



PLEASE LISTEN TO ME, DEAR TEACHER

# A LIFE TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE NURSING CLASSES



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“The dust explosion at the Formosa Fun Coast turned my life upside-down in an instant, messed up all that I have planned for myself. Was it a melancholic song of lament, or was it merely an odd note in my life’s movement, been overturned like that. With a change of thought, I understood that the only way to pass this class on life education was by facing this impermanence head on with adamant resolution, to be a phoenix reborn in the midst of fire. I wish to compose a inspirational chapter in my life to dedicate it to all those who saved me, protected me, cared for me, and supported me along the way.”

When impermanence in life befalls, no matter how many whys, ifs, and buts cannot change anything. That is what I have learnt about life, the insignificance of human beings. Although I was fortunate to receive a second chance thanks to the ceaseless effort of the medical team for over a month, the loss of limb functions, impairment in physical performance, and the endless waves of overwhelming pain and itch all made me realized of the merciless tests that lies yet ahead, and that I have to face them one by one. After having some time to contemplate, I finally thought it through. Instead of enduring the torment helplessly, as a nursing student, I should cherish the opportunity of role reversal, examine myself as if I am my own mentor, concentrating on the suffering, strengthen my belief, to overcome whatever challenges that lie ahead and complete the mission I have been given.

### **First-hand Experience of Burn Treatment**

Rinse, remove, soak, cover, send are the five-step treatment for burn patient that is so fundamental that all nursing students should know by heart. However, at the time of the accident, I was so concerned with the risk of bacterial infection and viral transmission that I surrendered the chance of soaking myself in the only pool in the theme park with water. In the two hours of waiting for an ambulance, I rejected the cooling measures of the medical responders, because was in such a pain from the burns that any slight contact is devastating. A radical decision that defied the very essence of burn treatment was perhaps the reason why my wound was so serious.

I shall always remember, particularly once I begin my nursing career, to strictly abide by every single medical protocol, to provide the best and appropriate medical care to my patients.

Chamber syndrome requires tendon resection, a surgical procedure I had read in textbooks once and did not completely understand as to what it entails. After this injury, I remembered how my hands and legs swelled like balloons, and the doctors performed this surgery to reduce the swelling. I only learnt way after the fact that a delayed resection may lead to amputation.

## Coming to Terms with Who I Am

I had just finished my internship in the plastic surgery ward of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital before the accident. I remember that a classmate of mine had a burn patient under her care. Although the patient appeared to have no significant impairment in terms of physical function, only a bit depressed. I thought at the time that burn injuries were limited to the skin, regularly dressings was all it need to recover.

Only after the accident, did I come to a painful realization that there was nothing simply about it. I could tell when the dressing round began in the ICU by listening to the screams that shook the room, and that was when fear began to grip my heart. The textbooks did not teach me much about burn injury, so I had no grasps of what it entails. Removing skins from head to patch up skins on limbs was something I had never heard of, ever. I only knew that a piece of skin is removed to patch another, wounds has to be rinsed over and over, and that pain medication has to be administered on daily basis just to relief that pain by a little. I never knew the profound consequences of burn injury. I thought it was just like all the minor burns I have endured in the past, where a simple dressing would suffice, and the skin would recover over time. Only after the accident did I realize that the scars on my body caused by the explosion will never return to what it was before. In future, my skins may be rid of the scars, but it would be wrinkled and inflexible. Skins that have endured serious burn injuries may not be able to perspire, which can lead to poor regulation of body temperature. I feel as if my limbs are insensitive to outside temperature; on the contrary, my body is often fairly hot or cold. I am a frequent victim of heat stroke in summertime, and my body freezes during winter days. As hard as it is, these are difficulties that I have to get accustomed to.



## Regain Mobility Through Rehabilitation

I always thought that syringes are tools to inject medication and draw blood, not knowing the range of its application is so much wider, like draining annoying blisters, for example. After skin recovers, there is a period of blistering, and rehabilitation also causes blisters to appear one after another. That was when I discovered that syringe has a addition function to the ones described in a textbook.

I did not know that, after a burn injury, rehabilitation is required to regain the physical activity of a normal person. It seems only natural that one would regain mobility once would recovers. And now, I am in constant struggle with scars, constantly rehabilitating. I still recall my first rehabilitation session. I could not believe all these simple actions can be so grueling and painful. I felt weak and pathetic, not knowing how long it would take for me to regain my mobility. A year has gone by, I am satisfied that I am capable of completing most of the daily





**Peng Wen-Yu resumed her academic life, and shared her experience with new nursing students on Sept. 8, 2016. Group photo taken after the sharing.**

chores. And I know, even after I pushed myself to the limit with rehabilitation, I still have to face reconstruction surgery.

### **Empathetic Towards Suffering of Disease**

“Be empathetic towards your patient” seems to be a point that is emphasized in the first year of nursing school. I still remember the days laying inside the ICU. The stomach discomfort was so excruciating that I often cried out in pain and cursed those around me. That was when I understood why patients can be irrational under extreme discomfort. The nurses who took care of me, however, always consoled me patiently, finding ways to ease my stomach ache. Such a empathetic attitude soothed me almost instantly. However, I was also deeply troubled and conflicted for a long time because of a line someone dropped on me: “you studied nursing yourself, so why are you so uncooperative?”

The experience reminded me of a patient assigned to me who required primary nursing during my internship. He ignored me completely at first, but after he grew familiar to me, he began to vent his emotions, and even curse at me. At that instant I was perplexed, mixed with anger, thinking who gave him the right to throw a tantrum. I pretended to calm his rage, while underneath I had my own fair share of curses. This role reversal gave me insight on how to be empathetic towards those tormented by illnesses.

### **Treasure Every Moment**

The pressure I endured during my internship left me sleepless. I had to accept heavy criticisms from my seniors and instructors during the day, and wrapping up mountains of

papers in the night. My body was practically in a constant state of fatigue. Every time when I saw a patient lying on bed, I was envious. "How wonderful it must be to be able to rest comfortably on a bed," I thought. I could not be more wrong. No one would want to live out their lives bedridden unless they were forced to by some conditions. The discomfort and helplessness caused by illnesses is beyond mere fatigue. So, I have to cherish every moment, and to face the rest of my life with positive thinking.

I was quite dissatisfied with the way I look before the accident. I often told my friends and families that "I would definitely go have a plastic surgery when I save up enough money, to elevate my nose and slim my cheeks." With my face partially burned, I had gone through several rounds of painful scar removing treatments. As effective as it may be, deep down inside, I could not be more satisfied to regain the look I once had. We should cherish the look our parents gave us, and instead working on cultivating our inner self that will manifest as beauty and elegance.

### **From Courage Comes Faith**

I was rebellious once, always questioning the group's mainstream values, and even more so while I was studying in TCUST (Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology). I have learnt a lot since then. Before the accident, my instructor Kao Hsia-Tzu was protective and tolerant towards me; after the accident, she took every opportunity to visit me at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital by traveling all the way from Hualien. I know, judging by the look her face, that it pained her dearly when she saw me in my condition.

After the accident, instructor Lo Shu-Fen, who had a background in burn care, came to my side right away, accompanied me on the ambulance, helped me with the transfer, and



**In the middle of July, 2016, volunteer Lin Chia-Li from the performers' association invited Peng Wen-Yu to encourage a patient in Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital to overcome the disease.**





Life is a Journey <sup>Pitu</sup>  
 停留\*呼吸着不同的空气



Peng Wen-Yu expressed her gratitude to Kao Hsia-Tzu, Lo Shu-Fen, and Hsueh Ting-Yuan for their love and care, and to her parents for their unconditional support and company. The photo showed Peng Wen-Yu's sharing a photo of her parents and Sister Lin Chia-Li on Facebook. Before the accident, Peng Wen-Yu was dissatisfied with the way she looked. Now, she understand the importance of pressure garment, and is in no rush to remove the scars.

was there for me as I transitioned from critical acute phase to the painstaking rehabilitation phase. She told me that she would be by my side for as long as it takes. She drove my fear away.

As I waited helplessly in the ICU for dressing, instructor Hsueh Ting-Yuan appeared in a familiar Tzu Chi uniform and drove away the coldness in the room. When I began to learn to walk again, she took my cane away, forced me to take steps on my own, and that is how I am able to walk steadily today.

I have felt the care and concern from the Tzu Chi family, so I have been thinking about how to reciprocate the second chance this society has given me. In a fateful encounter, I am invited by Sister Chia-Li from DaAi T.V. to serve in the hospital as volunteers. By sharing my experience after the ordeal with those who are in the middle of their suffering and struggle, I hope to bring them a little bit of courage and support, to show them that withered flowers can bloom again, if one would only try and never forfeit.

**On June 27, 2015, one Saturday night, 508 young people were injured when fire ripped through crowds at a party at an amusement park outside Taiwan's capital Taipei. Peng Wen-Yu was one of the burnt victims.**