

給孫輩兒女每月一信 10/31/2004

親愛的孫輩兒女們：

秋去冬來、人們又要準備過年的事了。我這月是一多事之月。10/20[3] 住所淹了水。在給兒女信中已有說明。不愉快的事這裡不再多談。我們今年六月有一家人團聚。隨後我寫了一篇中文文章(天年篇)記述其事。上月這裡我參加已兩年的英文寫作會通過三個月的暑假、上月又開始。練習寫短篇故事、我已將那天年篇以英文寫出。將它錄在下面供你們參考。希望讀後提意見。

Dear Grandchildren:

Autumn is over, winter is looming. People are preparing for the year end seasonal activities. This month (October) is an eventful month to me. On the 10/20[3] day and night our condominium suffered a devastating flooding, on which, so misery to us and having mentioned in the monthly letter to your seniors , I don't want to repeat now. The thing I want mention to you is a writing I just finished in the Writers' Roundtable resumed in the past September. It is an article which I translated from the one in Chinese I had accomplished after our mid yearly family folks reunion held in the past June. Read it as follows:

TWILIGHT IS BEAUTIFUL. MAY IT LAST LONGER!

Story Scene

It was 11:20 AM I drove home from the resumed writer's roundtable meeting on September the 8th 2004 held at Joselyn Senior Citizen Center of Alhambra City. I parked the car, closed the garage door and hurried upstairs to see my sick wife who was lying on a reclined chair facing the unopened TV on the living room wooden deck.

"Are you OK? Minshan." I asked. She said nothing, but smiled faintly, when intercom buzzing, told us the meals- on- wheels were at the gate.

I went outside striding along the pavement beside the mini gardens of the five units' condominium, noticing some recent changes. Unit A changed owners, B now empty, owner left temporarily. The couple in eighties of C just moved to a one- flat- smaller apartment for easier living, and the couple in nineties of E had moved to a nursery last year. Minshan and I not much younger in D were still there, but uneasily.

Entering the house with the meals, Minshan suggested: "Honey, now is not a rush hour in the bank, I need two checks deposited, and get some cash for paying the maid." I walked to the nearby bank doing what she said.

Back to home, I found she already had moved to the kitchen dining table using her walker and grab bars. We started eating and chatting. She asked: "How is your class after the three months' vacation? What is your writing assignment today? ". I replied: "All members were fine except Anna, Ellie, Lisete and another couple ladies missing yet. "This time Jane changed the assignment style a bit. The first one is to write the beginning scene of a story with more to continue later on. I am just pondering about how to start. She advised "You might use the scene of our present life. It should not be difficult write a story." I thanked her for her help and added: " The topic could be: Twilight is beautiful, May it last longer!"

Problem Looming

Minshan (1926-) and I (1921-) married 56 years ago. Most the time, she had been taking care of the five children, family chores and me letting the children strive ahead and me concentrate in making a living. She had been showing strength in her physical and mental endurance, overshadowing more than ten years after our retirement in 1985. On April 20, 2002 Minshan suddenly fell sick. From that time on, our family had changes. Now I must take care of her and the chores but none the children since they are grown and independent. Minshan having passed the worst of six times hospitalized

now appears stable. We all feel more comfortable but still worry about the problems ahead, not only because of mommy's illness, but also daddy's aging. Nobody talked openly for fear of hurting and embarrassing.

The worry of poor Minshan was revealed about three months ago in her answering a HMO Health Plan Questionnaire with my help reading as: "In the past year, have you had two weeks or more during which you felt sad, blue or depressed or when you lost interest or pleasure in the things you usually cared about or enjoyed?" On the "yes" or "no", Minshan bluntly told me mark "Yes".

Worries of the children are conceivable. They are scattered thousands of miles away, busy in their own careers and families, none of them are prepared for long time self- sustained parents, especially on the present chronic sickness and the following deaths.

As the patriarch of the family, I have been envisioning the above problem for several years and secretly taking actions. I see the whole problem largely in three phases: 1. Our inevitable aging, sickness and deaths. 2.

Proper settlement on our remaining properties. 3. Proper settlement of our remaining of memoir values such as writings, documents, photos, hand scripts etc For that purpose, I had worked out a WILL with Minshan several years ago and created a homepage on my computer to accommodate most of my writings, and tried to sort the books, clothing and stuff aiming to do a part of the above items 2 and 3 but leaving the item 1 intact. Now I consider it the right time to plan seriously covering all phases in detail and bring them on table to discuss.

We learned President Reagan passed away June third this summer at an age of 93. He was praised by the world not only because of his achievements but also his well planning the things about his passing so orderly and precisely. With this example and inspiration, I drafted a plan covering the details

in the above phases 1, 2 and 3 in three presumed cases: father dies first, mother dies first, and parents all passed. I first showed the draft to Minshan and then emailed to the five children asking them review and comment saying to be discussed in our prearranged reunion in the coming late June. All the above were carried out on time very smoothly and fruitfully to be depicted as follows.

Happy Ending

I drafted the plan and named it "eternity", in a style in combination of traditional and contemporary, conventional and my own specialties in six portions: 1. Basic considerations. 2. Legal procedures, 3. Things included in the will, 4. Things not included in will, 5. Draft wording of obituary and eulogy. After delivery, I assumed children receive it with surprise and thoughtfulness. They surely had discussed on the phone but not leaked us a word.

As the time neared for to the prearranged reunion date in late June, we booked three double bed rooms in a hotel near our dwelling to assure them comfortable staying instead of squeezing in our condominium. Beginning June 20, they came one by one happily but not mentioning the eternity received. In the daytime they all came to our living place chatting, diligently helping doing chores and shopping.

On the third day, Alice, our eldest daughter, looking at mom and me first, raised a point saying, " In your plan you say you are optional either bury or cremation. I think you better decide between these two now to avoid hesitation and discussion at that time." Minshan replied understandingly: "I want cremation". Kids mostly followed to ask; "How to dispose the ash then?" One suggested "Sow in the soil of my planted back yard". Mom added: "Toss to the sea." Without being asked, I said: "Me too, but hold the latter doing together." John (second son) inserted: "Should the ashes be mixed up?"

I said: "Good idea, doing that way." Then the discussions entered the related ritual things. Mom said with my previous consent: "We won't need any ritual; just let us head to the cremation yard check in right away. After that, you would need to publish an obituary in the local newspaper and send a few letters to the remote relatives for acknowledgement in each case. The things are that simple, easy and cause no trouble to others."

We did not spend much time discussing the legacy and inheritance left over. I only mentioned in principle that, in our family, we always treat children equal. There should be no exception in our legacy and inheritance distribution, knowing that most families give sons larger portion because they are family name carriers. Having a pause, I said: "In fact the wealth of Alice is several times more than the sum of the rest of our entire family.

..." Alice interrupted "I give up my share." I admired Alice and continued, "Legacy and inheritance would be in four portions of equal amount...."

After a few more discussions, the meeting ended joyfully. The tension was over. Folks chatted vivaciously about possible out comings. I heard one of the sayings: "... Though Mommy is sick and Daddy looks husky, but he is five years older. Chances are... but nobody knows." I mocked the General Mc Author's famous saying: "Old parents never die, but quietly pass to another world". Doug and Diana seated near me stood up to massage my shoulders and back, showing unconscious gestures of unusual thanks and loving. We went to a studio to have a nice group picture taken to hallmark our unusual reunion.

Best wishes. Grandpa