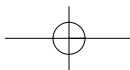
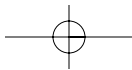


Transforming a Dark Cell into a Garden

Love and Strength: Multiple Sclerosis

The cause of Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is unknown. It's as a MS patient says, "It creeps up on you slowly, and quietly steals a part of your life each time." On the eve of his thirtieth birthday, A-Jie was attacked several times by MS and was paralyzed on his right side. After two years of torture, he made his way out of the living hell step by step, away from the despair of his "life sentence". For himself and his fellow patients, he lays a road to redemption with body and spirit. Before losing his sight, A-Jie always thought that others never did enough. But now being sick, he sees every last drop of their sweat and tears. His eyes of mind are open now, he says. He wants to extend his deep-felt love to people and society...





Blind. Unemployed. Paralyzed...
Once a soaring cadet in the Air Force Academy, he now lay on the floor unable to crawl into bed.

Confucius said, one should stand on his own by the age of thirty. At thirty, however, A-Jie couldn't even stand straight. His career as a flight officer crashed into illness. There was only the gradual, intensifying feeling of ineptness. "It's so pathetic, I'm tired of living!" he said after losing his sight. He took a knife and aimlessly slashed at his wrists.

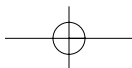
But he missed the arteries, and the searing pain which followed brought him back to life.

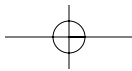
The Glory Days

He clearly remembers how fast and colorful his life was at twenty-five.

Leaves swept pass the car windows on the green mountains. Just getting his license, he was driving on a winding road, up and down with the topography, happily turning the steering-wheel left and right. A-Jie sped along the Xindian River with all of its intoxicating beauty, forgetting how he unexpectedly suffered extensive vision loss a few months earlier. The fact his vision was nothing like the 20/20 vision he enjoyed in earlier days, did not obstruct his view of the scenery. How beautiful it was!

So were his dreams about life. Handsome and energetic, A-Jie believed that youth was short-lived and wasted no time. He joined gangs in junior high school and got himself into a bloody fight that made the papers. He was then transferred to another school, after which he enrolled in a military academy. Three years went by, his sight worsened, and he was forced to leave. His dream of becoming



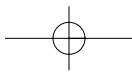


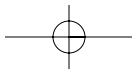
a flight officer became hazier. A-Jie took a job and studied by himself. When he was twenty-four, he was accepted to National Taipei Institute of Technology. He was a bit older than his classmates, possessing abundant experience and a great sense of humor, not to mention his gift of the gab. There were several girls hanging around him at any given time, and he also won the title of “Outstanding Debater” in the Intercollegiate Debate Competition.

Loving to live life in the fast-lane, A-Jie was soon struck by Cupid's arrow more than once. However there was one which struck deep into his heart: this arrow belonged to Wei-wei (pseudonym), who was six years younger than he.

A favorite saying of his, “Work hard while you are young,” was something A-Jie lived by. He made several different roles for himself by attending school and dating, all the while maintaining a fast-paced lifestyle. The only purpose his home served was in providing a bed to sleep in. Aside from sleep, he never wasted a single moment there. Within a very short time, he opened a pub close to Tamkang University in Taipei County and hired staff so that he could simultaneously keep an office job in a trading company. By the age of twenty-five, he had made his first million NT dollars.

As industrious as he was, his body began to change. He began to show symptoms of photophobia in his left eye, blurred vision, and chronic headaches which he only took pain medication for. A doctor was consulted because the pain wouldn't go away, but no clear diagnosis could be made and steroids were prescribed to him for quick relief. A-Jie was determined not to allow his fast-paced lifestyle to slow down, and began to ask himself a question: Why make money for his company when he could be making money for himself? After obtaining a business operating license he set up a trading company





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and did an outstanding job managing imports and exports.

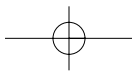
This ambitious, young go-getter moved Wei-wei's heart. She was also constantly occupied with work, and although this meant less time for dating, she understood that he wanted to make a fortune so his loved one could enjoy a better life.

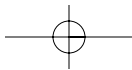
Farewell to Youth

In his glory days, A-Jie's suffered sudden blindness three times. He was admitted to Veteran's Hospital to have a spinal tap and several other tests, but the cause was never found. His optic nerves continued to shrink, and by twenty-six he was completely blind in his left eye, and only shadows and the outline of objects could be distinguished in his right eye. From then on, everything he saw was like the picture seen on a TV station after broadcasts cease for the day, featuring a black background with lots of scattered golden spots, whether his eyes be open or closed.

Having said farewell to the steering wheel and the beautiful tree-covered mountains, A-Jie also said farewell to his high-spirited student life. But his nineteen-year-old girlfriend, whose beautiful face stayed unchanged in his mind, did not say farewell to him. A-Jie did not abandon his business either because it was his source of livelihood. He asked his good friend A-Fen to take charge, and began the search for medical treatment.

Anhui province, Shanghai, Guangzhou..., he traveled to several places in mainland China accompanied by his seventy-year-old father. Electrotherapy, high-pressure oxygen chambers, chiropractors... "The pain is excruciating, but you just have to endure because hope might be found in any kind of treatment," he said. But one by one these hopes were dashed. Despite feeling helpless,





he refused to give in.

A-Jie's back was covered with marks left by dozens of traditional treatments he had tried. It was dotted with bee stings like the sky was dotted with stars.

One day while still traveling in their search, A-Jie started to lose feeling in one leg. Then he could not pick up the phone nor could he stand back up after bending over. It felt like when a plane suddenly loses speed, causing panic. "Something bad is definitely about to happen!"

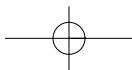
From Veteran's Hospital to National Taiwan University Hospital, A-Jie tried everywhere.

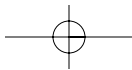
On the eve of his thirtieth birthday in 1997, A-Jie suffered from a series of acute complications. This caused damage to his motor functions, and shortly after began having trouble with the most basic of bodily functions: breathing, moving, swallowing and speaking. On top of that, he became paralyzed on his right side. Doctors confirmed without doubt that he had Multiple Sclerosis (abbreviated MS). If an attack occurs, steroids can be administered to suppress its onset, while there is still no known definitive cure at present. It is known MS arises from complications in the central nervous system, but the exact cause is still unknown.

“Sentenced to Life at Thirty.”

A-Jie lived alone on the third floor of a small, run-down apartment building, feeling utterly depressed.

Incontinence and constipation made it very difficult for him to sleep. While his condition improved slightly, his leg muscles were still weak. Supporting himself against the wall to walk was very tiring. Unwilling to be dependent on diapers, he would shake as he





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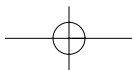
made his way to the bathroom at the back of his apartment. He often fell flat on his face and slowly crawled back to his bed. If he couldn't climb back up, he would pull the covers onto the floor and spend the entire night on the floor, waiting for his father to come look in on him the next day from the apartment downstairs.

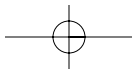
A-Jie's fingers were weak and curled. They also shook when he moved them, making it impossible for him to hold chopsticks. His ever strict father would silently hold a bowl and feed him one mouthful at a time. It was difficult to swallow too—sometimes the soup would come spurting out of his nose—and it took all his strength to cope with every bite of rice he took. Twisting his throat and tongue, he struggled to swallow, tears came streaming down afterwards.

The father fed the son for more than a year, during which A-Jie really began to look down as he fell into deep depression. His father was afraid that he was searching for death. After A-Jie had slashed his wrists, his father had bars installed on the balcony as an extra precaution.

“Only thirty years old and I've been sentenced to life,” said A-Jie. He almost had a complete breakdown. Everything he had been looking forward to ended up as a life in a depressing dark cell. His body which had once been able to withstand altitudes of ten thousand meters could not even take one step down a flight of stairs. His air force academy classmates were already flying in the blue skies piloting Mirage 2000 fighter jets. “And I'm here puffing and crawling on the floor.”

When he lost his sight at the first bout, his confidence did not take a deep dive, thinking nothing could get worse. The second time he had an attack, it was so furious that his body was virtually impris-





oned, robbing him of his soul.

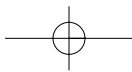
Multiple Sclerosis may attack lightly or relentlessly, sometimes causing pain in certain nerves, and sometimes the body endlessly shakes or feels hot all over. It's as a MS patient says: "It creeps up on you slowly, and quietly steals a part of your life each time."

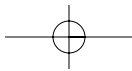
MS either nibbles at you or takes a big chunk out of you, with the after effects gradually accumulating. Can a MS patient's condition be improved? To what extent can the effects be reversed? Or to what extent can the conditions worsen? The symptoms and attacks of MS patients are all different; sometimes their condition improves, and sometimes it deteriorates rapidly.

A-Jie wanted to die, and then again was unwilling to. No matter what, death did not seem all that distant. He had already lost nine kilograms, had trouble urinating, and showed a slower pulse. The disheartening dark frightened him to the bone every time the lights were turned off at night. He listened in fear for approaching metallic clinking sounds, always expecting the two bailiffs of the underworld, one with a bull's head and the other a horse's, to come and take him away. This was more frightening than seeing a body or a coffin out in the field while serving in the military.

"If a true man gets his teeth knocked out, he should swallow them with blood without whining." Suffering and afraid, A-Jie was unwilling to speak of how miserable he was and bottled everything up. Since his mother had gone to Japan to escape heavy debt and remarried there, the only thing he wanted before his condition worsened was to travel to Japan, and see his mother one last time.

Wei-wei worked as a salesclerk in a department store and saw A-Jie on weekends. She would never forget the time after he lost his sight, when he got on the wrong bus with his cane and it took him





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forever to finally give her a birthday gift. Wei-wei was very caring and affectionate, and helped A-Jie run all sorts of errands. She encouraged him by saying, “There are people whose lives are even worse off than yours. You're not like ALS(Lou Gehrig's Disease) patients who can't move at all.”

Wei-wei was A-Jie's heroine on this trip to Japan, helping him to walk and becoming his escort.

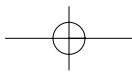
His mother had no prior knowledge of his illness. The meeting was a shock to her. After he arrived in Japan, his mother was absolutely heartbroken upon seeing his condition and thought of everything she could do to seek treatment for him. Although it was still to no avail, the mother's incessant tears filled the gap between A-Jie and his father and brothers, and also cured the loneliness he suffered after becoming ill.

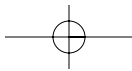
Family Bonds Strengthened in the Dark

A-Jie's father took three wives and built three families. Perhaps due to this complex environment he grew up in, A-Jie did not have close family ties. He and his brothers did not joke around or talk very much, and they rarely supported for each other. Despite having been ill for several years, his family was still unaware of his current condition and even suspected he had consumed fake liquor or had a stroke. In the beginning they even accused him of being lazy and feigning his illness.

A-Jie's father was unforgiving of A-Jie's mother for running away and leaving her three children to be raised by a single parent. In addition to A-Jie, his older brother had a serious form of diabetes and his younger brother had a bad leg from a car accident.

“People say-” A-Jie's father reluctantly began speaking. “If a





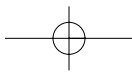
hen takes care of her chicks, their feathers are shiny and healthy. If a rooster takes care of them, their feathers become spotted and tangled...moreover I'm old..."

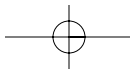
He had just finished cleaning the house and was tired, standing in the doorway downstairs enjoying a breeze. The elderly man peered toward the end of the alley at dusk. He had taken care of his three sons all these years and had been through a lot emotionally. Although he did not normally show concern, he had always cared. He blamed A-Jie's illness on his wife because she had slapped A-Jie years ago and hurt his eyes. A-Jie did not agree with his father on this, however, and became very angry. He blindly swung a punch at his father with a weak body but still managed to injure the father's ribs.

The cold atmosphere of A-Jie's home made him think that families worldwide were more or less the same. Everyone had to take care of themselves, and this was the reason and mindset he had in making his own fortune, leaving his needy younger brother behind. However, after A-Jie himself fell flat on his face and needed help, his attitude slowly began to change during the two dark years of suffering .

"I've never been fed by my father in my entire life. So it's actually a very new experience for me." A-Jie spoke in a relaxed manner, but forced his smiles and let out some sobs. Every day at noon, his father bought a ready lunch box for him, and cooked in the kitchen during evenings for his three sons.

"Rain or shine, Dad always went to buy lunch for me. I never even thought about why it was the same thing every day, I was just grateful." A-Jie gradually changed after becoming paralyzed. "During the Mid-Autumn Festival, my older brother carried me to





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and from the car when we went to Swallow Lake in Xindian for a barbecue. He had his own physical difficulty, but he managed to carry me up hills on his back. It was very touching.”

Before losing his sight, A-Jie had always thought that others never did enough. Then he became blind and paralyzed, unable to stand, sit, or run his trading company. Now all he could do was lie in bed, he suddenly “saw” everything that others were doing. “Because my eyes of mind are open now.”

Living in a dark room with only the faintest of sunlight, makes people cherish that light ever the more.

A Change of Heart

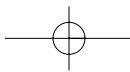
Having lain in bed for two years waiting for the sun to rise and set, as well as another terrible and hopeless cycle to begin, A-Jie finally began to have a change of heart. His old values system came down, allowing him to discover a whole new inner-life. He still possessed his original tendency for ambition, and so retained what was most precious to him.

A-Jie began to ask himself, “Is this it? Is this how terrible it is? What can I do for myself?!” He remembered Qi-gong, the martial arts breathing exercise he had previously learned. Besides breathing, there were no other exercises he could do.

Qi-gong emphasizes the power of the mind. A-Jie imagined a bright sun slowly rising within the body, and then slowly moving towards his dysfunctional legs. The gentle sunlight was relaxing to the mind. Energy naturally began to flow unobstructed.

A-Jie expanded his imagination—sitting across from himself, asking and answering questions.

“A one in one hundred thousand chance of getting this disease,



why me?”

“If not me, then who would I want to get it?”

“No matter who gets it next, it certainly won't be me again. So I have nothing to lose now.”

The reasoning gradually led him out of a two-year darkness and helped him build a citadel for the mind. The road to changing one's heart was a heavy task, and it meant moving one stone at a time. Taking even one small step can be exhausting.

“A-Jie, A-Jie,” he said to himself, “Your legs are practically useless now. If your arms aren't strong enough, you'll be unable to stand up on your own. So strengthen your arms and upper-body every day!”

From then on, he exercised his upper-body and became built. His once flat chest was shapely and his formerly curled fingers were much more flexible. He was increasingly energetic, seeing himself as if he were playing a chess match with not just any ordinary person, but with the Creator. “The more hardships He wants to give me, the better a life I want to live.”

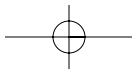
“A-Jie, A-Jie. You've learned that life is like the ocean. If there were no coral reefs, big beautiful waves would be impossible.”

“A-Jie, A-Jie. Your mother is in Japan far away, crying every day. If possible, she would suffer this disease in your stead. No one can take your place, no one! You must accept this hard, cruel fact.”

“A-Jie, A-Jie. The Creator has shut so many doors on you, but another will be opened for you!”

Accumulating Wealth

A-Jie's physical condition was ruined, but he still had a very clever mind. As his physical condition deteriorated, he realized he



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should do everything he could in business to accumulate wealth. He had already acquired some capital before becoming ill and invested in the stock market. He conducted transactions based on all the information he could gather by listening. Plus, he received money from his older brother and a monthly subsidy from government for severely physically impaired persons. “That's enough. I can't spend it all. People can actually lead simple lives.”

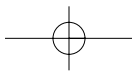
Although in a troubled state, A-Jie was luckier than many. Besides possessing a natural talent for finance management and a close friend who would look for overseas tips, more importantly he had a top-notch psychiatrist.

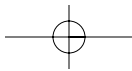
This beautiful young woman came to visit A-Jie every week. A-Jie half-jokingly asked her, “Why not be a full-time girlfriend, I'll pay you a monthly salary, come on...” After trying to persuade her on several occasions, A-Jie finally obtained the most important foundation stone for rebuilding his spirit.

In May of 1999, twenty-seven-year-old Wei-wei switched jobs, becoming A-Jie's “super secretary.”

They had known each other for not even a year when A-Jie began to get sick. Wei-wei was concerned about the pain he was in, and worried he might never be able to recover. She had never stopped loving him over the years, and they are now closer than ever. She brings him lunch at noon, cleans up after dinner before she leaves. Weekends are off. At work, Wei-wei checks the mail, performs errands at the bank, goes to the hospital to pick up meds, and cleans up. She doesn't think she is of much help, but A-Jie genuinely looks up to her for doing them. Even folding one article of clothing is the greatest of challenges for him.

A-Jie slowly brought in the first five million NT dollars of his





life. He insisted on rewarding Wei-wei for all her hard work by raising her monthly salary from NT\$18,000 to NT\$40,000. She could now give some money to her family and relieve them of financial worries.

Lighting the Flame in Our Hearts

Paying money to her was not about business; it was a responsibility and a way of showing gratitude.

The flame in his heart had been relit, and A-Jie's relationship with Wei-wei is what had accomplished this. It was Wei-wei who allowed him to understand that although disease was gloomy, life still had a chance. The future of his health seemed so distant, but he still did not give up on a dream—the dream of a happy family, with a wife and children.

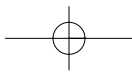
Dreams can fall apart, so people hold on to them even tighter.

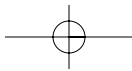
Wei-wei always inserts a straw into drinks and loosens the caps on bottles. If A-Jie gets up at night for a drink, he won't have to spend so much time using his weak hands.

When A-Jie is constipated, Wei-wei has to put on her gloves. “I grit my teeth and just do it. It's only the body of the person,” she laughed. “It's kind of fun to dig it out little by little.”

The caring Wei-wei not only attends to life's necessities, but also went to a fortuneteller on behalf of A-Jie. Spells were written on pieces of paper and burnt, after which the ashes were mixed in water and ingested by A-Jie. By doing so, the misfortune within him can be driven out. A-Jie gladly accepts this, saying: “She wants me to be at peace. This is not superstition; it is healthy for the mind.”

Wei-wei watches cartoons and animation like a child. When she sees a part that moves her, she describes it to A-Jie while crying. But





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when A-Jie acts strong, Wei-wei can still see through to his weak side, and teases him: “OK, stop holding it in, now...”

When A-Jie is feeling down, Wei-wei wants him to be more optimistic, saying: “Many people in this world are loved by no one.” Wei-wei promised him that as long as he breathes, she will come everyday and do everything she can for him. When he passes away, she will cast his ashes into the sea.

Without any fear in her gentle, lucid eyes, she said, “Since I've come across this challenge in my life, there is no escape and nothing else to do but overcome it.” She has known A-Jie for ten years and has always taken care of him. He was not only a lover, but a family. The depth of her feelings made her unwilling to let go of the idea: “If any member of my family contracts a serious illness, I would take care of them the best I could, wouldn't I?”

Transforming a Dark Cell into a Garden

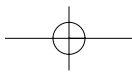
This love was the primary reason which gave A-Jie the strength to live on.

This courage changed A-Jie's beliefs, and led him onto a different path in life.

“Business is really fun. Making money is even more fun. But living only to make money—now that's too narrow a view on life, and a waste. What I'm running now is not a business, but my life.”

These words could not be spoken by someone prior to becoming ill. A-Jie had tried many different jobs and kept himself extremely busy. Only now he realizes that Heaven did not mean for him to run a CRT business, or a canned food business, but manage a life full of ordeals.

This is very abstract, inner, even far-fetched ideals. But A-Jie



knows himself very well. After being reborn, A-Jie slowly began to realize everyone has to face some kind of suffering in their lives. The two bailiffs of underworld may take him away any moment. Since he literally drags himself along everyday, he needs much more courage than others.

He must bear the burden.

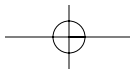
The quick and easy route of suicide has already been taken off his list of options, and now all he cares about is living a meaningful life.

He must endeavor to transform this “prison cell” of his into a garden, so that flowers may bloom within his heart. He commits himself to his relationship with Wei-wei and maintains a love that is envied by others. He works hard to live a normal life, and hopes in the near future he can have children like any other man.

“Love is too beautiful. I won't give it up.”

A-Jie takes life head on and relies as much as he can on himself. He wants to live a life full of light and joy, giving it his all as many others do. He observes that caring for others is a source of strength in life. He not only draws strength from friends and family, but also from his primary physician Dr. Yip Ping-keung. Although A-Jie could not see Dr. Yip, he always remembered the doctor's warmth and optimism when the patient was patted on the shoulder. This made A-Jie steadily rise out of depression, suppressing negative feelings by positive thoughts, and sowing the seeds with which to confront illness.

“The best medicine for us MS patients aren't inhibitors,” A-Jie began preaching like a missionary, spreading the words about what he had found to other patients. “It's CARING FOR OTHERS.”



Giving It Your All

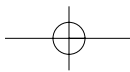
Living well on your own is no simple task. A-Jie has Wei-wei, but what about other patients? A-Jie compiled lots of information on other MS patients with the assistance of close friends. He took the initiative by contacting other patients to hold encouraging talks and provide support for one another. He hoped to form a “Patients Against Disease Association” so people could share and exchange information and not be confined by hardship. Even the effectiveness of laxatives is precious information learned from painful experience; these kinds of discussions could help patients save time and energy.

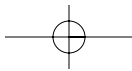
When he could see, A-Jie used the phrase “giving it your all” at a whim. Now he wants to translate his words into action.

“Life is certainly hard, but the question is how does one make it easier?”

The power of one is weak, so in cooperation with fellow patients Shu-hua and Jin-hua, the three of them began working on establishing a Taiwan Multiple Sclerosis Association.

Shu-hua was very passionate. There were two occasions when she suffered severe MS flare-ups, one of which caused difficulty in breathing. This made her feel “close to death” in her mind. Later on while recovering at National Taiwan University Hospital, she became responsible for contacting medical staff and social workers. Jin-hua had been diagnosed with MS the longest, but he was in best condition of them all. He had excellent computer skills, and became responsible for contacts and documents. A-Jie, who was severely visually impaired, took charge of allocating work to everyone and making reminders. He later started using his tongue to stick stamps to envelopes, sending out notices that a ceremony would be held to





mark the establishment of the Taiwan MS Association.

In April of 2004, the first Taiwan Multiple Sclerosis Association was established with the help and passion of many. Patients and their families sat together sharing all their hardships and fears, and also hoped that someone would be willing to claim the one million US dollars being offered by the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America to conduct research on the development of new MS treatments.

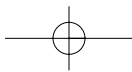
On his big brother's back, A-Jie was carried down the steep flight of stairs in his apartment building to the opening ceremony of the Taiwan MS Association. He sat in his wheelchair, handsome and confident, wearing a white shirt and vest which he had asked Weiwei to pick out of the closet. Being blind did not mean A-Jie had lost his fashion sense, nor did he forget how well-spoken he was.

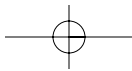
“After going through a period of readjustment, I now make calls to fellow patients everyday so we can encourage one another. I still hope that one day we can stand up again,” A-Jie said very calmly in his small meeting. With perfect enunciation, he said: “I hope that none of you will ever reach my stage, but if you do, don't be afraid. The most important thing is to keep your body and mind sound, and respond to the kindness of your caregiver. We do not have the right to feel sadness nor despair. I am finding a reason to live, and hope all of you can too. Together we can write a book together, titled *A Hundred Reasons to Live...*”

Giving an impressive speech in his unwavering voice, A-Jie dispersed the dreary haze that had once been hovering over the crowd.

There was a roar of applause in praise of this young man from everyone.

After the gathering, A-Jie had even higher aspirations, hoping





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that under the concerted efforts of everyone a Taiwan MS Foundation could be established. This foundation could be used to build a care center and fund biotechnology research. Although it was inconvenient for A-Jie to participate in collecting and editing information for other patients, he still was able to talk with them on the phone:

“Hey, I'm in worse condition than you are and living life as best I can. You have to hold on. When we get better, we'll go have fun in Australia, alright?”

“I know things are hard now, but Heaven has left you a path to travel on, you have to look for it with a positive attitude. You can't simply be mired in depression...being able to speak with you is one of my reasons for living.”

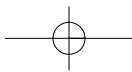
The Brave Iron Trio

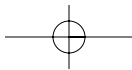
“I feel bad for A-Jie,” Shu-hua once said in a laughing voice.

“You feel bad for him?” I was surprised. These words were being said of A-Jie? But if he had heard what she was going to say, A-Jie would have laughed too.

“Because I use him to remind patients how good their situation is compared to A-Jie's. Every time I meet the kind of patient that's been sick for some years and is always depressed and frustrated, I refer them to A-Jie. And do you know something? It works! So many patients who have talked with him say they get a lot of comfort and encouragement. By learning what has happened to him, they learn that their situation isn't all that bad,” Shu-hua said.

The nickname “A-Jie” was thought up by Shu-hua in an article she wrote, drawing on the “Jie” in the Chinese saying “Ying Xiong Hao Jie”, which means “a hero with unusual courage and ability.” His real name is Song Jian-yi, but later adopted A-Jie as





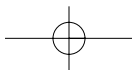
his nickname and often uses it when introducing himself.

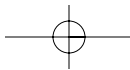
Shu-hua first began showing symptoms of MS at nineteen, and up to the writing of this book it had already been thirteen years. Because she suffered nerve damage, her upper-body was in pain all day and it affected her breathing. She worked hard during the day and would lay down right after she got home. Although her body was damaged on the inside, she was grateful that her appearance was intact. Shu-hua did not see herself as being “persuasive,” so she asked A-Jie to kindly be a counselor for patients.

MS taught Shu-hua care and show warmth. She knew what being sick meant. When her friends got ill, she understood what they needed. When she fell ill, a number of friends would come to the hospital and arrange a schedule to care for her. She was grateful for having these friends with their unending love. Shu-hua also thought highly of her own experiences. “I was chosen by God,” she said. “God needed someone qualified enough to learn this lesson, right?”

Jin-hua was the same age, and thought highly of his own unique life experiences as well. He worked diligently all the way until the time came to leave his position. Coworkers helped fight for layoff benefits and raise money. “They let me see the most beautiful part of humanity.” He has received help from others, and has returned in kind. If another patient has a problem, he is completely willing to help the best he can.

It had been a long sixteen years of illness, and Jin-hua tried to dilute the pain through laughter. But there were tears in the midst of that laughter, and this was translated into a novel he had been writing—an activity that served as a search for his own soul. Sitting in front of his computer that was left on twenty-four hours a day, he started a new life. “It is not for us to decide whether our bodies





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begin to deteriorate. But my spirits are totally under my control.”

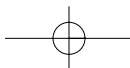
No wonder A-Jie firmly believes in their Iron Trio and their life-long friendship.

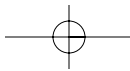
Illness had sent them spiraling into the fires of hell, but their spirits worked hard so they could crawl to heaven's gates.

There is an American model named Lucy who fell off the runway and into a wheelchair. She had been diagnosed with MS for more than ten years, but she enjoyed much stronger psychological support than MS patients in Taiwan. After learning the diagnosis, the family doctor embraced her, let her wail out all her sorrow. Her doctor later arranged counseling sessions for her. After changing gradually over several years, Lucy became the director of treatment in a MS Association branch.

In *Watersheds*¹ by Tom Koch, Lucy mentions how she became responsible for encouraging patients and giving them hope, discuss with them a range of possibilities as to what might happen, and talking about the bright side of things. At the same time, she also needed to talk with patients about confronting their fears and sadness. Through undertaking these tasks, Lucy says, she reconstructed her self-esteem. She says she is much more mature than she once was, and she is still serving as a model. The only difference is she is no longer a model on the runway, but a model for physically impaired persons.

Emotional support is crucial in handling the immense psychological pain when someone becomes so sick. In Taiwan, however, after A-Jie got sick, he had no access to such counseling. It was two years of torture before he finally began to follow in Lucy's footsteps. By giving it his all A-Jie had grown and matured, creating a sense of





achievement.

This group of MS patients came together and combined forces, allowing them to realize that they were not on their own.

Creating a New Miracle

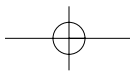
A-Jie had been struck hard and fell far after becoming sick. But he said, “From now on I’m going to be as spectacular as a great waterfall!” He was not making fun; he was showing confidence. His experience is certainly the most “outstanding” among all his fellow MS patients, so he often appears in the media. He likes participating in interviews and encourages other patients getting out of their dark corners. “I can’t give society much. If people can get my wisdom of life and love without my suffering, it’s a good thing.”

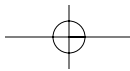
On the night of Chinese Lovers’ Day on the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, the love between Wei-wei and A-Jie was broadcasted on the TV news. Among those crying audience was someone who would become another strong reason for A-Jie to keep on living.

“Relax your feet—good—curl your toes—one, two, three, four...”

One Saturday at A-Jie’s home, Mr. Chien Wen-jen, a physical therapist of Cathay General Hospital, recited these movements while holding A-Jie up. A-Jie’s toes were pulled back, held for a moment, and then the movements were repeated. Mr. Chien said, “If you can’t move your feet in an upward motion, your toes will scrape against the ground when walking.” A-Jie then sat up to exercise his muscles and commenced practicing squatting and standing as a preparation to learning how to walk...

This was one of countless weekends.



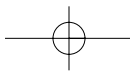


Mr. Chien learned the story of A-Jie from TV on the eve of Chinese Lovers Day. He also professionally assessed that A-Jie had the potential for rehabilitation. The next day he had a meeting with A-Jie, where afterwards they met regularly every weekend. He came to teach A-Jie a lesson in physical therapy and bring infinite hope. Not even typhoons could prevent Mr. Chien from getting to A-Jie's. "I'm only contributing a little. I hope he'll be able to walk downstairs and out the door by next year on Chinese Lover's Day," Mr. Chien said.

In the past A-Jie had undergone physical therapy, but for physically or mentally impaired persons, it was no easy task getting to the hospital. Taiwan's National Health Insurance did not cover home visits, and the few places in Taiwan that provided it were only for patients of stroke. A-Jie did not have much experience with such treatment, but had a strong will, so Mr. Chien set up a schedule. These exercises only took ten minutes a day as Mr. Chien planned, but A-Jie did them for two hours a day. Dripping in sweat, he said, "That feels great!"

He worked hard on the exercises because he "could not allow society's love go to waste." After three months he began exercising even harder, because he had found that "both legs were firm and had strength. Something's different!" He also told himself there was no record of any MS patient that had successfully recovered, so he wanted to create the first miracle.

A-Jie's home was becoming a popular destination for fellow patients on weekends. Mr. Chien also accepted an invitation from The Taiwan Foundation for Rare Disorders to extend his help into the treatment of patients with Muscular Dystrophy. Being the President of the Taipei Society of Physical Therapy, Mr. Chien



issued announcements notifying members that more volunteers were needed.

The seeds of good began to grow outwards one by one.

So many people showed their gratitude that A-Jie was overwhelmed. Over an afternoon of mussels, A-Jie was at a loss for words.

That weekend, Mr. Chien drove all the way over to Danshui in Taipei County “on the way” to A-Jie's. He brought a bag full of fried mussels to A-Jie's, the scent of which spread throughout his apartment in Muzha, an area in Taipei City quite a drive away from Danshui. A-Jie was taken aback by the warmth of this gesture and the scent of mussels. How was this possible? He was deeply moved, unable to eat them.

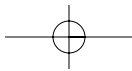
“I just mentioned once that I missed this famous delicacy of Danshui. . . and I, well, wasn't even a relative of his,” A-Jie recalled. When remembering that moment, he began sobbing, “Shouldn't...shouldn't I be grateful that this illness has brought me so much love?”

“That's the way life is. Sometimes you just have cravings for certain things.” Mr. Chien said smiling.

A-Jie was moved for receiving so much respect. The most valuable thing in life was interaction with others, and he had learned a lesson. He wanted to emulate this, and hoped he would be able to establish a foundation and a “Halfway Home for Disabled Adults” before he was forty.

Love with Confidence and Courage

It had only been half a year since treatment began with Mr. Chien, and Chinese Lover's Day had not yet come. Supporting him-



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self on Mr. Chien's shoulders, A-Jie used all his energy to walk step by step down three flights of stairs and stepped outside. "The air out here is great," he said. The second time he went down, he relied on Mr. Chien even less and it took less time. At his nephew's wedding, A-Jie personally handed the groom the traditional cash gift in a red envelope.

Walking outside changed the world for him. The auspicious airs of the wedding were swirling around A-Jie. When could he be the groom himself? He didn't know, no matter how much he thought about it. His mind was in his control, but his body was in Heaven's.

Wei-wei was troubled, and he didn't know what to do.

Pressure from her mother was mounting: "What are your plans for the future? Are you going to go on like this?"

"Yes, just like this," she thought. "For the rest of my life." Wei-wei did not say anything, but the answer echoed in her mind. She was unable to look her mother in the eye and talk about her true feelings. The mother and daughter were engaged in a cold war for quite some time.

A-Jie tried to speak with Wei-wei's mother.

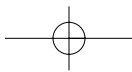
Her mother said, "Wei-wei should get a job, meet people, do something good for society."

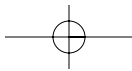
"Isn't her helping me helping society?" A-Jie answered.

No consensus was reached, and they ended their talk for the moment.

A mother cannot bear her daughter to suffer, and A-Jie could not love with confidence.

Many patients sound the drums of retreat very early in their search for a spouse. They want to get married, but they are unable to enter social circles and find opportunities to meet people due to their





illness. In addition to that, there is the worry that they will bring ruin upon the other person's life. Hence they are trapped between the hope of love and what holds them back.

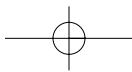
A beautiful girl with muscular dystrophy said, “In men's eyes I've seen the genuine pursuit of love, and at the same time, unwillingness to bear responsibility.”

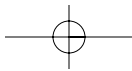
The mother of a sick child said, “If I were Wei-wei, I would have disappeared without a trace a long time ago.”

Even if severe illness is not a sin, it is still a stifling burden to bear for most people. Those lucky enough to be loved are very few. After Lucy the model got sick, she had a number of operations. After a long time she realized that the reason for her marrying her boyfriend was not mere luck. It was neither her being sick that made him stay, nor was it to satisfy his “need to feel wanted.” She knew that if their places were switched, she would be willing to maintain a long-term commitment with her sick husband, willing to selflessly love and care for him. They depended on and cared for one another of their own will, not out of necessity. This is why she married him.

A-Jie was truly happy that Wei-wei was willing to care for him. He would not dare demand anything; rather he felt guilty towards Wei-wei's family. He never set hopes too high, maintaining a down-to-earth attitude and working hard to live a secure life. His application for government housing would soon be granted, a place he liked very much which had a great view from the living room window. Although unable to see, he still looked forward to Wei-wei living in happiness and comfort.

Wei-wei did not sway from worldly pressures. She said, “He still attracts me. He's a young man with ideals and goals. But he doesn't live only to make money, he works to live life.”





A-Jie spoke to me on the phone once, saying “I’m not bragging when I say Wei-wei is not someone to be swayed by others, and this proves she passed my test, unlike my ex-girlfriends...”

“Ha-ha, A-Jie,” I started laughing. “Wei-wei isn’t by your side now, is she?”

“No, she isn’t.”

“No wonder I heard her say that she often had gripes against you, you shithead.”

The next day, A-Jie called again. He said, “I asked Wei-wei, and she thinks I’m right. I could pass on at any time. She must be willing to see and face everything I am going through. It’s a very big test for us.”

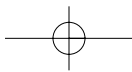
A-Jie, you live life to the fullest. What harm is there in bullshit-ing a bit? It proves that you have not given into fear.

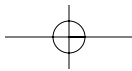
“You’ll always be able to get up with me around!”

It was a cold winter in early 2001. Wei-wei and I went to a coffee shop. We left A-Jie’s place and walked onto the bridge and I could see the stars in the long winding Jingmei Brook. In the distance Wei-wei could see a curve in the river embankment where their “love park” lay— she and A-Jie used to walk their dog there. But she did not reminisce about those days and spoke of what happened today.

At noon, A-Jie lost his balance and fell onto the floor. “I can’t get up.”

Wei-wei shook her head. She thought for a moment, and used Mr. Chien’s physical therapy position to straighten A-Jie’s legs. She moved behind A-Jie, bent over, put her arms around his body under his arms, and used her wrists to press on A-Jie’s kneecaps. Applying





pressure gradually stood him up.

Surprised, A-Jie said, “You're even tougher than I am!”

“You'll always be able to get up with me around!” exclaimed Wei-wei.

“I thought we'd end up crying on the floor together.”

“I won't cry for this,” Wei-wei retorted. “Crying from torment and crying from being moved are two different things.”

The bridge Wei-wei and I were on shook because of strong wind.

Looking over at her, I saw how sweet a face she had and how exquisite and compelling her voice was. Another unforgettable image floated to the surface of my mind:

A-Jie grabbed onto the door with his left hand while Wei-wei held strongly on to his right, forming the center of physical and emotional support between them. They depended on one another every-day, slowly making their way forwards together...

The heavens echoed far away in the night-

“You'll always be able to get up with me around!”

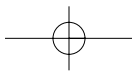
In mid-April, tough guy A-Jie shed tears.

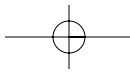
On this day, he leaned on no one's shoulder, relying entirely on his own strength to walk up and down the stairs.

He was overwhelmed with joy! He told Mr. Chien, “We're making history.” We must hold on to life all the way; it's a fact that never changes! His voice was a mixture of one who was proud and one had been through hard times: “Amid despair, I chose to give myself a choice. Later on, I crawled out from the valley's bottom.”

At this moment existed eternal truth, no matter what new changes there were in body or love.

At this moment, he ascended to the peak of his soul.





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Notes:

1. Koch, Tom.

Watersheds: Stories of Crisis and Renewal in Our Everyday Lives

Key Porter Books, 1994

