and boundless energy, you would never guess that she is already the mother of two boys. She is the best-dressed and the most capable

housekeeper of us all, able to hang wallpaper and fix a washing machine on her own. Yung and her husband are a most loving couple, constantly holding hands, with a perfect marriage that anyone would envy. And there was Ping, who graduated from National Taiwan University. After earning her master's degree in this country and working for a while, she also gave up her career to take care of her toddlers. She had fair skin and a gentle demeanor, and was always taking classes in her spare time. When her boys got bigger, she was able to earn a certificate to become a real estate agent, and now she is taking computer and accounting courses. She's always a late arrival to our lunches because of her classes. Both she and Jia are doing well in the real estate business and both of them are board members of our Chinese school.

Lien, who is slightly older than the rest of us in this area, is tall and slender with good, straight posture. She has a master's degree in chemistry but has stayed at home to take care of her family for almost ten years. She is very logical and never gives you any double talk to confuse you. Unfortunately, she'll be moving to the West coast soon. Also there was my elementary school classmate, Tina, who is very particular about house cleaning, Her house is perfectly spotless —she spends endless hours cleaning the house and even wipes her plants leaf by leaf. Compared with her, we, as other so-called housekeepers, really should be ashamed of ourselves. And there was another lady sitting in the corner, Lan, a beauty who plays the piano and has two boys who are as good-looking as she. The last one is Meixiang, who is younger than most of us and also moved into our town only recently. She has a talent for interior decoration and always looks radiant and fresh. I remember when I first talked to her over the phone; I was drawn by her open-minded attitude. It's no wonder that she graduated from Zhengji

University as a major in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy.

After all of these observations, I realize that each of these women has wonderful qualities, inside and out. It looks like I really have a lot of catching up to do.

Second Generation

This is the first time that my sister has gone back to Taiwan for a visit after ten years away from home. When she first came to this country, she expected to return after finishing her degree. However, destiny has kept her here ever since. Who could have foreseen that within two years of moving here, she would meet her future husband, a young man from Hong Kong, fall in love and get married, then proceed to have one child after another even as she continued her studies? After they graduated, they had become a six-member family and, no matter how homesick she was, it was nearly impossible to go back home again.

This summer, my sister finally fulfilled her wish to take her little girl with her to visit our elderly parents in Taiwan. She was so nervous that she had trouble sleeping as the time for her to go home approached. Despite the long distance between her home in New York and mine in Pittsburgh, I volunteered to help her this summer by taking care of her three little boys. Felix, the oldest, is almost fifteen years old, healthy and strong, a typical second generation Chinese-American. Looking at him and his younger brothers makes me feel how quickly time goes by.

I still remember vividly my first winter here, how depressed I was, nervous and lacking in confidence. I couldn't find an ideal school and my sister was reluctant to let me go away to work for my living. She insisted that I should stay with her in Cincinnati for a while and baby-sit her two little boys (the third one was well on his way). She and my

brother-in-law were poor, with only a little scholarship income to support the whole family plus me, so life was not at all easy for them. As for me, I was not in a good mood, having just left my lovely homeland to come to this strange country and leave all of my loved ones behind. I spent most of my days with the two little boys, finding comfort in their company. Playing ball and hide-and-seek, picnicking in the park, the three of us could spend the entire afternoon together. There, in the green grass of the fields, their laughter sent away many lonely days and evenings.

Then after their second child, Alex, was born, I left their home and moved to my campus, but every summer I went back to see them. The boys blow up like balloons, bigger, stronger every time I paid a visit. The last time they stood beside me, Felix and Ivan were almost my height, they had their own lives and their own worlds and were not as close to me as when they were little. I couldn't wait to take them back to renew our relationship and began thinking of ways that we could spend time together this summer.

After few weeks I've found that the second generation, having grown up in this country, is very different from us in their feelings, thoughts and ideas. They are independent, mature and determined. The feeling of closeness with adults is not really there. I remember that when my sisters and I were little, my favorite place was my aunt's house, where there was always delicious food waiting for us. As soon as the holidays started, we couldn't wait to go to Aunt's house. Even when we were teenagers, we brought our friends along. Aunt was always good company and had become a mentor in our lives. How I wish that my sister's children would be the same way with me! Unfortunately, you can't always expect history to repeat itself. My nephews enjoy Mc-

Donald's and Pizza Hut, and don't seem much interested in my well-prepared Chinese dishes. There's not much communication other than a hello in the morning. It seems like there is a wall between us blocking emotional channels. I've been thinking and thinking about this. My final conclusion is that our language difference is what blocks our emotional flow.

Baby-sitters have spoken English to them ever since they were little. My brother-in-law is from Hong Kong and they have not insisted that everyone speak Mandarin or Cantonese at home. When the boys started school, English became their primary tongue and my sister, as a doting mother, never wanted to force them to do anything that they did not want to do. So little by little, they gave up the Chinese language and became typical second generation Chinese-Americans. After a few weeks here in our home, listening to our conversation in a language that they can't understand, they've become quiet and remain silent. They seem to envy their two cousins, who can speak and write some Chinese. When I wanted to start teaching my nephews Chinese, I found out that it is not an easy job when they have not been trained from the beginning.

Learning Chinese is like water running in a stream; it has to keep flowing freely, because once it's blocked, the water will stop forever. With my two young girls, we've had to force or bribe them to continue their language learning. Despite our efforts, they've already begun using English words mixed in with our Chinese conversation. Now that their cousins have come to support them, all at once they're behaving like fish that have finally reached the water and have begun using English in their daily speech. In raising this second generation in America, we parents must have a tremendous amount of patience in order to main-

tain our Chinese traditions and language. Children are like clay, easy to mold when they are little. If you give up and let them do as they want, sooner or later they will choose not to use the Chinese language, and an emotional barrier will appear between the two generations.

Most members of our first generation were educated entirely in China, so except for those few who are gifted in languages, no matter how fluent our English may sound, we still cannot express our thoughts as easily as in Chinese. Language is so delicate and complex that it's difficult to clearly communicate our true thoughts and emotions to the next generation.

Life, American Style

People say about the U.S. that it is a paradise for children, a battleground for adults.

As a father, you go to work early and come home late, using all of your energy to earn a position in society. You're starting out in a foreign country, not just asking for bread and butter but working hard to achieve the American dream. You do that not just for yourself, and your family, but also to honor your home country. You are exhausted every night when you come home, yet seeing good results from your work in the lab can wash away your exhaustion. You work hard day and night to make your parents proud of you, proud of having sent you to this country.

As a mother, in the early years of married life you support your husband as he finishes his degree, you go to work and leave the baby in childcare. When the kids are older, you pick them up from nursery school. You do grocery shopping for the family, borrow books from the library, attend parent-teacher meetings, make doctors' appointments, and on and on, it's ma bu ting ti (the horse never stops moving), a non-stop operation. When the children are in grade school, there are more things to be handled. You throw birthday parties to entertain their friends. To keep up your traditions and culture, Chinese school is important and not to be neglected. Too much freedom and corruption in society make parents worry. You try to keep your kids away from bad

influences, so you keep them occupied by sending them to music lessons and Sunday school. All of these activities add to a mother's busy life.

The day of a typical housewife is like this: Early in the morning, feed the kids and take the younger one to kindergarten. After that, wash the dishes and clean the house. Pick up the child at noon and, on the way back, do some shopping in the supermarket. The older one comes home at three, practices piano then does homework unless she has a piano lesson that day. Sometimes, the mother's job as a chauffeur isn't done until dusk. Of course, the housework is endless.

Children are blessed by God. They are free from worldly burdens, always happy and joyful, growing up in their parents' warm embrace and tender love. And the U.S. is a country of abundance where everything is for children. If you walk into a department store, you see that the toy section occupies half of the floor. I think about my generation, how we spent part of our childhood growing up in a time of war. Before we were five years old, mud and stones made up our toys and, if someone was kind enough to give us a baby doll, by the time it came to us it was already damaged, with broken arms. Here, most children have whatever their heart desires and so seeing their wastefulness hurts us. When I was cleaning up the kids' clutter recently, I discovered that there were at least a dozen dolls lying around which hadn't been touched for ages. The storage closet in our basement has become a warehouse for their toys.

I still remember that during the war, my mother had to stay with my father in the city of Chongqing. All five of us young ones were placed temporarily with our grandparents in the countryside. Five of us spent the most precious part of our childhood in loneliness and without

our parents' love. After the war, when we returned to Canton to settle, city life amazed us tremendously. We had never before seen limousines hurtling down the street, and we marveled at our first taste of ice cream. This morning, my younger one had a field trip to a nearby farm - this would be the first time in her five-year-old life to go somewhere without her mother around. She was so excited that she started nagging me even three days before the outing, insisting that her lunch box should contain chocolates, fruits, pastries and plums. As usual, I dropped her off in front of the school. She couldn't wait to go and I had barely parked my car when she jumped out and ran off without our routine kiss and good-bye. I was left standing there alone, something missing from my heart. They are growing like birds and one day, when they are fully grown, they will fly away; but would they, could they, in this country, ever learn not to expect things to come to them so easily, to have a fighting spirit like their parents? It looks like besides loving them, we must teach them not to take things for granted and to work hard for what they want.

Teacher's Banquet

There are no decorations, flowers or wine on the large, plain table in the front of the classroom. But the table is full of mouth-watering foods, meat buns, assorted dishes, wonton soup, noodles and curry dumpling, plus a pot of tea and some chilled drinks, all for today's banquet. This is just a simple tea party, but it means a lot, represents heartfelt thanks from ten students to their Tai Ji teacher. These ten students attended every class for the last eight months, each Sunday, rain or shine, from the first lesson to the last.

When the Chinese school's spring term started, a special class had been offered to parents interested in learning Tai Ji. It was a real benefit for those who wanted to do some exercise for their health. My husband, Wen had been learning Tai Ji on his own for a few years and had never had a chance to learn formally from a teacher. Actually, his first tutor had been my mother, when she came from New York to visit us last winter. In a very short month he started to pick up some basic techniques as she did her daily exercises, and his interest was piqued. Mother sent him some books and he started teaching himself. But no matter how hard he practiced, without a teacher it was difficult to develop any real skill. As Tai Ji is an extremely delicate martial art, without expert guidance you cannot achieve the true wonder of it. You need to learn the precise techniques involved in each breath and each movement; otherwise, you are just wasting your energy for nothing. However,

once you have discovered its secrets and practice consistently, it becomes a wonderful exercise that can relax you and bring you health.

Debbie is the teacher that the Chinese school invited. She is young, sweet, healthy-looking and full of energy. She is so different from the traditional Tai Ji teacher, serious and unsmiling. When she taught the class, her handouts were clearly organized. Though she was gentle, she was also firm and so some students dropped out. She was very serious about teaching the correct postures, raising your feet and stretching your arms just so, making sure that each movement exactly mirrored the patterns in her handouts. Debbie's gestures are both graceful and energetic, the flow of her movements combines beauty and power, and each student followed her movements faithfully, trying to avoid any mistakes. After class, they usually practiced with each other.

After Wen began taking the class, on our trips to New York he was more enthusiastic about browsing the bookstore for Tai Ji manuals than shopping for Chinese groceries. The house accumulated more and more books on Tai Ji. He also asked friends in Taiwan to collect more books for him to practice exercises. Incredibly, the symptoms of his chronic stomach ulcer seemed to lessen dramatically and his weight dropped to his level as a college student. The waistline that represented middle age also reduced to a healthy size. If you can practice Tai Ji faithfully everyday, it's a miraculous medicine for attaining good health, preventing illness and giving you long life. Mother is over seventy, yet because of her twenty some years of practicing Tai Ji, her surgery a few years ago didn't keep her down for very long. She recovered within a remarkably short time.

Debbie's ten students brought their families to join in this appreciation banquet. They wanted to show their gratitude and respect before

graduation. It isn't a gourmet feast, but just a small gift for her. It's a fun occasion to sit with the teacher and enjoy a casual get-together. For the last eight months, teacher and students have been serious in their teaching and learning, but now everyone can let themselves relax and feel a sense of accomplishment. Although the teacher is much younger than the students, you can see the Chinese custom of respecting the teacher. After graduation, all of Debbie's students can represent her by sharing their knowledge of Tai Ji, an important part of traditional Chinese culture and excellent method for improving one's health. They can improve their technique, attract another group of disciples, and eventually the art will spread and enrich this foreign land.

The World Journal and Me

It had been over a year since I last picked up my rusty pen.

Like so many newspapers published in Taiwan, the World Journal has a regular, open literary section which gives amateur writers the courage and confidence to write and seek publication. A lonely wanderer is able to write about the feelings in his heart, others record the details of their daily life, no matter how tedious or seemingly unimportant. The hope of being selected by the editor and the excitement when you see your article appearing in the newspaper, these are highlights in an otherwise monotonous day. Every day is less boring when you have something to look forward to, to add meaning to your life. Especially wonderful experiences are when a reader writes to echo your feelings, or an old acquaintance comes across your name in the newspaper and renews your relationship, or a friend gets a thrill from finding that he or she is mentioned in one of your articles—you've given them memories to treasure and are happy for having written. Many strangers became your friends. You could never have expected such rewards. You've enriched your own spirit through your writing for others.

Most articles in the literary section are well written and meaningful. This becomes a challenge to alert you: you have to read more, write more, learn more, or you'll be left behind. The literary section is open to all; however, if your writing does not reach the paper's standards, if it has no substance, they won't select your essay and you will

be rejected.

We recently went to New York for winter break. Each time we went to the newsstand, the daily edition was already sold out. Once you do not receive your spiritual food, a kind of disappointment rises in your heart. When the vacation is over, you can't wait to get home, thinking about that pile of newspapers waiting for you, papers that will keep you company for many happy days and evenings.

Being a Mother

She was so cute as a baby when she sought our attention, and her smiling face was adorable when she was sleeping, but a soft voice saying, "Mama, I love you!" completely melted a mother's heart.

Sensitive, inquisitive and suspicious, this is the picture of our older one. Honest, sincere and stubborn, this is the picture of our five-year-old second daughter. When you put these totally different personalities into one family, it is quite an amazing show. At the dinner table, in the car, you could hear the chatting all the time, like two little hummingbirds. Two daughters controlled the entire adult world. They had endless energy. Early in the morning, once they got up, it was like turning on a talking machine, both girls would keep talking and talking, even ignoring their breakfast at the table, until I had to start shouting before they would stop and rush off to catch the school bus. When I saw them walk out the door hand in hand, with a room of peace and quiet behind me, I started to miss them again.

In the beginning of our marriage, we had a long way to go before my husband would earn his degree and start his career. It was tempting to look at others' cute, healthy babies—we loved them to death—and imagine having our own; however, we could not afford to have a family. Then two years into our marriage, out of the blue, I discovered that I was three months pregnant. At the time, a mixture of happiness and sadness arose. Unfortunately, I had a miscarriage when I had just tasted

the wonder of a new life moving inside me. You sink into a deep depression after experiencing the mystery of life. It was a huge blow to us. Six months later, good news came again. This time, we were extremely careful, nervous with worry but excited with anticipation. Finally, after ten months, we had our first daughter, six pounds even.

With a regular job from nine to five, an already busy life was filled with bottles and diapers. But her birth was a high point. Being a mother, you find that you've matured all of sudden. The baby's crying, the night feedings, seeing her satisfied with her meals, these all give a mother the ultimate happiness, her maternal instincts become more and more fulfilled. As the delicate features of our daughter became clearer day by day, as she began making little gestures and learning new activities, we were enraptured. All of our friends who came to visit us were drawn by her. When she was just two months old, she started to develop many facial expressions and smiled a lot. When I talked to her or softly sang a lullaby, she seemed particularly overjoyed. Everyone who saw her exclaimed, "Such a happy baby!"

I remember when she first learned to shrug her shoulders and say good-bye. She kept doing that repeatedly and her grandma teasingly said that she must have had a stroke. When she was two years old, she walked into the kitchen and climbed up a stool when our backs were turned, trying to reach into a cabinet without our help. All of sudden, she fell down and hurt herself and began bleeding from the corners of her eyes. We sent her to the emergency room in a panic. Fortunately, such incidents did not happen very often, or we would have had a nervous breakdown. She constantly asked funny little questions like, "Mama, why do we put rice into our mouths?" Such instances really leave one unsure whether to laugh or cry.

When she was three years old, her younger sister came into the world. Our life entered a new era. Her younger sister was half a pound heavier than her. With a round, chubby face, the little one was completely different from her sister. She brought us a new kind of joy. The births of two daughters, coming one after another, made life in a foreign country less lonely than before.

Soon after the younger one was born, my husband finished his degree, we moved away from his school, and I quit my job to devote myself to taking care of the girls. With that constant attention, the younger one seemed to lack the independent nature of the older one, and she became spoiled by all of us. Luckily, she had a kind heart and was easy to persuade through sweet talk. She was also under the control of her sister. Both girls were indeed the jewels in our palm. However, they still needed discipline to learn the difference between right and wrong. Whenever I couldn't handle their behavior, their daddy would show up to support me. Both girls were adept at using psychological warfare to trick me into getting whatever they wanted. It was good that I had their father's support - otherwise, I wonder if I could have won the many skirmishes by myself.

In all, they are adorable and cute. When they argue, they're like furious tigers at each other's throat. They come to me, criticizing each other, and then complain that the other one is always judged to be right. The best I can do is to ignore their complaints, or softly reason with them. It's useless to be upset by their fights because, in just five minutes, they will already have made up.

Whenever they're in school, or go along with us as guests to someone's home, they never worry me about their behavior and are always praised as the most polite children. With a book in her hands, the

older one can enjoy herself all night. And as long as the younger one brings her toy box, she can be quiet for an entire afternoon. At home, however, they are totally different. At home, they exhibit all of the stereotypical traits of many young girls - they love to laugh and make noise, love to cry, love to shout. As long as they are happy, I just let them entertain themselves. Being a guest requires them to be polite and suppress their childish natures, but the relaxed atmosphere at home allows them to be themselves, so they can understand the need for balance in life. Overly strict discipline may create an unhappy child. The poet John Mansfield once said: "Happiness creates wisdom." I believe this is true.

Their generation is lucky compared with ours. They are growing up in a time without worries about food and clothing and war. Their parents have a lot of extra time to take care of them, to give them lots of love and warmth. Once in a while, my daughters will pop up with comments like, "Mommy is a good cook," or "My mother is the best!" Receiving these sweet words from their hearts makes parents feel like they are walking on clouds. I'm sitting down quietly, writing this essay. The younger one appears suddenly before me, hugs me and gives me a big kiss, then walks away happily. In their world, they know that I will always be there for them.

To be needed and loved, what a wonderful feeling to be a mother!

Reflection From Illness—Count Your Blessings

“Illness is like a cunning, vicious little snake, climbing into your body without the slightest warning.”

All week, the family had been excitedly waiting for the weekend to arrive. No matter how great our regular television programs were, we didn't care about them because for the coming weekend, we had scheduled an outing at Kennywood. The school had organized a Saturday picnic at the amusement park and we had arranged with a few other families to coordinate the food for lunch, such as assorted noodles, soy sauce eggs, chicken legs, cold drinks, etc. We wanted to let the children have a good time and also to relax a little ourselves by enjoying the fresh air and getting away from our boring routine. We had also been invited to dinner with friends that night. And Sunday morning we planned to have dim sum with a couple that would be leaving town soon. Our weekend was packed with fun activities.

Friday evening, the whole family went grocery shopping for an hour. The second I stepped into the house, my headache started. I wasn't concerned at first. During dinner, I took two aspirins, then hurriedly finished eating and washed the dishes. Then a sore throat came—I thought it was probably my hay fever returning. I went to bed and tried to sleep away the discomfort. In less than an hour, the ache started to make me feel that my head was about to burst and kept me awake, so I got up and prepared the food for the next morning. By the time I fin-

ished, my entire body was sweating. The sore throat began to get more severe. I prayed silently, "Please don't get sick!" Throughout the night I slept fitfully, feeling unusually hot all over. In the morning, my temperature was 102-degree and my lips and throat were parched. No wonder I had suffered a series of bad dreams all night! The soreness in my throat had moved upwards and reached my ears. It looked like we would have to forego the weekend's activities. The girls were extremely disappointed that Mom was so sick. I managed to get up and wanted their father to take them anyway. After he called the Wei's, they decided that it would be better for him to stay home with me, considering I had such a high fever, and that they would take care of the children. The girls found out that there would be other kids with them and walked out the door with smiling faces again.

The room was empty all of sudden, I was totally exhausted and had no energy left. I noticed that Wen was making a lot of phone calls. First to apologize for not being able to go to the party that night, then to cancel our reservation for the next morning, then to apologize to our friends for canceling dim sum. The whole day was ruined by my illness, and we had lost the chance to join a happy get-together with our friends. When you're healthy, you take everything for granted and never stop complaining. Once you've lost your health and are sick and confined to bed, you see the blue sky and white clouds outside your window and the sunshine all over, and you can hardly get up to enjoy life and walk around. It's only then that you realize the preciousness of being healthy. Wen was in the kitchen, cooking and preparing medicine. I began feeling sorry - I was really a nagging wife, too critical of him, always trying to mold him into what I wanted. I constantly complained that he was too upright, inflexible, overly detail-oriented

and lacked a sense of humor. Lying there sick, I started to realize that all of these apparent shortcomings were actually his good points. He knew that I hated a messy house, so in addition to cooking, he was busy cleaning and washing, and would pop into my room occasionally to check on me and ask how I felt. That day, he was accompanied by a lifeless wife.

By Sunday morning, the aspirin had still not worked in stopping my fever. My neck was so swollen that I had trouble even swallowing my food. We called our friend, Dr. Ou, who upon hearing my symptoms decided to prescribe some antibiotics. He believed that the illness came from a virus that caused inflammation and swelling. After taking the pills, I lay in bed all day but my thinking was clear. I thought about how, when you're healthy, you chase material things, but once you're lying down and can't move, you start to realize that the best thing you can have is Health. Being able to eat, drink, sleep and get up to welcome the morning light every day is the best blessing you can have in your life. Only when you are healthy can you enjoy what's important: family happiness and the warmth of friendship.

Monday morning, my fever was gone, my throat was less sore, my health seemed improved and I could get out of bed. I wrote down right away: "First, try to treasure every minute in your life when you are healthy. Second, try to remember to be happy, count your blessings and be grateful."

Tender Heart

Our daughter awakened us. "Daddy, Mommy, look, look!" She was carrying a silver tray to our bed, and on it were oatmeal, milk, and two slices of toast with butter and jam. Tze-fen was only ten years old, and we were thrilled by her delicate and tender thoughtfulness. She had just learned to prepare a simple meal and couldn't wait to let us enjoy a luxurious breakfast in bed.

Only this year have I started feeling the growing up of my older daughter. At times I'm impatient when things aren't done right and start shouting, until I see the hurt in her face. My daughter has reached a really sensitive age, so I have to try to calm down and compromise as much as possible now.

Last year, when my parents stayed with us, I was always rushing around trying to accommodate them and unintentionally neglected my little ones. I always thought that they would not need as much care as their grandparents. What I did not understand was that children are like little roots; you need to nurture them and shower them with love and patience in order for them to grow. At one point, my heart was so dedicated to my ailing parents that I completely forgot I had little ones at hand. The performance of my younger daughter dropped tremendously, so that even her homeroom teacher was surprised by her sliding grades. After a few consultations, we discovered that what she needed was attention. I started to put my energy back into her and her grades returned

The Joys and Sorrows of Middle Age

The aging of my parents saddens me; the growing of my daughters gives me joy. I still have dreams, but those colorful dreams have been fading away. What I most regret is that a naive heart has been tainted by reality. When do we learn to examine a man's words and observe his countenance, to measure his intentions? Sometimes lofty ideals are replaced by the cold truth. When we reunite with our old friends, we try to recover our innocent hearts. You can see the grayness growing in his hair; it is exactly like a poem by Du Fu: "Youth has disappeared so quickly, now you can already see the gray hairs." We enjoy chatting late into the night over burning candles, but tomorrow we will say good-bye and see you off to the other side of the mountain. No one can predict the future and we are lucky to have old friendships that remain strong. Our daughters like to play grown-up games by dressing as adults, and I cry to them in my heart, "Treasure your precious childhood!"

Mother's hospitalization has worried me, although we greatly admire her very strong will to live. She had high blood pressure and heart problems when she was fifty. Fortunately, she knew pretty well how to take care of herself, through regular exercise and a balanced diet, and remained healthy over the years. She was diagnosed with colon cancer five years ago and underwent surgery immediately. Then last year, due to the tremendous stress of caring for my father, she developed heart

problems again and was hospitalized for two weeks. After checking out, however, she recovered marvelously and was able to talk and laugh and enjoyed our company. When Christmas came, Mother decided to move back to New York to stay with my sister. In New York, they had a lot of old friends and could spend time with the rest of my brothers and sisters. It would be lot more fun than the Pittsburgh. Six months later, she developed lung problems. After all, she had reached her eighties and was physically weak, although her strong will keeps her optimistic.

I have a lot of confidence in her. My mother is a very strong-willed woman and has always managed to take things easy, even in the most difficult times. In her eighties, her beauty is still there. She walks with a straight back and her graceful manner always attracts people around her. I love to look at my mother's wedding picture, to admire her classic beauty. When Mother once told us about her background, we learned that my grandfather had started his career as a high ranking officer in the Qing dynasty and later dedicated himself to the field of education. My great uncle had been a revolutionary hero during the latter part of Qing dynasty and had been a follower of Tsai Sun-po, a great hero of that time. My grandmother had been gifted in playing classical Chinese lute, which may have been the reason that Mother had majored in music. Mother has always been positive and optimistic, a quality that we really should learn. The married life of my parents, however, was not that perfect, primarily because they had completely opposite personalities. Mother is lively, outgoing, straightforward, and Father was such a quiet, inflexible and honest person. Mother had learned the traditional morals and way of thinking but had also been educated and exposed to new ideas, which resulted in painful inward struggles throughout her life. I have come to understand these things about her only late-

ly, when she started telling us her stories.

I worry a lot and have difficulty handling frustration. I did not inherit her positive personality. That's why Mother is always advising me not to worry about little things, telling me that there is a long way to go in life, that we have to be mentally strong. To her, no matter how old we are, we will always be her little children. When I turn around and look at my daughters, I suddenly realize that time has slipped away through our fingers. At our age, we sometimes must accept many unfortunate events in our lives. A few years ago, my uncle passed away, and I was sad because he had been such a respected scholar and wonderful person. I still remember the last time I said good-bye to him—he was full of energy, and I never suspected that it would be my last time talking to him. Now Mother is in the hospital, and my heart is very nervous. But I'm trying to learn a little from my mother, have confidence and hope that she will survive this and let us keep her company for a few more years.

It's sad to talk about my father. He began exhibiting symptoms of Alzheimer's disease a few years ago. He started to lose his memory, withdrew from company, and now cannot even remember our names. He has turned into a child again, stubborn, strong-headed, a total stranger to us. He needs twenty-four-hour care in order not to get into trouble. His senility deeply depresses us. In my earlier memories, Father was an interesting person, very quiet, never angry, never refused us kids anything, spoiled us all ever since we were babies. Now, look at this helpless and absent-minded old man. How sad!

It is such a pleasure to watch my children grow. The diapers and bottles are long gone, and there are no more babies crying in the house; they have grown up to be good company to us, they understand a lot

more, once in a while they can be very considerate that they are even a great comfort to us. We hope that the next generation will regain what we once lost. Sorrow and happiness together have woven a picture of life. We hope to gain strength from joy and to learn strength from suffering. We will try to find a new source of strength in the future, so we won't let down our parents, who have given us life and love.

(To honor and commemorate my Mother's death who passed away just two days before this essay was completed.)

Child's Talk

Hao Hao is only four years old and yet he dumbfounds us with his precocious child's talk. One time, he was playing with his next-door neighbor, a boy named Hang Hang, and they decided to color themselves all over with paint. Hang Hang's mother slapped his hands in punishment. When Hao Hao's mother learned that he had been a party to the mischief, she spanked him. The conversation went like this:

Hao Hao: Mama, when Hang Hang's mother hit him, why did she hit him on his hands?

Mother: Because Hang Hang was naughty and used his hands to draw all over himself.

Hao Hao: Then why did you hit me on my butt? I did not use my butt to draw!

Another time, his mother refused to give Hao Hao candy, explaining patiently that if he ate too many sweets, he would get cavities and loses all of his teeth. Hao Hao replied casually: "Then I'll just wear false teeth like Grandpa."

Yet another time, Hao Hao accompanied his mother to Taiwan to visit his grandparents. They invited all of their elderly friends to a banquet to meet their grandson. Throughout the meal, Hao Hao played with a coin at the table. Afterwards, he couldn't find his coin and asked where it was, making everyone help him look for it all over. Finally, Grandpa Fu found the coin and gave it back to him. "Hao Hao, the

coin is here." Hao Hao was happy again and put the coin in his pocket, saying, like an adult would to a child, "Good boy!"

The whole table roared with laughter and Grandma Fu added "Ai-ya, Grandpa Fu has never been a good boy in all his life!" (referring to his drinking and smoking habits).

Family VS. Career

I was leading a relaxing life, reading, writing, window-shopping, and keeping my daughters company - how enjoyable it was! And yet, to get rid of the sadness of my mother's passing away, and to regain some long-lost confidence, and also because of inflation, I started toying with the idea of going back to work. Once you walk in, it seems to become a river of no return and you lose that easygoing life forever.

I am a serious person; once I make up my mind, I dedicate myself whole-heartedly to my decision. The last eight months have been difficult. I guess only I will know how I've managed to get through it. Starting all over again in middle age is not that easy. My energy has faded over time and it's been six years since my last job. I had to start learning the new library technology. But it was a blessing that I could go back to my own professional field when the job market was so tight.

There was a time when I was full of ambition, but that was more than ten years ago when I was young and had just begun my career. I decided to stay home with the children soon after the second was born and we needed a life to ourselves in order to settle down a little. I would never have thought that I would go back to work again. It was destiny and a blessing from God that I could return to my field. It was enough to find a job that I liked; I am no longer so concerned about my position and salary. Time has gone quickly in the last eight months. It's true that I have gained a lot of satisfaction and joy from my work,

from being back on a campus, expanding the range of my knowledge, and spending days with young people, whose youth has brought back a lot of memories. It seems just like yesterday that I was one of them.

Our East Asian library is small but resourceful. From the head librarian to the cleaning lady, everyone is nice and friendly. All of us have a lot of responsibilities and work together as a team. Our office is in a corner of the second floor, quiet and peaceful. The head librarian has complete trust in our work, and we all work very hard. After the first few months, I still had some problems; but with a plan in mind everything seemed to go well. Still, I spend a lot of effort and energy on my job.

At first, to avoid traffic and save some money, I established a car pool with my friends and we took turns driving. However, everyone's lifestyles were different and we had to learn to put up with each other's habits. Socially, I was known for being late, but now I got a taste of waiting for other people to arrive. When you know that you'll be getting in late to work and the other party is not yet in sight, you start to get nervous. And once in a while, you are the late one and feel bad for the rest of the group, also not an easy feeling. It had been only three miles away when I started my first job on the Penn State campus, so I had never experienced a traffic jam. This time, being a housewife and career woman at the same time was much more complicated and exhausting.

The most difficult part was the thought of leaving our young children at home. It came as a surprise to me that they've adapted to the situation quite smoothly. Tze-ling, my younger daughter, is only nine years old, yet she seems to have no objection to her mom returning to work. Does she already appreciate the benefits of a double income? I al-

Portrait of An Artist—Xiangmei Guo

The soft voice of Mei came through the telephone, telling me that she was going to have her second art exhibition at the Eastern Gallery. I started thinking about her after we hung up. Behind that small, delicate figure was a person filled with determination. Within two years of returning to the States, her ceaseless hard work had led to beautiful results. Still thinking of Mei, my thoughts went back to twenty years ago.

It was in the middle of winter in 1975. Our family of four had just arrived in Pittsburgh from Penn State. With a little uneasiness but a lot of excitement, we prepared to begin our new life. Although a neighbor mentioned that there were some Chinese families in the area, we didn't dare to visit them uninvited. I will never forget when I first met Mei one sunny winter afternoon. I was strolling through the neighborhood with my two daughters. As I stood enjoying the landscaping of a nice front yard, the door opened and a smiling face full of warmth and friendship welcomed us into her tastefully decorated home. We seemed to hit it off right away. Although we hadn't planned to meet, it had happened anyway through serendipity. We have been close friends ever since. In the last twenty years, I've witnessed her transformation from a housewife into an accomplished artist. In all that time, she has never given up on her goals; she is the epitome of a strong woman. You have to work hard to gain reward—it won't just come to you from heaven.

Mei had a gift, but diligence is the main secret to her success.

As we became better acquainted, we discovered that we had something in common: both of us had majored in library science. I remember being astonished at how she was a multi-talented superstar, the Olympic champion of housework. She had earned an art degree. She was a skilled cook, seamstress, beautician, pianist, and more. After coming to this country, she had worked towards her master's degree while caring for her young sons. She was a perfect housekeeper, always looked impeccable, and was nice to everyone. We became very close friends because we both had sensitive, emotional personalities and high hopes for the futures of our children. One day, I was looking closely at a painting in her home and came to realize that her father was Guo Xue-hu, a famous artist from Taiwan. It was no wonder that, even disguised as an ordinary housewife, her artistic nature was apparent. She had a love for beauty, a perfect sense of harmony and color that showed in everything she did, in her dress and her makeup.

At that time, our lives were very routine. As young as we were, we seemed to have lost some confidence in ourselves. I persuaded her not to give up her painting and waste her talent, even though her children were young and housework was so tedious. Her husband, K'un, was a good and responsible husband but, like most engineers, was not the romantic type that Mei sometimes wished for, so she was lonely at times. I told her not to give up, that she would be able to find a way for her future, that she should just pick up her paint brushes and immerse herself in her art. To comfort her, I sent my two daughters to her to start their piano lessons with her son. No matter what she did, she always took it seriously and did a wonderful job. She was actually my daughters' first piano teacher.

Time passed quickly and the days went by. Eventually we stopped being housewives. I returned to my career as a librarian but, because of her artistic talent, discouraged Mei from doing the same and wasting her artistic abilities. So Mei began painting. Once she started, she became devoted to it, dedicated and hardworking. We didn't see each other much during that period but, in my glimpses of her work, I could grasp the thoughts and emotions expressed by her paintings. Lovely still lifes and colorful landscapes had become her primary subjects. When I attended her first exhibition at the Blue Sky Gallery, I was truly excited to see her accomplishments. I thought to myself that, if she continued to work hard and improve, she would surely become a success in no time. Each year, as the art festival approached, she and K'un would work day and night to prepare for the show, doing everything on their own, from transporting the artwork in its heavy wooden frames to setting up the display booth to sweeping up after the festival was over. She was so tiny yet, no matter how exhausted she was, she always stayed throughout the show, from beginning to end. In Pittsburgh she became considered a rising artist because of the potential she showed at the festival, but this sparks much jealousy from her peers. But no matter how awful the situation, after some tears for being treated badly, she would start her work again. As her good friend, I admired her determination.

While I returned to my library work, largely because of inflation, Mei was establishing herself in the art world. She fully regained her confidence and created a niche market for herself. When her family moved back to Taiwan in 1981, I lost a close friend. Fortunately, the relationship between K'un and Mei had improved and they had found some common ground. He fully supported her professional pursuits and became a real behind-the-scenes hero. I expected that when Mei re-

turned to Taiwan, recognized Chinese artists who would push her to develop her painting would encourage her. She would also have strong moral support from her parents and siblings. She would definitely reach new heights.

Through many years of correspondence, I learned that that she had become a kind of hermit, whole-heartedly devoted to her work. Her art had reached a new level. After ten years, she was no longer a chrysalis—she had turned into a butterfly and was making her mark as an artist. Her world travels with K'un also gave her fresh inspiration and expanded her range of subject matter. When I attended her first art show at the Eastern Gallery in Taiwan, I was thrilled to see the success of a dedicated artist. Her personality shone through every piece of her work.

She has been back in the States for the last two years. Although we don't see each other often because we are each occupied with countless activities, we talk a lot on the phone. Now she's concentrating on achieving a second breakthrough in her art. Twenty years ago I saw her first show, and recently I was happy to read an art book that she published. . . . I have witnessed a real friend become a true artist. As I mentioned earlier, you must have talent, but even more inspiring to me has been her diligence—this is the true secret to Mei's success.

the preciousness of our lives and our health, pursuing material things and earthly fortune, competing with each other, being so critical about every little thing, always wanting to win, trying to put more money in the bank, buying a new car and moving into a bigger house, yet what use is all of that when you lose your health or your life? In the end, it's nothing but an empty dream. What we really need to look for is generosity of heart and kindness; we should appreciate what we have, count our blessings, try to find peace and spiritual satisfaction. Be forgiving and be content, I would call this true happiness.

My Cat

Someone like me, who always runs away from and is afraid of animals, was getting a big, fat cat. What a joke!

I have never bonded with any pets, except once when I was little. My brothers and sisters found a dog that they named Jerry. I was scared of him and didn't dare to touch him at all. Because he was so smart, in less than a year he became the darling of the family. Every morning, Jerry followed after my bicycle to accompany me to school, all the way from Ren-Ai Road to the school gate. Unfortunately, just when I had developed the deepest affection for him, he was snared by a dogcatcher and was never returned. This tragedy deeply upset me and we never had another animal.

I am a very nervous type, always screaming whenever I see anything strange. If I see a mouse coming, I will jump right up on the nearest chair. Now I was letting Boom Boom enter into our family, I guess because I love my daughters too much and hated to let them down when our friends wanted to give their cat to us when they moved back to Taiwan. It was during a time that my two daughters had been nagging me to have a pet when the Chu family called us about their cat. They knew that my girls couldn't resist the temptation of adopting it. Also, at the time, we had two nephews from the west coast staying with us, and their joined forces persuaded me to say yes. They promised to take care of all the cleaning and feeding, so I couldn't say no. That's how

Boom Boom came into our family.

Boom Boom has a pair of unusually lively green eyes and a mixture of white and black fur, and is undeniably very cute. When she first came, she hid under the table and refused to venture out. Then, within a few days, she started getting into trouble, exploring everywhere. My sofa was the first object attacked by her. She likes to pull its soft fabric with her sharp nails, and now my sofa is covered with scratches and holes. Each time I start yelling, she disappears into thin air, then comes back as soon as I take my eyes away. Sometimes she disappears for a long time, and I later discover that she has taken a long nap in my closet. My wardrobe has become a cat haven, with fur all over everything. One night when I was sound asleep, she jumped on my bed and scared me to death. From then on, I have never again left my bedroom door open. The girls actually spoil her. I turn around, and Boom Boom is eating off their plates and sleeping in their beds. The girls want me to be flexible with our cat rules and allow Boom Boom to sleep with them legally.

As for cleaning the cat litter, it has become my job. When the man of the house returned after a business trip some time ago, he found smelly cat waste everywhere and started complaining. To put things under control, I had to take full responsibility. After two weeks of following strict litter rules, the odor was reduced but now my allergies have surfaced, my entire body itches and I feel suffocated when she rubs against me. When I compare Jerry and Boom Boom, I feel sad because it seems as if Boom Boom only cares about food and attention. When I'm busy, she's always in my way; and in those moments when I want to play with her and pet her, she acts like a total stranger and ignores me. She also has a strange habit: when her litter box is full, she refuses to

go there and will relieve herself anywhere she pleases, and the entire house, every corner, becomes her personal toilet. I'm exhausted from taking care of her and my itching has become more severe.

A few days ago, my door was left open and she ran out and disappeared for three days without a trace. I kept arguing to myself: just let her disappear and never come back; but my daughters are upset and have lost their appetites. I felt jealous. Had Boom Boom already taken my place in their hearts? Then, in the middle of the night, there was a sound of "meow meow" outside my window. Boom Boom had returned. The girls were overjoyed and excited to see her again, jumped right outside to hug her close, and treated her like a queen. All of a sudden, I was relieved, like a burden had fallen off my shoulders. That stinky cat! Have I also grown attached to her? It looks like the hope of advertising for a cat lover to adopt is gone.

Growing Pains and Joys

My older daughter has blossomed before my eyes. Those smiles, those shining eyes, every inch of her makes a mother feel the pride and happiness of seeing a daughter grow up. Nineteen is a girl's most attractive age – jun zi hao qiu (gentlemen want to pursue). Our fair lady is walking into the tender years of her life. Her moods go up and down like a merry-go-round. I wonder why she's acting sullen, then turn around and she's excited again, telling me all about her tender feelings and happiness. I open my calendar, see that this is the beginning of the year 1990, and think that my older daughter is entering her glorious years. As we near the end of this century, she's walking into adulthood, into her twenties, into a precious time of her life. I silently pray and hope that she will sail through it all smoothly, wishing that the years ahead will continue to provide her with a happy nature and the ability to endure the many frustrations that she will inevitably encounter. How I wish that she would remain young at heart, forever and ever!

How quickly time goes by! 1950 seems like yesterday. That was the year my life really began. My family had just moved to Taiwan at the time, and I was still an innocent girl, always tagging along with my brothers and sisters like a little kitten. During those childhood years, my family was not rich but we were happy. We enjoyed our lives and finally experienced peace. I remember myself as a little girl with a ponytail, always in heavy wooden shoes. In that year, my family began

establishing a new home in an unfamiliar place.

In those days, I would stroll along the busy streets of downtown (Xi Men Ding), go in and out of movie theatres with my father, watch basketball games played by Ke Lan (a popular Taipei team of the time), trade movie star photos of Lin Dai, Yu Ming and others. Those memories are the pictures framed by my first ten years.

In the next decade, from grade school to high school graduation, I spent most of my time on studies and exams, but also had time for outings with my family and, occasionally, caught three movies in one day with my girl friends. Back then, we did not have KTV (karaoke clubs) or discos and yet, life was serene and peaceful. Soon, my sense of peace was quickly slipping away because I faced the stress of my studies and the typical mood swings of adolescence. Day after day went by and, suddenly, the sixties arrived in my last year of high school. During that time, I was crazy about dancing and going to parties, and would even attend more formal parties in my school uniform without telling my parents. Those memories represent my years as a teenager.

In the beginning of the sixties, life in Taipei was exciting. That period was a turning point for the developing city, a time when TV was becoming common in every household and parents were beginning to adopt more open-minded ideas in raising their children. Those were the precious golden years of my college life. Discovering the opposite sex, savoring the excitement of receiving your first love letter, walking under the moon, strolling and whispering by the lake. Look at my daughter now, how could I have imagined that she would experience all of this thirty years later. Just like me, at the same age, my daughter has fallen in love.

After graduating from college, the trend of going abroad swept

many of us away like a big wave, a wave that has carried us to the opposite shore on the other side of the ocean. I came to America, studied hard in graduate school, and worked part time. I gritted my teeth and overcame many obstacles. I wanted my parents to be proud of me when I finally received my master's degree. Then, just when my difficulties seemed insurmountable, just when I most needed someone to take care of me, there he was with his honest face and endless patience - he won my heart and we continued our journey through life together. It seems like just yesterday that I got married and had babies, and had to deal with bottles and diapers. But another ten years slipped through my fingers. . . . I turned around and found that my daughters were taller than me.

The seventies were years of tumult mixed with peace. The Vietnam War, hippies, Nixon's scandal, energy shortages, and tremendous inflation - we made it through all of that safely. We started to sink our roots ever more deeply in this land. I supported my husband as he worked towards his Ph.D. and we tried to bring up two daughters carefully. I was simultaneously a career woman, a housewife and a mother; from a sheltered young lady I had gradually become a strong woman. As the girls were growing up we often relocated from place to place. They gradually melted into the big pot of America, becoming more and more like the blond-haired, blue-eyed people who looked so different from them. It was difficult to maintain our Chinese culture. That period of adjustment was a big trial for both parents and children. But what a comfort it was to watch them go from learning their A-B-C's to rendering us speechless with their strong talent for debate. We were fortunate to have the comfort of our children. Life was meaningful and exciting when they were around. Coming to this country as adults, we had to

adjust to various difficulties but we learned through our suffering and matured as the years went by.

The eighties were years of laughter and tears. The tragic loss of our parents and dear friends passing away hit us one after another. Our daughters also entered into their years of rebellion. Too much discipline would choke them and too much freedom would ruin them - This was a period filled with constant squabbling; the atmosphere in our home had never before been so tense. Having a good, easy life had spoiled them and so the caring discipline of their parents turned into arguments and tears. In the middle of the night, I would lay in bed feeling blue, thinking of my youth when we would never dare to argue with our parents and always obeyed them. Through countless sleepless nights we taught ourselves to be parents who were trying to understand their children's hearts in a modern time. Our children grew up in the eighties experiencing a freedom that their parents never had, and they struggled between their parents' ideas and strong contrary currents in society. Both sides had to accept the challenge and if we, as parents, didn't try to be more patients, we would lose the battle and the relationship would fall apart. The latter part of the eighties included many storms and occasional sunshine. The girls were growing up - it was a slow process - and both sides began learning how to compromise and accept love from one another. The stormy weather finally ended and life was once more filled with peace and quiet, although we parents were getting older every year.

The beginning of the nineties is another new and exciting chapter for our children. With their young, fresh appearances and anticipation about the future, we can't help but envy them. Their lives are colorful and rich. A box of chocolates, several dozen roses touch their hearts

and enrich their days, becoming part of the endless melodies of their lives. The love from their parents is no longer enough to fill their hearts - we have strong competitors and I watch the girls with a mixture of joy and sadness, knowing that I can only hope that they will land on solid ground and not get lost in the precarious maze of love. Our daughters' every move, their search for beautiful futures, touches us, like tender flowers - how much we want to nourish these little budding blossoms! We hope that they have grown strong without suffocating them in the greenhouse that we've built for them with our love. Our years as doting parents have all but gone, but the tender years of our girls are now growing, growing, into greater and stronger independence year after year...

The Auntie Li that I Know

“Healthy mind, healthy body.” “The more love you give to others, the longer you will live.”

These are Auntie Li’s favorite mottos. As a matter of fact they also paint a picture of her colorful lifestyle. Among all of the elderly friends that I have, Auntie Li is the one who always looks especially young for her age. She has reached her ninetieth year, yet she looks no more than fifty. Her countenance is always full of peace and grace. Whenever we’re together, she joins in with our younger generation, having fun and showing no sign of aging. Actually, most of us are already middle aged; however, in her eyes, we are the so-called younger generation. I marvel at how God has truly blessed her.

When I first met her ten years ago, I was happy to learn that she had been my mother’s college classmate in Beijing, and that Uncle Li had been my father’s colleague in Taiwan. It was destiny that we should both settle in Pittsburgh and become friends. When my parents came to visit, they renewed their friendship and spent a lot of time together, playing cards and chatting. That period of time was too short: my mother moved back to New York and passed away soon after. However, my parents had spent a wonderful year in Pittsburgh.

Through her I met her daughter, Yu-ling, and we became great friends. Both of our daughters were only five or six at the time and became playmates. Now they’ve graduated from college and Auntie Li

still looks the same as back then, full of life and enjoying each minute. Her annual trips to China don't wear her out. She is always in high spirits.

The best thing about her is that she never puts on airs. She is very considerate in every respect. She can always join us and we have fun together. We never need to worry about what we talk or joke about in front of her because she never gets offended. Our entire group of friends in Pittsburgh has more free time now since our children have grown up and left home, so we have potluck dinners and play ma jiang once in a while—she is always welcome in our group. She plays very well and always tells us interesting stories.

I feel particularly close to her because we both enjoy reading and writing. She has become a faithful patron since I began working in the East Asian library. I never forget to tell her about our new books and borrow them for her. In her books and in her conversations with us, I really feel that the reason she has such health and longevity is because she has a very positive attitude toward life. She is very optimistic, open-minded, passionate and loving—that's why she has won our hearts and friendship. Even in the most difficult situations, she takes everything in stride.

Auntie Li is truly a good role model for us. I dedicate this article to on the occasion of her latest book publication wish that she would stay young at heart forever.

Overseas Summer Job

The period of my life that began in May 1966, ultimately determined the course of my future.

The previous winter had been a struggle. On a freezing night in February, I returned to school from my sister's home in Indiana. When I got off the Greyhound bus with my heavy luggage, it was snowing and the drifts were as high as my knees. I didn't take a taxi because I didn't want to spend more money. I carried my luggage and walked to my dormitory. There was nobody around, nothing in sight but white snow. Although it was just half a mile away, it took me one hour to get to my dorm. I decided to find a job and earn my living, despite my sister's objections. She was struggling with three infant boys and my brother-in-law was still in school. I wouldn't depend on them anymore.

May 13, Friday

Before summer vacation, I'm worried about finals, job locations, and choices of love. I'm so poor that I even have to borrow soy sauce. There's only 25 cents left. I spent my last 50-cent Kennedy souvenir coin on food. In these days without even soy sauce, I feel helpless and lonely. I tell myself that when my sister sends me pocket money tomorrow, I can travel and find a job, and this will be the last pocket money I will accept from my sister.

June 6, Monday South Dakota, Mt. Rushmore

When I was a little girl, I never could have dreamed that I would be

in a scene from the film *North by Northwest* - I'm working at the very same cafeteria where the police chased the criminals in the movie. Outside the long glass window, I can clearly see the sculpture of the four American presidents. This is the first time in my life that I've been a waitress, carrying trays and pouring drinks for customers. The tourists are very warm and friendly, and their tips are very generous. However, my boss, stone-faced Dick, strikes me as being too hostile. He has complained to the supervisor that I'm too slow, and we talk too much with the customers, and cause business to slow down. I don't care what he says...

June 11, Saturday

The weather on the mountain is cold. I just wish I didn't feel that same coldness in my heart. I've been assigned to be a cake girl in the kitchen because of Dick's complaints. I worked like a slave for six days as a waitress and I end up in this situation! I feel embarrassed - I've lost face. I have to continue working there for my tuition next semester and tolerate everything in order to survive. In the apartment last night, my roommates, American girls, dressed up and went out looking for boyfriends, while I was exhausted and lay motionless in bed, listening to a soft female voice singing: "Try to remember that day in September..." from far away somewhere. I fell asleep with tears in my eyes.

June 12, Sunday

When I think about my prospective future, experiencing some hardship in this summer resort is nothing. I feel easy at heart. This morning, I didn't even feel like attending Mass. I have a bad impression of the owner of this summer resort. He's so wealthy; he bought a senatorial seat. Yet I'm told that he is a very mean person, who looks like a gentlemen and sits up straight in his church pew but exploits stu-

dents as cheap labor. His old mother is the housekeeper of the female student dormitory. She is the only kind person who treats students with heart. When she talks about her son, she shows her disappointment and breaks into tears. What a pity!

June 13, Monday

Life is a joke. In the bakery section of the kitchen, even when I'm tired of kneading the dough I still carry a smiling face. Is it worth it? I can see nothing but the long, cold face of my boss. I don't hear any encouragement, just an impatient voice that pushes us to work faster. It is depressing. We're often given hints that there have been more and more students coming around to look for jobs and, if we don't work harder, we'll be fired. I feel like this is discrimination. I found out today that Dick demoted us to the kitchen because we pretended not to understand his demand to share our tips!

June 14, Tuesday

Time flies. I don't have the energy even to raise my head to look at the four presidents outside the cafeteria after eight hours of busily working in the kitchen. This job stinks! The cook, Gladys, is mean to me because I'm Chinese. She yells at me impatiently, meanwhile being very sweet to her assistant, Shelly. It is frustrating. My roommate Carla bought a record player. I hope it can raise my spirit, dispel my depression and I also need to calm my emotions. It's very difficult for one to leave home, struggle alone and live without security. My mind and my heart have fought for a year. Maybe it's time for me to make a decision - I'm long past that stage where I can entertain my daydreams. He is loyal, reliable, and considerate. My family and sister all like him very much. What else should I consider?

June 18, Saturday

It's not surprising that the owner's wife fired us, using the excuse that we are not able to fulfill our contract. (What a joke!) Although I was tired of this job, I feel cold and empty inside. We finally got a taste of the working life of students in a foreign country. Li worked in the other department. Her situation was a little better than mine; but she was also fired because we came here together. It's such bad luck for her. We are both gentle and kind. We didn't like this job at all, but we needed the money for our living expenses and tuition.

June 20, Monday

He and Wang came to pick us up on the mountain. They consoled us with a Chinese proverb: "The old man lost his horse. Who knows? It might be a blessing in disguise - a loss may turn out to be a gain." They took us on a tour of a beautiful lake. There were willow branches floating in the air and a soft wind was blowing. But I was worried about my job search. I'm tired not only physically but also emotionally. What should I do?

June 21, Tuesday

It's true. I've been fired. I remember my conversation one day with a young waiter: "Good morning, John." — "It is morning, but I don't know how good it is." This was his wry sense of humor expressing our helplessness. Those hard days in the kitchen making pies have disappeared from my life forever.

June 23, Thursday

We've been trying in vain to look for jobs for two days already. It seems that it was bad news rather than good news. Li has decided to go to Chicago to stay with her brother. What should I do?

June 24, Friday

No job yet. I decided to go to the Badlands for the day. The Bad-

lands is a thousand-year-old sea. The layers of colorful rock are quite beautiful, resplendent, because the water evaporated and everything mineralized. I don't know why it was given such a mismatched name.

June 28, Tuesday

I finally found a job at the Hilton. After my experience on the mountain, I'm not optimistic anymore.

June 30, Thursday

As a dishwasher, I'm too small for the machine. My co-workers keep trying to help me. There's a lot more warmth in this place than on the mountain. It seems that human beings are not all the same. I got a phone call from a local business school when I got home. I was offered an interview for an assistant librarian position. Thank God, this is what I want to do.

July 18, Monday

Today was my birthday. I thank my parents for giving me life. My life is not very great, but I have love and dedication. In difficult moments, I always receive help from God at just the right time.

How will I tell my classmates about my engagement? This was a big surprise.

July 20, Wednesday

When I work in the library, I'm happy and relaxed. The principal appreciates my work. I want to try my best here, and then I need to go back to school to finish my degree.

August 8, Monday

Summer is almost over. Everything is wonderful. The principal was extremely satisfied with my work. He often praised me and assigned a young assistant to help me. He even implied that if I wanted to stay, I'd be offered a real job. A very attractive offer too difficult to

decline, but my father wrote to persuade me to consider my studies as my priority. A job is very nice, but my goal in the U.S.A. is to finish my education. I should not give up. The principal respected my decision and hoped that I could come back later. His door is always open for me.

Good-bye South Dakota, good-bye Mount Rushmore!

Old Times, Old Friends

You can have a good time together but the moment always comes to say good-bye. Parting is such sweet sorrow. At the end of the year, letters from your friends warm your heart. There is so much to tell about since you last got together. You know that across the miles and mountains, it's so difficult to meet again. Many years of staying at the same school have brought you countless memories to reminisce about as well as the friendships and the joyous days of your youth, still seem to be right in front of you. After graduation, everyone started to have their own stories, like sparrows flying in different directions. Holiday greeting letters really bring back the old memories.

Dong and Gribel were a few years older than us, but we clicked right away. They had come from Hong Kong with their teenage son. At that time, we had just started at Penn State while they had almost finished their degrees. Gribel was a very affectionate and caring person. She was always generous and a wonderful host to us newcomers. What always amazed me was her beautiful voice. Tung was our big brother and our mentor. We respected his knowledge and maturity. But although he generally presented a serious front, he also had a lighter side with a sense of humor. I will never forget the night of his graduation, when they invited us to their home for a big farewell banquet. That night, we agreed during the feast that we wouldn't say a word of good-bye until we got drunk. So that's what we did.

How time flashes by. Their handsome son Jason is graduating from college and their younger boy is the same age as my older daughter, almost nine years old. When I look at my daughter, who thinks of herself as a big girl already, I can't help reminiscing about that summer when Gribel and I, both expecting, would talk together and share our excitement about the babies to come. Now, they've settled down in Canada. Dong is already a senior professor and Gribel has a wonderful career. Most fortunately, after many years of separation they have both been reunited with their aging parents, who have moved into their home to live with them. Gribel described their life in a letter: "Life in North American is so stressful and tense; you remember your old friends when the year reaches its end. Time goes by so quickly and we are getting older and older. . . ." Gribel, when I saw you two years ago, you were the same, I truly did not see any signs of age on your youthful-looking face.

Ming also wrote me a letter. We were at Penn State together with Ming and her husband for a few years and became very close friends. Their two sons came at the same time as my two daughters, and they spent their earliest childhood together. Ming was capable, open-minded and had a wonderful sense of humor. The Jiaozi (dumplings) she made were incomparable. And Wang was always talkative and fun loving, telling an endless stream of jokes when he was with us. A few years ago, when I met Wang again, he had changed—he was no longer very talkative and had turned into a very quiet, middle-aged person. I felt a loss in my heart. One has to adjust to whatever life hands them. The naivety and innocence of our youth are gone forever!

Mei-ying sent me a Christmas card, which touched me deeply:

*Never a Christmas morning ,
Never an old year' s end ,
But someone thinks of someone ,
Old days , old times , old friends .*

Just like that, a small card expresses all the feelings of friendship. Suffering from her illness for a year or so has turned her into a very strong woman. Her handwriting is still so clear and elegant and her words are full of optimism. She writes that after her sufferings and struggles in the past year, she hopes that all of her troubles will go with the old year and the New Year will bring her a complete recovery. She mentions that the thought of her friendships had sustained her through her time of difficulty. Reading her letter, I recall the year that she and her husband had a big argument and finally made up at our house together, eating dumplings, reaching peace through negotiation and compromise. Now, many years later, I believe that neither of them is so strong-headed, that time has matured us all.

Hui-ching mentioned our reunion when she and her husband came to Pittsburgh. The four of us sat under a dim light and talked about the old days; it was just like an old poem by Du Fu: "We have moved towards many different directions in life. What a night is tonight, when we can still get together and talk, our hair having turned gray and our youth having passed!" When we were at Penn State ten years ago, we were together almost every weekend, taking turns playing the host, having just learned how to cook. What joyful days! And now, Chang is the manager of a big company and already the father of two healthy boys—he was just a rough, young fellow at that time!

Amy sent me a picture of her two little girls. Lei and Ling have

turned into young ladies. I still remember when Amy's family first moved to Penn State from Taiwan. They were our next-door neighbors, and we saw each other all the time. Zhou was a wonderful husband who took care of the whole family despite his busy studies, and Amy was well dressed, very sophisticated and attractive. She enclosed her business card in her letter—she's become a successful real estate agent.

Thinking about California makes me think of the letter I received from Ku, who wrote that he had become too relaxed after completing school, and occasionally considers trying out a different work environment, but the good weather keeps him from moving elsewhere. I still remember the exceptional beauty of his wife, Chi-ann. When they first arrived on campus, she caused a huge uproar in our group because of her looks. My husband, Wen, and Ku had been college classmates, so since we had arrived at Penn State a year ahead of him, we naturally became his local guide and counselor. Although Chi-ann was lovely and a good housekeeper, she really wanted to get a job to help support Ku. There was a vacancy at the library at the time, so we carefully planned our strategy and, due to her good attitude and beauty, she was offered the job immediately. Knowing that Pattee Library has since changed its name and that most of the staff I worked with is gone, I feel a sense of loss and sadness, the recent past has become ancient history? Ah, such is the endless cycle of life.

Hsuan-hua was also my colleague at the time. After she and her husband had both finished school, they returned to Taiwan where they've since led a fulfilling and busy life. They live in a place called Stone Garden, a wonderful location that is very safe for children. They feel lucky that they could go home and live in their own country.

The most interesting letter was from Hsin-yuan, who also lived

close to us at the time. Feng was the cook in the family, a true gourmet chef and an extraordinary father to his little baby. When their son Pingping first arrived, he kept a baby record at his bedside all the time, noting how much the baby ate, how many bowel movements he had, what the consistency was, how many times the baby cried, and how many bottles the baby drank. He faithfully kept the record and was dubbed "Perfect Father of the Year" by us. Now, Pingping is no longer a baby, and Hsin yuan is teaching cooking at a nearby community college. It's such an interesting twist—now it's her turn to show off her cooking skills.

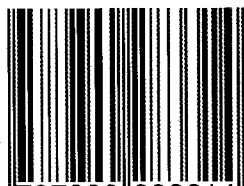
We have moved over ten times and yet the letter from my American girlfriend Barbara still managed to find me. Are her beautiful hair and charming features still the same? I remember how she sang for us at parties, and the colorful floor lamp that she left us when she moved to Boston is still lighting up my family room. The once-owner of that lamp has found her life partner and changed her name to his.

These letters come every year, bringing back countless memories and stories of sweetness and sorrow. Hu, wrote that his life had been full of tumult. He lost his mother last year and so his father was left alone with them. My good friend Su ling from Singapore wrote with bad news about Chi, and how they had just returned to Taiwan for the funeral. Everything changes. I can't help worrying about my elderly parents. But there are ups and downs in life, the shape of the moon is ever changing. . . these are the rules of the universe. We have to grasp the moment, seize the day, live with a positive attitude and take care of our health. Our friends are far away but close at heart—let these friendships stay with us forever and give us the support we need to live out this life.

责任编辑：张颖

封面设计：程阳阳

ISBN 7-80028-331-3



9 787800 283314

图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

海外浮生/钟丽,钟昆著. -北京:现代出版社,2003
ISBN 7-80028-331-3

I. 海... II. ①钟... III. 长篇小说-中国
-当代 IV. I247.5

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2002)第 069852 号

原 作: 钟丽 钟昆

责任编辑: 张 颖

装帧设计: 程阳阳

出版发行: 北京市安定门外安华里 504 号 邮政编码: 100011

电 话: 010-64267325 010-64240483 (兼传真)

电子邮箱: xiandai@cnpitc.com.cn

印 刷: 固安博通印务有限公司

开 本: 880 × 1230 1/32

印 张: 12.25

字 数: 130 千字

版 次: 2004 年 3 月第 1 版 2004 年 3 月第 1 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 7-80028-331-3

定 价: 20.00 元

版权所有, 翻印必究; 未经许可, 不得转载

Biographies

钟丽 (Lily Chung Yip)

广东省五华县人。台湾师范大学化学系科学学士，美国俄亥俄州辛辛那提大学生物化学博士。曾任美国纽约癌症研究中心高级研究员。现任教于纽约公立中学化学组资优班。科学家。旅美30余年。喜好写作及讲故事，她的小说引人入胜，曾被编入《海外作家小说选集》。

Lily Chung Yip

A native of Wuhua County in Guangdong Province, China, Lily Yip received her B.S. Degree in Chemistry from Taiwan Normal University and her Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Cincinnati. In New York, she has been a senior researcher at the Sloan Cancer Research Institute and taught chemistry in the public high school program for gifted youth. Her works have been included in "Anthology For Overseas Writers" published in Taiwan.

钟昆 (Agnes Chung Wen)

广东省五华县人。台湾东吴大学外文系文学学士，美国肯塔基州路城蓝山学院和匹兹堡大学图书馆信息学硕士学位。后任职于宾夕法尼亚大学及匹兹堡大学东亚图书馆至今。生性喜好文学。1980年开始在《世界日报》及其他海外报刊上发表散文多篇，内容多为留美生活的描述与感觉。

Agnes Chung Wen

Like her sister, Lily, Agnes Wen came from Wuhua County in Guangdong Province and received a B.A. degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures from Soochow University, Taiwan, as well as MLS degrees in Library and Information Science. Her last degree was from the University of Pittsburgh where she has been working at the East Asian Library for the past 22 years. Numerous articles about her reflections on life overseas have been published in *World Journal*.