

My name is Clara Fang, many of you know me as XinXin, and I am the daughter of Dr. Nengyu Fang and Sister Fengdi Chen. We joined the church when I was 9 years old and new immigrants. My father is the reason we joined this church because he attended a chinese musical program at the washington temple, probably around the winter holidays, and he being someone who loves books, and free books, got a copy of the Book of Mormon and left his name and address. Of course the missionaries came knocking on our door. My parents are both scientists and they said the teachings of Joseph Smith reminded them of the cultural revolution, blind obedience to doctrine, and they didn't like it. But the people here wore them down with love and belonging, and they gave in and finally got baptized.

He was born during the Japanese invasion of Shanghai in 1938. His mother was fleeing while giving birth to him, so she did not remember his birthday. Can you imagine giving birth while fleeing war? I mean, there was no comfortable bed, running hot water, or drugs. His family were part of the bourgeoisie in China, a literary and governing elite with connections to important political figures, British colonists, intellectuals, and the like. As a child, he was exceptionally smart. He grew up learning English, excelled at school, and wanted to become a physician.

When he was a young man, Chairman Mao put forward The Great Leap Forward, a very ill devised program for national progress that led to one of the worst famines in the history of the world between 1958 and 1962. Approximately 30-55 million people died. He used to tell me that they would just nap all day to conserve energy, and once when he was angry with his family about something, he ate all the food that was in the cupboard.

At 21, he gave some suggestions to the communist party as part of a feedback campaign called "Let a hundred flowers bloom." He said that China should not follow the Soviet Union in everything and universities should teach English and western science and medicine. He already did not come from a background that was favored by communists, and for his "counter-revolutionary" suggestions he was denounced as a traitor, arrested and exiled to Xinjiang, where he spent 20 years in labor camp working out his sentence. But even there, he used his English and medical skills to help those around him.

He once told Sister Mary Folger, that when he was released from prison he said to his jailer "I forgive you." She was so moved by this, because what greater forgiveness could you have than for your jailer? She always saw him as Christ like after that.

The cultural revolution ended in 1976 and he returned to Shanghai in 1980 where he went back to university and earned a degree in medicine. He married my mom in 1974 and I was born in 1983, when he was 45 years old. My father was a doting dad. He used to tell me

- We almost aborted you! So glad we didn't.
- You were almost deported! Glad you weren't.

He used to take me to the zoo, or the market, carry me around on his shoulders, and buy me a box of crayons, the ones with 6 colors in them. I was so happy! My mother worked at the company, and my father stayed home more, so he watched me as well as the cousins who lived in our multigenerational household. I heard him several times talking with his patients, telling them about some prize I won in elementary school for my art or music or writing, even though he rarely ever praised me to my face.

As a political pariah, he knew that the future of his family was precarious in China, a future in which he could be apprehended for no reason, thrown into prison with no recourse, and his children denied opportunities for education or employment because of his political status. He attempted several times, without success, then finally, in 1988, he was accepted as a research assistant at Catholic University in Virginia. He was 51 years old.

As my father prepared for his exodus in the spring of 1989, the largest incidence of domestic civil disobedience in China unfolded. Students in Beijing and other major cities in China took to the streets to protest government corruption and demand democratic reform. They paraded a replica of the Statue of Liberty, chanting slogans about freedom and democracy, while locals cheered them on and gave them food. By June 4, a hundred thousand of them had congregated in Tiananmen Square in peaceful, nonviolent demonstration. That evening, Chinese military troops and tanks stormed into Tiananmen Square, brutally gunning down hundreds (or thousands, according to some accounts) of unarmed activists and residents. In the aftermath of the crackdown, hundreds of people were arrested, and many activists fled to the United States, Taiwan, and other countries, my father among them.

He arrived in Washington DC in November 1989 with only two suitcases and \$200 in his pocket. It was cold that first winter, and communication lines were scarce. He did not own a telephone and internet was not widely available. My mother and I received letters from him with photographs of him standing in the snow, a strange sight to our eyes.

Research assistants typically only stay a year or two, after which they'd have to be sponsored by an employer to remain, however, something extraordinary happened that year. On April 11, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed Executive Order 12711, permitting Chinese students and visiting scholars in the United States to stay until July 1, 1993 to escape political persecution. The following year, Congress passed the Chinese Student Protection Act, which allowed Chinese nationals who entered the United States from June 5, 1989 to April 11, 1990 to apply for permanent resident status. My father applied and became one of more than 54,000 Chinese nationals that became permanent residents because of this legislation. He then applied for my mother and me to join him. My mother came in 1991 and I joined them a year later in 1992.

During our early years in America my father worked as an acupuncturist by day and delivered for restaurants by night. My mother worked as a nanny and cleaned the acupuncture office. We lived in the basement of the clinic without heat or air conditioning; shared a bathroom with our neighbor, and shared our living room with my father's friend, who was also a political refugee. He later got a job as public health inspector in Washington DC and my mother worked as a

technician at Thales telecommunications company. They worked hard and eventually bought a house in Rockville. He held that job for more than 20 years.

He loved his job, even though he was mugged multiple times in DC. Once someone tried to snatch his laptop, and instead of surrendering it, he fought back, and was punched in the face. He loved going to different restaurants, inspecting them for safety, and getting lots of free takeout and napkins in the process. I was the happy recipient of all the fried chicken and roast duck he brought home. He worked until he was 83 years old, after Covid. When we asked him why doesn't he retire sooner, he would say, "what for? waiting to die?" He didn't want to drive anymore and couldn't keep up with all the technology. His employers begged him to retire, and when he wouldn't, they offered to pay him a bonus to retire.

My father had many interests during his life. He hated the communist party and was a champion of democracy and free speech. He wrote several op-eds and articles for Chinese newspapers in the US, criticizing the Chinese government, even though he knew that could get him into trouble in China. He was a gifted academic who learned English at a time when it was a dangerous thing to do. He was an avid gardener, and grew vegetables wherever he lived. He loved books, and was always bringing home books he got for free or cheap at the thrift store. His favorites were Romantic poets, Charles Dickens, Russian novels. He loved dictionaries and could not resist acquiring them. He was the only person I know who reads the dictionary for fun. Whenever he read a book he would underline words he didn't know, and write their Chinese translations in the margins. Later in his life he started learning Spanish. He also collected lots of computer and programming books, even though he never learned anything from them.

He loved foraging and thrifting. In the spring time, he would pick bamboo shoots from parks and along highways. He'd fill his trunk with them and we would peel the layers off the shoots, cut them into little pieces and stuff our freezers so full that we had bamboo from spring into winter. He loved buying things at thrift stores. My mom and I secretly would get rid of them sometimes. He would forget that he had bought them, my mom and I would donate them to the thriftstore, and sometimes he bought them back from the thriftstore after we had donated them! So we learned to donate to thrift stores that were far away.

He was always helping out his friends. They sought him out for his English translation, with legal and immigration matters, and for health advice and treatment. He brought them home to live with us if they were unhoused. My mom complained that he was always helping out random people Zhangshanlishi, while not helping out at home.

Like all Chinese parents, he wanted me to become a doctor. Like all American teenagers, I wanted the exact opposite, to become an artist. I compromised by earning 3 masters degrees and a PhD in environmental studies, so I got to be the next Dr. Fang after all. He was very proud.

Late in life he became very difficult to deal with. He hoarded all the things he collected in the house that he lived in for 30 years. This summer we sold that house for ⅔ what it would have been worth. The buyer was shocked to find how packed it was. He said it took 4 guys working 7 days and 7 jumbo sized dumpers to clear it out. He was very angry that we threw away all his stuff.

He died overnight on Tuesday morning. Probably because we threw away all his stuff and sold his house. While his death was sudden and unexpected, it was at least peaceful and quick.

His life reminds us that no matter how bad things get, we can get through it, and create a better life for ourselves. He achieved extraordinary things despite the biggest obstacles—war, famine, revolution, incarceration, immigration at age 51! His resilience and determination enabled us to live a better life in America. As a kid, I would sometimes complain if I didn't like my lunch, had too much homework, or a boy broke my heart, my parents would say, "what kind of trouble could you possibly have? We lived through the cultural revolution!" To this day I can't talk about my problems with them. So I don't recommend talking to your kids like that.

His death reminds us that life is a precious gift, and we need to make the most of it. So whatever dreams you have, pursue it. Don't put it off until later. Treasure the people you love, because you don't have them forever. My father did not like to spend money or celebrate holidays. So much of his life was spent just trying to survive that I don't think he had the mental wherewithal to actually enjoy himself very much. But we should. We can make our homes beautiful places for respite and celebration. We can show everyone that we care and treat people with kindness. We don't have to work all the time and we can have compassion for ourselves. In Christianity, we talk a lot about sin, but sometimes sin is just being human. We also talk a lot about grace, which is what Jesus Christ is about. If we can just cash in on all of the grace, because in trying to do better we will always make mistakes. It's more important to celebrate the holidays, enjoy friends and family, and appreciate all of life's gifts. Our health and our fortune are never guaranteed and could be lost in an instant. We could try to live each day as if it were our last.