



STICKING TO THE INITIAL RESOLVE FOR 30 YEARS

Lai Hui-Chun,

Night-Shift Head Nurse, Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital

By Hsieh Ming-Feng

Because Lai Hui-Chun worked during the night, she would usually spend her daytime taking care of her father. Lai would usually accompany her father to the hospital. Sometimes she would notice a patient whose foot had fallen from the foot rest of the wheelchair while the patient's family was pushing the wheelchair, and she could not help but blurt, "Don't put your foot there; you'll scrape your foot!" Other times, she would see a family member hold the urine drainage bag too high, and her kindhearted nature would immediately prompt her to remind them to make changes, regardless if they accepted her advice or not. Besides, whenever she saw the family members taking good care of the patient, she would beam and say, "Good job!"

After accompanying her father for a while, the patients and family members eventually realized that Lai Hui-Chun was a nurse. Even her parents' friends would joke, "Mr. Lai, you were so lucky to have invested in "blue-chip stock". Look, the benefits are all coming back to you." Lai Hui-Chun was elated at such a compliment, and she continued to willingly serve as her parents' "blue-chip stock".

The Decision to Be a Nurse - An Inspiration by that School Campus

Because she was the eldest child in her family, Lai Hui-Chun was advised by her mother to study nursing after she graduated from middle school. As she knew nothing about the field, she did not favor such a choice, but her mother still registered her for the entrance exam. When they entered the campus, there was nothing but a wide expanse of grass and courtyard in sight. Accompanied by the majestic buildings decorated with red window frames, the school exuded none other than peace.

"Wow, this school is different!" The beauty of the school immediately attracted her, and she silently prayed to the heaven: "Please let me pass the exam, so I can go to this school!" Her wish was granted, and she was admitted to Stella Matutina Girls' High School in the department of Nurse-Midwifery.

Each textbook required for the nursing course was large and heavy, and she had to carry them home every day. Her grandmother could not bear to see her suffer, saying, "You're already short, and now you're carrying such heavy books everywhere. You're never going to grow that way!" However, Lai continued to study fervently, and when she was in her fourth year of nursing school, she became a medical intern in a hospital in Changhua. Everything there, from basic nursing, surgery, general medicine, to public health, told her that studying medicine was what she wanted to do.

When she was an intern in the surgical ward, she and a senior nurse cared for a patient who just underwent a pancreatic surgery. A day after the surgery, the patient



On September 17, 1989, Lai Hui-Chun (fourth from the right in the front row) was one of the one-hundred and seven students at Tzu Chi College of Nursing who graduated.

was in so much pain from even the slightest movement that he became angry at everyone. However, after the third day, the patient could sit and became much gentler. After the fifth day, the patient could walk, and the patient bid farewell and went home on the seventh day.

Witnessing the patient's recovery day by day, Lai Hui-Chun was in awe of nursing healing power.

First class of Tzu Chi College of Nursing - One out of One Hundred and Seven

In 1987, while many vocational schools were closing and colleges were rising in their places, teachers began to encourage their students to apply to these schools, and Lai decided to apply for a two-year junior college. But what school should she apply?

Lai's mother was a devoted Buddhist, and she participated in the Buddhist Lotus Society formed by women. When Lai was in middle school, she would attend the Lotus society with her mother and recite the Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra and The Lotus Sutra's Universal Gate Chapter. One day, Lai's mother stumbled upon a page on a magazine reporting that Master Cheng Yen was planning to build a college of nursing, and she kept the page of the magazine. As Lai's parents valued their children's education, the whole family embarked on a trip to travel around the entire island visiting colleges.

When they arrived in Hualien, they asked all over where the Tzu Chi College of Nursing was, and someone even responded, "College of Nursing? I only know about the Tzu Chi hospital!" Therefore, the family traveled to the Tzu Chi hospital in Hualien. A fountain was situated in front of the main hall, and the first sight in the lobby was the

illustration of Buddha providing consolation for the sick. Lai Hui-Chun thought, “This is a hospital? I can’t smell any traces of medicine though!” As she walked in, she asked people for direction of the college of nursing. “If you drive past the produce market, you’ll see Jianguo Road. Turn right and head straight down.” They were finally given directions.

The family parked the car after following the directions, but all they found were two buildings that had just had their formwork removed. There was a tall fence surrounding the buildings, as construction had not been completed yet.

“All we saw back then was the first row of offices over there and that two-story high building.” Lai Hui-Chun could never forget the school’s first sight. “This is a school? This is a temple, you mean!” Her brother’s words were innocent and funny at the same time.

Lai swiftly passed the exam for the nursing college with splendid scores and was now only concerned about which school to choose. At this time, her mother said, “Master Cheng Yen never speaks nonsense. Buddhists never lie. The Tzu Chi College of Nursing is the first nursing school formed by a Buddhist organization. Let’s choose this one.” Since she had never been to Hualien and wished to train herself to be independent, Lai Hui-Chun became one of the one hundred and seven students to first enroll in the Tzu Chi College of Nursing (now “Tzu Chi University of Science & Technology”).

The Passionate and Kindhearted “Little Bee”

Ever since she was young, her grandfather would call her “munchkin” (referring to a short girl), but besides that, the elder generations knew that she was a very polite and kind girl. At the nursing college, her kindhearted nature earned her the nickname “Little Bee”.

One day, while the outside roared with hurricane winds and pouring rain, Jianguo Road had basically become a mini river. Despite these conditions, Lai still went out to the convenience store for food and even asked peers and colleagues , “I’m going out for bread, and does anyone want any?” Everyone was delighted for her help.

The rain poured heavily that night. “I may have been reckless for risking myself out there, but I was happy to do it.” Lai buzzed with happiness like a bumblebee. Even though thirty years had passed, she remembered her first days at the college clearly.

While she studied at Tzu Chi nursing college, she became involved in the Buddhist Society. In her first semester there, she would attend the club every time she was



after school. The club cooperated with the National Hualien Teachers' College to host seminars on health for children in remote areas.

Before she began her second year at college, she became an intern at the Tzu Chi hospital, living a life without advanced technology. According to Hui-Chun, "A physical checkup of a patient requires a vital signs report, a blood test report, an immunity test report, an X-ray report, and five or six other reports. My hand was never at rest from writing. I was so busy back then that I would forget my original intentions." After the internship, she returned to school to study, and before she knew it, she was ready for graduation. Out of the one hundred and seven people in her class graduating, half of them were already working part-time jobs. She was not one of them, but she graduated with a scholarship and stayed around in the area to work. In July of 1991, she reported to the Tzu Chi hospital as an official employee.

Ten Years at Hualien, Developing the Skills in Clinical Practice

"When I began working at Tzu Chi Hospital, there were computers with basic information of every patient. I was incredibly lucky." Lai knew that this hospital was quickly making modifications for improvements. Everyone was dedicated to the benefit of the patient, and even the director would help a patient take a bath.

In reality, there was high turnover in nursing staff because Hualien is too rural living for many of them. Lai would hear her seniors said, "Regardless where you perform nursing, it's all the same." However, after her two years at Tzu Chi College, she was introduced to Tzu Chi and began to understand Master Cheng Yen's teachings about helping others, so she decided to stay at Tzu Chi Hospital. Besides, Tzu Chi Hospital was only a five-year-old hospital, so the managers of each section cared for their subordinates

After staying at the Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital for two years, Lai became the Deputy Head Nurse of the orthopedic ward. She worked in the orthopedic department for about eight years, and was impressed about several patients. For example, Xiao-Gu, one of her first patients, suffered from gout, and the joint of his big toe had become deformed from swelling, and white gout crystals would pop out from his foot, putting him in unbearable pain. He was also suffering from welts that constantly produced pus, but Xiao-Gu did not have any family members to take care of him.

Lai Hui-Chun helped Xiao-Gu take a bath and apply ointment on his welts. After cleansing, Xiao-Gu was incredibly delighted and could complete tasks by himself afterwards, which bestowed a sense of accomplishment in Lai Hui-Chun. When Xiao-Gu was free to go home, he bid farewell with delight.



Yang Sze-Piao, the first principal of Tzu Chi College of Nursing, took the first class of students hiking with his wife. Lai Hui-Chun (third from the right in the third row, the one posing in a hat) was one of them.

Another patient Ms. Li, a resident of Taitung in her thirties. Her husband was driving a car with her as his passenger, but a car accident happened, and Ms. Li suffered from multiple fractures and required an amputation. Tears soaked her face every day as she lived in the orthopedic ward. Her husband, who needed to take care of her at the hospital and run errands at home, was incredibly guilty of what he did. He tried to compensate for his act with kind actions, but Ms. Li always grumbled coldly in return, which increased his frustration.

Lai Hui-Chun became the mediator between the couple, and they finally began to reconcile. Her husband would always drive her for checkups, and after several appointments, Ms. Li admitted to Lai that she was angry at her husband because he had an affair with another woman. Lai encouraged her to be strong, saying, "At least he was willing to use his salary to support this family." Her words of encouragement ultimately allowed Ms. Li to feel relief. The two became as close as sisters, and Ms. Li would always visit her and give her sugar apples whenever she had an appointment.

In July of 1999, the Geriatric Psychiatric Day Care Center needed more nurses, so Lai was asked to take the position of head nurse there. She managed the facility while learning how to care for the elderly.



She remembered a funny elderly man about 150 centimeters in height who would point and say, “You, you, you,” then pretend as if he were to smack someone. According to Hui-Chun, “He would hit you, but it would be a light knock, and he would then chuckle happily.”

This man’s children were very filial. They took care of him themselves before they sent him to the center. They were finally able to take a break, and they thanked the nurses at the center dearly. “We are only responsible for taking care of our patients as well as possible. Although the center was provided by the hospital, the children treated us like heroes.” Lai gained lots of experience at the care center, but after a year, she was relocated to the Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital on the west coast.

Caring for the elderly in Dalin

While at Hualien, Lai was notified that Tzu Chi was planning to build a hospital in Dalin of Chiayi. She thought of moving there as it was closer to home. She had originally left for Hualien so that she could train herself to be independent, but before she knew it, ten years had passed.



Lai Hui-Chun frequently traveled with the Yunlin and Chiayi Medical Association to provide care at the clinics. In the picture, Dr. Yeh Chang-Ming is examining the blind Mrs. Hsu’s skin. Lai Hui-Chun helped her clip her nails and taught her granddaughter how to take care of her.

The Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital officially opened on August 13, 2000. Lai Hui-Chun registered there as a nurse on September 1 and became one of the senior personnel in the hospital. She utilized all her skills attained from her experience in Hualien in this new hospital.

As the head nurse of the internal medicine ward for two years, she then moved to the 7B surgery ward for three years. After that, she opened the 9B ward and the 11B articulations or joints ward. Lai Hui-Chun was incredibly excited when she spoke about this, claiming that opening wards with then Nursing Dept. Director Luwas an incredibly satisfying experience.

Especially when opening the 11B ward, she and her peers had to recruit people from other units. Work at first was very non-cohesive, but at last they were able to come to a consensus and work together towards a common goal. Lai Hui-Chun was gratified to see her potential in planning and was incredibly thankful for the people that worked with her for the new unit.

To this day, the 11B ward hosts education sessions every Monday and Wednesday to reinforce their initial goals. Back then, Lai realized that most people in the ward required similar treatment (especially those requiring knee surgeries). She asked junior nurses to present simple care tips to prep them for career development. Lai was confident. She insisted on hosting education sessions like “knee surgery safety tips” for in-patients the night before surgeries. After a while, this became a tradition in the 11B ward.

Due to her experience in orthopedics learned in Hualien, Lai also became a head nurse of the 8B orthopedic ward. Her coworkers say that she has very high expectations and never fails to provide high-quality care.

Relating to the Helplessness of Family - Thanking Dalin Medical Team for Being Her Support

From the 7B ward to the opening of 9B ward, to the return to the 8B ward, and to the opening of the 11B ward, she also had experience in promoting tests of nursing ability. It was only in the recent two to three years that she felt stability in her life. Eight years at Dalin had passed and it was 2008. She never knew that it was that same year her life was changed because of her father.

It was about ten o'clock at night when her family called, saying that her father was in critical condition in a hospital in Taichung. Lai Hui-Chun speculated that her father's spinal cord was injured. She rushed to the hospital and asked the hospital to perform a skull traction, but the hospital committee said that they had never performed such



an operation and that the patient's blood pressure was unstable and they needed to find the rupture point. At that time, she wanted to transport her father to a Tzu Chi Hospital, but the hospital said that they did not want to further injuries because of moving.

It was around midnight, and Lai was still debating on what she should do. As the eldest in her family, she was capable of nursing but could not do anything to help her father, so she felt incredibly helpless. The next morning, the Nursing Dept. Director Hsin-Ju Lu called, and she felt as if she finally found support and a person to vent. Tears streamed down uncontrollably from her face. "At the time my father illness, she gave me so much support and encouragement. I can't thank her enough!"

Since she wanted to care for her father while working as a nurse, Lai volunteered to become the nursing director for the night shift. She smiled as she said to her coworkers, "During the financial crisis of 2008, everyone was getting cut in salary while I sought to "raise my salary."

There were many times when her father was critical, and she received the support of the Dalin and Taichung medical teams. Everyone treated her father as if he was a family, and Lai was overwhelmed with gratitude for their support.

Treating Everything with Harmony and Reason

Despite her switch from a head nurse of one ward to many during the night, Lai already possessed exceptional management abilities. This new position also allowed her to refine her skills. Lai is filled with gratitude for prior Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital Nursing Dept. Director Wen Shun-Hua (now the secretary of the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation), who initially inspired her to take such a path.

The largest challenge of working night shift was sudden. "For example, sometimes the families of patients may express dissatisfaction with our services," Lai said, "Unless someone was creating a commotion under the influence of alcohol, if we truly treated every single incident as abuse on medical personnel, we would forever be busy with work." We said, "Is this person truly causing trouble?" Because the hospital is in a rural area, most people speak in a very loud manner. If we misinterpreted their speaking as verbal abuse and asked the police to come, the people would think that the police were there to arrest them and would be infuriated..." After working night shift for a while, Lai learned that as long as they put in their fullest effort in care, many incidents would dissipate into nothing.

When asked about her juniors, Lai says, "Although I have up to twenty years of supervising experience, I sometimes adhere too much to one set of principles. I still



January of 2013. Participating in volunteering was Lai Hui-Chun's method of rest. In this picture, she participated in a winter distribution for Longping Village in Luodian County in Guizhou, China.

have much to learn about management.” However, she says that some of her juniors treat her as a friend, “Come, you should sit with us and eat, so you have friends,” and she would respond, “That would be weird if I eat and you don't.” They loved teasing her for a laugh.

Nursing Is Life, Improving Bit by Bit

In 2018, Lai Hui-Chun became a student once more, and she said, “I want to thank now Nursing Dept. Director Chen Chia-Jung for opening a master's program for nursing. I can improve myself while working!” While studying, she found that she enjoyed serving in the clinical sector of the hospital, and she strived to refine her attitude while completing tasks.

While she was caring for her father for the past ten years, she was fortunate enough to participate in the performance of “Dharma as Water”. Her coworkers taught her to develop a deep understanding of Master Cheng Yen's teachings and the humanistic culture of Tzu Chi, so she could educate others in the same manner. A year after the “Dharma as Water” performance, she participated in a scholarship donation program in Guizhou, China. She heard volunteers' stories in helping others, and she suddenly came to a realization. “I've been in Tzu Chi for so long, yet I have never done any volunteering work. I need to change from a “person of Tzu Chi” to a Tzu Chi volunteer. Therefore, she began her path to become a Tzu Chi commissioner.

Serving as a nurse in clinical practice for at least 30 years, aren't you exhausted? Lai Hui-Chun smiled, saying that nursing profession allows her to care for her family, improve herself, and involve herself in volunteering, which truly has improved the quality of her life.