

# My Mum Chan Lai Kau 我母親陳麗球

By Michael Tse

We all have a mother. Our mothers care for us and love us. They carry us for nine months (though some of us can be earlier or even later) during pregnancy and this is very hard and uncomfortable for them to do. But giving birth is even harder. My Mum always said, "When a woman gives birth she is only a paper width from death 女人生孩子是跟閻羅王隔張紙." It is true - in the past - before technology had developed many ladies and babies died during birth. Nothing that we can do can pay back for this sacrifice that our mothers make for us. That is why Chinese say, "A parents care is as deep as the sea 父母恩情深似海."



My Mum passed away on the 13 of June 2011. She was involved in a traffic accident when a bus hit her while she was crossing the street. After she was struck, she fell and was bleeding, but she was conscious and was helped up by passers by and she said her shoulder and elbow hurt. As they were about to rush her to hospital she asked a policemen to call her daughter. So they rang my sister Michelle who said it felt unreal. Michelle contacted the rest of the family and they all rushed to the hospital.

At the hospital, because my Mum was conscious everyone thought it was not too serious. My niece Siu Yong, lives with my Mum and she is a nurse. Most of the time, my Mum looked after her and she said now it was her turn to look after my Mum. However, by the time they arrived at the hospital my Mum had fallen unconscious. Just before doing so, she told the doctors that she felt sick and her head was very painful. It was then they realised that her head had been seriously hurt, but unfortunately that hospital did not have a brain scanner. So she was rushed to another hospital for a scan.

My sister, together with my niece and sister-in-law, Mei, also rushed to the other hospital. Unfortunately, no one was able to talk to my Mum as she was already unconscious. When everyone arrived at the hospital, the doctors told them that the scan showed a lot of blood on the brain and her head was starting to swell, but they were unable to operate as it was too close to the

major artery and that could cause even more problems. So all they could do was put a small tube in to help release the pressure in her head and hoped that the negative blood would slowly release. Once my family heard this they were all shocked and scared. My sister Michelle called and told me the news. I knew it was very serious but Michelle kept me informed every few hours. I decided to go back to Hong Kong and so my son, Anthony and I bought tickets to fly back to Hong Kong.

The doctors told my family that although she was unconscious, her heart was strong and she was still breathing so all they could do was wait. However, they said even if she woke up she might be paralysed or even by in a vegetative state as her brain was quite seriously damaged. Just after the accident, the blood had not spread and this was why she was conscious and this is why the policemen and the bus driver treated it as a minor road traffic accident.

Anthony and I had a difficult journey to Hong Kong. Before we took off the weather was bad so our flight was delayed and this meant we could not make our connecting flight in Paris and they told us that there was no room for us on the next flight. I told the airline it was an emergency and they managed to put on the next Cathay Pacific flight on the next afternoon. When we arrived in Paris it was almost midnight and Paris airport is closed at midnight. This made it hard to find the hotel which had been arranged for us and not many people spoke English. We finally got to the hotel at 1.30 am and we did not sleep well.

All the time, apart from on the plane, I kept my phone on. My family and I sent text messages to each other to keep each other informed even though the time difference between Hong Kong and Europe was seven hours.

When Anthony and I finally arrived in Hong Kong, my luggage was missing.



Luckily it arrived next evening. My sister picked us up at the airport and we rushed to the hospital. When we got there I found my Mum connected to so many tubes and wires and she was heavily medicated. She looked like she was sleeping and with her

hair shaved, she looked like a nun. Her face was red and she needed a machine to keep her breathing. Normally the hospital rules only allow a once a day visit, in the evenings, but because they knew we had come from overseas they allowed me and my family to see her. It felt as though she wanted to see Anthony and I and was holding on for us.

That was on the 11th of June. After that I went to see her twice a day and used my Qi to try and help her wake up. I massaged her hands, legs and head and occasionally I thought I saw her eyelid flutter though it was very slight. It was very hard to see my mum like this because she was always very active, strong and healthy. Every morning she would go out to practise Taijiquan with her friends and have breakfast afterwards. She would also go to the Buddhist temple a lot, do her errands or visit her grandchildren and children. She also loved to play Mahjong with her friends to keep her brain active. Once a week she also joined a traditional Cantonese opera group to sing songs together.

So, it was very hard to accept on the 13th of June after the doctors had done all their tests, that they pronounced my Mum dead. Although the machines were keeping her heart beating and maintaining her breathing there was no reactions in her brain. The nurse explained all the tests they had done and the scan of her brain and showed no reactions. They put small grains of sand in her eye and some cold water in her ear but there was no reaction. While she told us my sister and two my sisters-in-law started to cry. Then tears started to fall from my eyes. We had to listen to all the test she had gone through and even those that someone in a vegetative state would react to she did not respond. At this time the doctors certified that she had died.

We were all sad and very upset. In the beginning when I had heard the bad news at home I did not cry. However, when I was doing meditation for her in front of Guan Yin 觀音– the Goddess of Mercy – I looked up saw one of the red envelopes of lucky money that my mum had prepared for my last birthday and Chinese New Year that I had laid in front of her statue. Then I could not control myself and tears started streaming from my eyes as I knew I would never have her red envelopes again. On the red envelope she had written some lucky words for me as she did for all her children and grand children.

On the first night after visiting my Mum I went back to her home and stayed the night there with Anthony and my niece. However, I could not sleep as everywhere were Mum's things:- her clothes, table, her chair in front of her TV where she watched her Korean soap operas. My Mum loved watching these because they were about family and relationships, though they can be a little bit old fashioned for some younger people. I could not sleep and a couple of times I cried as it was so hard to believe my mum was gone, really gone.

We all came to her bedside for the last time and we all cried. The grand children, apart from Siu Yong who found it very hard, were too young to really understand. Even though all those machines were keeping her breathing her body would not be in a good state. In the end we all had to face the fact that Mum had gone and we had to let go.

My sister is a very talented lady, she is best of our whole family. She is a senior lecturer and is almost in charge of her entire college. Her boss trusts her a lot and values her talent and leadership as this kind of talented and

trustable person is not easy to find. Michelle is in charge of all the funeral arrangements and is also dealing with the accident case and in every position she knows many people. Sometimes I worry about her working so hard but she has a very good husband who supports her one hundred percent.

When I was lying on my Mum's bed on that first night I could not understand how my mum's life could have ended like it did. I wanted to ask her, "Mum, what's going on?" She had only just had her 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday and apart from Anthony and I and two of her grandchildren who are living in Singapore, she had had all her children and grandchildren there. Anthony and I were in England but luckily I visited her every year and I had already been back to see her in February and March and I had spent time with her like having morning tea or visiting my father's grave.

I also had just talked with her the day before her accident happened. The day before her accident I had just arrived back from New York seminars and I was looking forward to having time to relax before the summer courses in August. I had only been home about an hour when my Mum called me to say she had received the birthday card and money I had sent to her and she sounded very happy. She was starting to say goodbye and was going to hang up but I kept talking to her about all my brothers and sisters to find out how they were doing. So we talked a little longer than usual.

When I got back to Hong Kong, my sister Michelle told me she was supposed to go on holiday and had booked a trip with her husband and some friends to go to Africa. Because of the accident she cancelled the trip. Usually she is very busy and does not have time off, so she said Mum had chosen the time when she was free to help. It was the same for myself as I had just finished all my teaching trips.

On the morning of the accident, my mum had gone to practise her exercises with my brother Lawrence, who was teaching a group of pensioners, including my Mum. Usually he is very busy and afterwards has to leave when everyone has gone, but this time when Mum asked him to come for tea and he went. In the afternoon, she went to see my other brother, Keung. Usually at this time of the day, he is not there when she visits, only his maid and his son and daughter. My Mum loved to visit her grandchildren and this time he was in so my Mum got to see all of them and was very happy.

She also has a maid who lives with her and who usually would go with her wherever she went as she was getting older. She would help Mum carry the shopping. Even though Mum still could walk very fast and tried to do everything herself, she had fallen a couple of times in the past year or so. Also her knee had a problem and her eyesight and hearing had started deteriorating a little and so knowing her maid was with her meant we all did not worry so much. But energy wise, Mum was still strong and so it was a big shock for her to go this way.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of June all the family came to her birthday including my brother Lawrence's wife and two daughters, who usually do not come to family dinners as they live farther away. It was usually just my brother who came for dinner when my sister arranged the monthly family dinner with my mum. This year at my mum's birthday party, all the children gave my Mum a red envelope which is traditional lucky money 利事. Then my Mum said to my second brother, Kei, "Here is your birthday envelope. I don't know if I will have time to give it to you later." My brother's birthday is later on in June. Later, my brother told us, "Mum always looked after us. This time it seemed mum knew what would happen to her as she gave me lucky birthday envelopes before my birthday. Mum also took care of the kids, bringing them snacks and looking after them when all of us were busy. Now she is gone and she did not need us to look after her for even one day."

Friends of my Mum came to visit her in hospital and told us, "Your Mum said she would not be able to receive her 6000 HK dollars." (The Hong Kong government has too much money and is in the process of giving a rebate back to the citizens.) Her friends were so surprised that her words had come true.

When I was in bed at night I tried to think of Mum as I wanted to know what had happened and why she had chosen this way to go. Every time I saw her face, she was happy and smiling. She looked younger - like she did when she was in her 30's - and there was no sign of any suffering. When I was able to talk to my Buddhist Sifu, Jing Ru 淨如師傅 who is in Hawaii, she said that was a good sign because she knew she was going and she had seen everybody. That meant her duty and her journey had come to an end and she was going to a better place. My Mum worshipped Guan Yin and so she will go to a Buddhist place. But she always believed in reincarnation and so she might return back as a human and have a better life.

Mum always helped people. If she knew someone was not well, she would bring medicine to them but this medicine was all based on her experience, not the doctor's diagnosis. Sometimes she would bring some herbal medicine patches for the joints, some oil for headaches or some herbal soup she had made for them. She would also volunteer for work in the community and she had a good social life. If someone needed to buy something but could not go, she would go to the market to buy it for them. She also liked to give tips to the waiters because she knew they worked hard and did not have a very high wage. If anybody needed clothes repairing, she would do it for them as when she was young she worked in a knitting factory and she taught many people how to use a sewing machine.

My Mum had five children, four sons and one daughter, and she also has ten grandchildren. Everyone one of us is healthy, has a job and can look after ourselves. My sister is the best and although she is the youngest, she has the role of the elder and always thinks about the family first. She said that if Mum had survived she would have found a house with an upstairs and downstairs

and Mum would live downstairs and she would live upstairs and then she could look after her for the rest of her life. There is a Chinese saying, "The tree wants to stop moving, but the wind is still blowing. The children want to look after the parents but they are not there 樹欲靜而風不息, 子欲養而親不在."

When the last of the machines and tubes were taken off my Mum's body I touched her. Her legs and head were cold, but the Dantian and the middle body were still warm. According to Buddhism, when we are going, the spirit is leaving the body and where the body is warm is where the spirit is coming out. If the spirit comes from the Baihui point百會穴 that is high level and they will go to the best place, such as heaven. They might become an immortal or even a Posaat 菩薩 (like a saint). If the spirit leaves from the middle body (where our internal organs reside), it means that they will be human again. If the warm part is the legs it means they will go under and that is not a good place.



Whether we believe it or not is up to us but I believe my Mum is in a better place and she planned her time to go so we do not need to look after her. About the accident, this might be karma she had to pay back or another right reason. When I understood why she chose to go this time, I

felt much better. My Mum was full of character and had lots of energy and talked a lot. I know I got my energy and love of movement from her. She never played any games of tricks and was simple and honest. I miss her a lot.

At the end I would like to say thank you to every student and friend who has sent me and my family cards, texts and phone calls. I appreciate them so much. Good deeds bring good results 善有善報 and if anyone would like to do a good deed and dedicate to my mum, then just think of her name, Chan Lai Kau 陳麗球, and dedicate to her. Buddhism and Chinese culture believe this will help her on her journey to a better place.