

## **MY FAMILY by George Huang**

I will start off by mentioning my father: He was a war hero. He was county governor in the Fukien Province during World War II. As the highest-ranking local authority, he oversaw both the civil workers and the militia. Father actually had the responsibility of defending the county against the invading Japanese. He had pictures of him riding on a horseback in full military uniform with soldiers surrounding him. He also showed us the pictures of dead bodies piled up on a roadside after the Japanese airplanes bombed the city. He also told us about his power to sentence and execute criminals. But he said that he very seldom exercised that power. Up to these days, I just could not imagine that father could have ordered someone killed. I always remember him to be tolerant, willing to listen and give people the benefit of doubt. He was a kind man.

My mother, 8 year younger than father, also grew up in a socially turbulent era. She was born right after the founding of the Republic of China after the Ching Dynasty was overthrown. She apparently grew up in a relatively wealthy family. She could afford to travel to the coastal town of Siamen and the nearby famed resort island, Goo Lan Yue. She told me about her vacationing and enjoying swimming in the waters off the resort island. Later on, I found out much to my amazement mother was a very good swimmer. In fact she was a better swimmer than any of her children. She must have been a thoroughly modern, fun loving young girl. Mother told me that she met father by accident. He bumped into her in the atrium of her house where she was washing handkerchiefs. Father apparently fell in love with her at the first sight. She must have been a beautiful and delicate girl who captivated him ever since. Mother also told me that father persistent and finally got her to accept his courtship. She gave up her college to marry him.

Mother told me that she came from a business family in Fuchow City and learned about business and managing people from her parents. Mother had good sense of people and was business savvy. I would attribute her successful upbringing of her offspring to her ability to manage and to teach her children on how to deal with people. She also told me that father didn't have a lot of money as he originally boasted before they got married. She had to make ends meet with limited resources. But even a thrifty person herself, she was generous toward friends and relatives. She frequently helped others that were less fortunate. But whenever she sent money to the poor relatives or friends, she managed to get us to chip in with her. I guess that was how she taught us to be enterprising.

There are five of us – two boys and three girls. It must have been a difficult time raising a family that size during the war. Father told us that he sometimes had to go the countryside to lead militia to fight the advancing Japanese. Being left alone at home with the children, mother must have terrified times. Not only she had to hold the family together without the man in the house but also to watch out for the hoodlums rampaging through the town. Father told me that one night the guerrillas were outside the town and through a loud-speaker calling father to surrender. It must have been a very frightening night for them. I even remember one treacherous run that mother took us in the middle of the night to get out of town because the Japanese were coming. I heard mother ordering the carriage drivers to hurry up.

After the war, in the mid 1940s, father got a job in Taiwan and moved us there. I would say that those were the golden years for us. In Taiwan, father was first the mayor of Tong Gon City in southern Taiwan. We had great time together. The government mansion that we lived in was right by the water. I used to climb up the fence and watched the boats in the sea. But father was convinced by his friends to start a business in Taipei. Unfortunately, I think, he was too optimistic and too trusting. He dealt with bad business partners such as my great uncle who had a wild idea of shipping sugar from Taiwan to Fukien to make a fortune during the last days of Nationalists' retreat from Mainland China. Of course the sugar shipment was seized by the Communists. Great uncle lost his money and brought down my father and a few other partners too. Actually more disaster stuck because father was guaranteeing some of the loans that the great uncle made. Because of the sugar business bust, we ended up renting out our house to have some income. We actually moved into great uncle's house together with other two creditors. Ironically, that was a fun time for me as a child living in a large Japanese style house with so many kids. I remember having great time with many of the kids playing games and drawing pictures. Through out all this adversity, I did not hear any quarrels or loud dispute between father and the "evil uncle", as my mother would put it.

Father must have persevered in his other endeavors and made good fortune somewhere because he bought a nice home in downtown Taipei on Wu-Chun Street and we left the great uncle behind. The house was in the center of Taipei and was two story and large. Father had a pedicab and hired a "driver". I remember going to school with my sister and father in that pedicab through the busy streets in Taipei. My sister was having fun making bell ringing load by stepping hard on the bell-button on the floor of the pedicab, of course with my father's mild disapproval. I must say that this was the best time my father and mother were having. They used to go out at night to the theaters and dined out after the show. As the youngest child and not having to do a lot of homework in the elementary school, I was often allowed to go out with them in the evening to the envy of my siblings. The house had a second floor where father and mother's bedroom was. Again as the youngest child, I could stay in their bedroom and played, sometimes watching them chit chatting and laughing out load.

I remember vividly how mother always held my hand walking through the busy streets in Taipei. And if I tripped she would quickly pulled me up as she was alert and nimble. Occasionally, I would play tricks with her by pretending to fall down. She would quickly pull me up. Realizing she was tricked, she would give me a scornful look. Of course, in my childish mind, I got a kick out of it. Then, years later, especially in the last years of her life, with her failing health she moved about in public by hinging on to my arm when we were together. And the playful moments in Taipei would flash back to me. At one time I had an urge to tell mother that she could count on me forever. And if she played that trick on me, I would not have minded.

Several years later, father was getting restless and tried to start another business - this time in southern Taiwan. But things became quite difficult for father, he tried his hands in recycling glass bottles, running a photo studio, both failed. Then decease struck him. He had appendicitis. He was operated and recuperating in a hospital in the city of Tainan. First time I noticed a crack in his invincibility was when I went to the hospital to see him. He was weak and resting in bed. He grabbed my hand and said something philosophical like life was unpredictable and he was already 40. He struck me being beat by the surgery and fear for his

children whom might not be cared for. Up to that moment, father was always sure of himself and could move mountains. He was the guardian for all of us.

Father recovered and found a good job at the Taiwan Salt Works. He headed the personnel department and frequently traveled to Taipei for business. I was going to junior high school. He frequently brought back books from large Taipei bookstores for us to read. That was the time when I read the great Chinese classics like The Three Kingdoms, Shuay Ho Story, Monkey's Journey to the West, etc. Father himself also read those novels. He would recite to us the stories from Liao Zai Ze Yee. It was a book of ghost stories. Often time there were the romance between a young man and a pretty female ghost or the revenge of a ghost against his or her murderer. Compared to modern day movies like Dracula or Ghost Story, I preferred Liao Zai Ze Yee anytime because father's recitals were so real and so much scarier.

During the second year in junior high school, I fell ill to a spinal injury and was in bed for several months to recover from the surgery. It was a hot summer evening and I needed a mosquito net to cover my bed. The net was rectangular with the four corners hung from one hanger on ceiling and other three on the wall. That job usually belonged to grandmother or my nanny. But one night, father volunteered for the job. He was new to the task and could not hang the net for several trials. I told him where the hangers were but he just kept missing. I couldn't help laughing. Again and again, he missed and I laughed. At the end, he finally figured it out and hung the net over my bed. All of a sudden it dawned on me that father was actually pretending to make mistakes. After the lights were turned off, I was so moved and had tears in my eyes. Father was trying to clown around to make me laugh!

Years later father retired and moved to California. Mom and dad spent their last twenty some years living with me or near me in the Bay Area. As a grown man, I appreciated more and more of what they did. To me, he was a war hero, an entrepreneur, and a leader. And she was the head of the household and the mother taking care of all little things for us. Just before they moved to California, father picked up Taoism and was appointed a high-ranking "priest" after several years of hard work. He recorded over one hundred tapes of his Taoist chanting and singing. He copied by hand several scrolls of Tao Qing (the Taoism Bible). Just like anything else, he tried his very best. When we met, he often told me about his devotion to Taoism. He also told me that what I didn't know had already happened in history. He would mention all the anecdotal episodes that he read in the history books. Father became philosophical and more sympathetic to my business challenges. He seemed to have very good memory of Chinese history. I drew that conclusion because he did not have a lot of collection of books anymore in those years in California.

Perhaps, part of the book of The Death of a Sales Man describes father very well. Having done so much in China during the War, he reminisced frequently what he accomplished as a young mayor or governor fighting not only the Japanese but also the emerging guerrillas coming down from the hills of Gian See. He persevered and survived, and eventually got promoted to higher positions. It became apparent to me that what he wanted the most was for his children to achieve high positions in their careers just like what he did in his career. He adhered to his old beliefs of working hard, leading by example and most of all striving for the best. He was always patient and tolerant to his children. He never raised voice with any one of us yet he could influence us effectively by his encouragement and showing of

displeasure for failure. All his five children grew up and each has a success story to tell. Unlike the character in *The Death of a Sales Man*, my father must have derived the greatest satisfaction and pride in his last days from his grown up children and their off springs.

My mother survived father's death. She bounced back and became even more enthusiastic about life, enjoyed socializing, occasional mar-jian and interestingly enough match making. She also developed an interest in ballroom dance. One day I danced with her and was totally surprised by how well she danced. Mother had immense curiosity in people and things that are business related. I remember her persistently asked about my software business and actually gave me some advice. She did not have profound statements on what life was all about but she demonstrated to us how to live a meaningful and productive life as a homebound wife and mother by dutifully raising five children, taking care of her husband and the elder in-laws. Behind her occasional stern manner was a tender loving mother and caring wife. Her persuasion and teaching on her children were like Spring rain falling gently on the ground. From the rain the plants grow. And from her nurture the children grew up strong. She worked very hard at it. At the end, life turned out nearly perfect for her.



**Baby George**



**Tainan 1<sup>st</sup> High School**



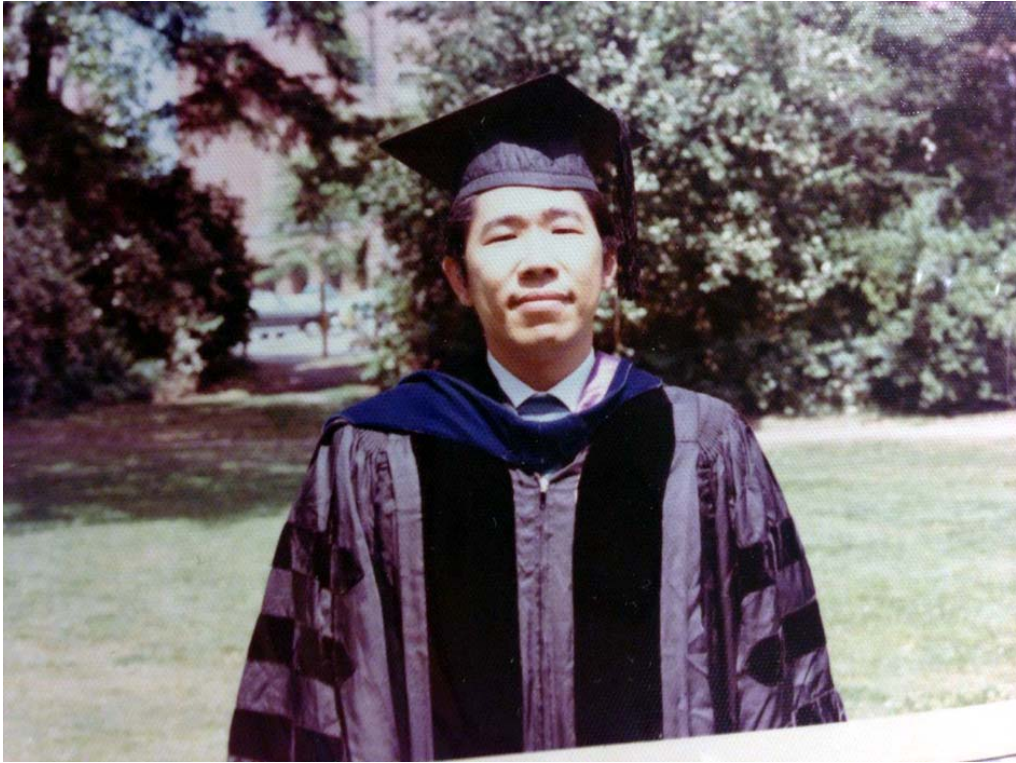
**1964 Graduation from NTU**



**Departing for the US**



**Wedding with James Liao as best man**



**PhD Earned**



**On top of Taishan, Shandong, China**



**St. Petersburg**