

# A 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday Surprised Present

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In July of 2017, Dharma Master Cheng Yen's address while she was in Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital touched my heart deeply. She explained the "Conditioned Dharma", meaning one must use a mindful but steadfast heart to view things. A steadfast thought is invisible and untouchable so how do we achieve the "Conditioned Dharma?" The key is to do it. I remembered an incident occurred in 2015.

There was a 60-year-old patient named Chen transferred from another hospital. He was diagnosed with an abdominal infection. His condition was stabilized after an operation. However, three weeks later, he had an acute

**Head Nurse, Wang Jia-Ling (right) coincidentally gave Mrs. Chen (left) a bowl of noodle on her 60th birthday at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. The heartfelt gratefulness and warmth made Mrs. Chen wanting to give back.**

septic shock and was transferred to critical care unit. Once he was stabilized, he was transferred to a regular hospital bed. One day, he was again returned to intensive care unit after an emergency. This time around he was not conscious. There were several unsuccessful attempts to wean him off the ventilator. After three weeks and relatively stable medical condition, Mr. Chen was transferred to our subacute respiratory critical care unit.

After receiving him, we pondered upon the challenge facing Mr. Chen's long term care. So the doctors recommended tracheostomy with family approval.

I remembered it was in the middle of winter with a storm coming. Since Chen was the first in line for surgery, his wife arrived at around 7am. However, the operation was delayed because of his blood work result and other problem. We had to wait almost 3 hours. I explained to Mrs. Chen who was accommodating but refused to leave the OR waiting room. I said, "You still have time for breakfast." However, she was worrisome and did not want to leave.

The weather was so cold and Mrs. Chen had not had anything for breakfast. She would have to be consulted all day long for post operation and related care matters. I worried about her condition. So I heat up my sesame oil mushroom noodles in a microwave. Afraid that she would not accept them, I invited her into our conference room and said, "Aunty, it's really cold today. Please have this noodle to warm-up."

Hearing what I said, she started to cry, and continuing crying for a while. Fortunately, our hospital's volunteer comforted her, "Don't cry. Why are you crying? It's only a bowl of noodles. You should enjoy it happily." After calming down, Mrs. Chen responded, "Do you know why? Today is my birthday, my 60th birthday."

She continued, "My children are all grown up and have their families; however, I have yet to celebrate my birthday at home, let alone a bowl of noodles. How did you know today is my birthday?" I smiled and responded, "I don't know. I'm just afraid that you might be cold or hungry so I want you to warm up your stomach." While continuing crying, Mrs. Chen said, "What a coincidence? I'm really touched...." To lighten up her heart, our volunteer quickly added, "Yes! It must be because you are very kind, very merciful, love your family a lot so the God did this for you. It's serendipity." Mrs. Chen said, "I am wondering why the nurse knew my birthday..."

During Mr. Chen's surgery, other colleagues quickly prepared a happy birthday card and a bowl of porridge as present. Representing the colleagues, I presented to Mrs. Chen in the waiting room. It was a surprise. Mrs. Chen again teared up. While holding my hands tightly, she said, "I only knew that nurses care for patients.

I'm surprised for you to care for family members as well? It's unbelievable! I'm too touched to say anything..."

The night after the surgery, I visited Mr. Chen at around 7 pm, thinking that he should be awake. So I said to him by his ears how much his family love and care for him. I even used Mrs. Chen's name to sing him a song, "Mr. Chen, Mrs. Chen really loves you! Your grandchildren often asked about Grandpa? They all miss you dearly. Do you understand?" Mr. Chen nodded in response. I was surprised and felt my heart tugged but grateful. I whimpered, "Mr. Chen, when your wife visits you tomorrow, please respond to make her feel at ease." Mr. Chen again nodded. Suddenly my eyes were filled with tears.

The following morning, Mrs. Chen, as usual, gently held Mr. Chen's hands and mercifully gazed at him, unwilling to wake him up. I greeted Mrs. Chen and waited with her. Then I moved closer to Mr. Chen. After a while, he woke up and gazed at his wife for a long time. I said, "Mr. Chen, your wife is here to see you. Do you know?" Mr. Chen smiled and nodded, Mrs. Chen reacted happily in surprise. She said, "It's amazing! How did you do it? He's awake! My husband is awake and smiling!"

For the following week, Mrs. Chen came daily, filled with tearful eyes. I asked, "What happened? Why are you tearful?" She responded, "When I am alone at night reminiscent what had happened lately, I cannot help but cry while feeling touched." Later, Mr. Chen was stabilized and discharged from the hospital. Prior his discharge, Mrs. Chen's condition was worrisome so I gave her my telephone number and said, "If you need anything in the future, you are always welcomed to contact me, even if it is to complain or share your joy." I did not hear from the Chen's for nearly a year. Then one week prior Mother's Day, she called...

She said, "Six months after his discharge from the hospital, Mr. Chen passed away. But I still remember the care he received at Tzu Chi Hospital and the memory of warmth and gratefulness. I am sad of his passing but I gained solace from these memories."

I was truly happy. She gave me her address and expressed that she wanted to visit me. But of course I wasn't going to let an elder to come; so I visited her. Mrs. Chen wanted to return the favor and became a community volunteer at Feng-Yuan Jing Si Hall. She participated in a book club every Monday. Twice weekly she volunteered at school to read books to the students. She also volunteered as crossing guard to ensure children's safety. After listening to her, my worries went away. I parted



**Mrs. Chen volunteered at school, reading stories to students. Wang Jia-Ling takes spare time to visit her.**

with a card and flowers, “Wishing Mrs. Chen a Happy Mother’s day and pray for your health and safety forever.” Mrs. Chen whimpered, “You are always so thoughtful and kind, providing everyone with warmth. Thank you very much.” Our meeting ended with a big hug.

Being in nursing for 23 years, I have seen many life stories with its climax and finales. The more I feel their pains, the more I am unable to leave my career. I developed a sense of responsibility and mission to protect lives. With these teacher-liked patients crisscrossing my memories, I could not help but cried with sympathy, responsibilities, unable to let go that gratefulness and gratitude. I must say a special thank you to these teacher-liked patients and family members. They use their pains and sufferings to demonstrate, remind and encourage me not to give up or relinquish. Their expression, tears and smiles affirmed my persistence and determination in the path of nursing. They provide me with comfort and reassurance which allows me to draw energy. That is the power of “Conditioned Dharma.”