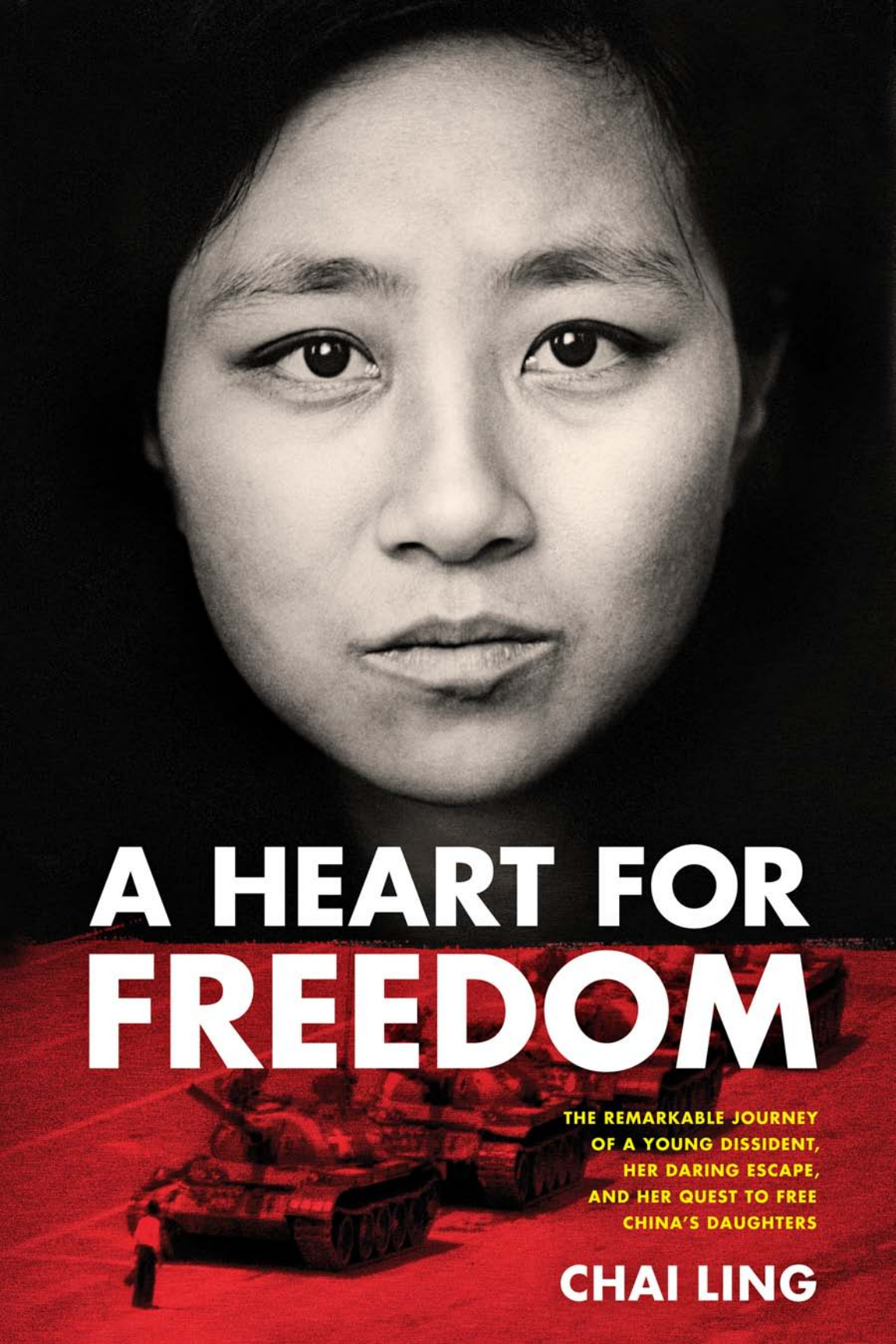
A HEART FOR
FREEDOM
THE REMARKABLE JOURNEY OF A YOUNG DISSIDENT, HER DARING ESCAPE, AND HER QUEST TO FREE CHINA'S DAUGHTERS
CHAI LING

PRAISE FOR *A HEART FOR FREEDOM*

As a foremost student leader of the Chinese democracy movement, Chai Ling gives us a deeply touching firsthand account of what really happened in China that eventually led to the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989. By preserving memories of this epoch-making event and its aftermath from oblivion, *A Heart for Freedom* not only makes an important contribution to history but also helps keep alive China's ever-increasing hope for freedom and democracy.

YU YING-SHIH

Professor emeritus, Princeton University, and recipient of the John W. Kluge Prize (2006), Library of Congress

Chai Ling is one of the most courageous women I know, and always has been—from her early days as a self-possessed student thrust suddenly onto the worldwide stage to her current role as a fierce defender of women and girls. Her conviction that every person should have a voice has informed her whole life and made her a powerful role model to *Glamour*'s 12 million readers and to women worldwide of every political persuasion. Quite honestly, she awes me!

CINDI LEIVE

Editor in chief, Glamour *magazine*

I am delighted that Chai Ling, who has promoted and sought freedom all of her life, has found the greatest freedom of all in Christ. And I pray for God's blessing on her in the coming years as she discovers new ways to serve and minister in the world in the power of the gospel.

TIM KELLER

Senior pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City, and author of The Reason for God

Chai Ling bravely fought for democracy in China but found something even more transformational—grace. This memoir is not just for people interested in a compelling first-person account of politics and history. It is for all of us seekers who search for true meaning and purpose while battling our private fears and regrets. It is about that liberating discovery when we learn that there is nothing we can do that will make God love us any more, and nothing we can do that will make God love us any less.

MICHEAL FLAHERTY
Cofounder and president of Walden Media

What was it like to be at the center of the Tiananmen democracy movement in Beijing in 1989? Chai Ling, who was the commander in chief of the students, tells the story in a gripping and moving way. She shares her insights into the student movement and the personal narrative of her dramatic escape from China and experience as an immigrant in the United States. If you want to read one book about China's student democracy movement and what happened to its activists, *A Heart for Freedom* will keep you completely engrossed.

DAVID AIKMAN
Former TIME *magazine Beijing bureau chief, eyewitness to the Tiananmen massacre, and author of* Jesus in Beijing

Chai Ling has a dramatic story to tell of God's transforming power—from radical dissident to radical Christ-follower, now changing China and the world in ways she never dreamed possible. Her book, *A Heart for Freedom*, will inspire you to pursue great things for a great God!

DR. BRYAN WILKERSON
Senior pastor, Grace Chapel, Lexington, Massachusetts

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THE REMARKABLE JOURNEY OF A YOUNG DISSIDENT,
HER DARING ESCAPE, AND HER QUEST
TO FREE CHINA'S DAUGHTERS

CHAI LING

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To all the people who courageously sacrificed and fought for
a freer China, including the Tiananmen generation.
May the day of eternal freedom come soon!

When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings.

PSALM 84:6, NLT

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PREFACE

As early as May 27, 1989, I felt the need to bear witness to the events unfolding in Tiananmen Square and to record my experience there for posterity. I've long felt there was a much deeper meaning and reason for what happened at Tiananmen, but for twenty-two years I had been unable to articulate it. In 1995 and early 1996, I wrote more than two hundred pages of an initial draft but could not finish it. I sensed there was a precious story and truth to be told, but for the past two decades, I could not capture the essence of it. It was like a free bird—I could hear it singing and feel its presence and heartbeat, but I could not quite grab hold of it. Like the sparkle of sunlight on a river, I could not capture it and put it down on paper. But for all these years, I have never given up my pursuit of this truth.

I searched in many places: in democracy work on Capitol Hill and at the UN; in a Princeton and Harvard education; in the fast-paced, high-pressure investment banking and consulting industries; in self-help books and leadership seminars; even in founding an Internet company and starting a foundation. But I couldn't find the answer that would quench my thirst.

Then, on December 4, 2009, my heart was profoundly changed and my eyes were opened to all the dramatic events of my life. For the first time, everything started to make sense. I now see that the thirst I had is the longing for freedom placed in our hearts by God. Only when I came

to know God could I truly begin to comprehend his unique purpose for my life. I've since been given renewed strength, healing, and insight to explain my perspective on China's past, the meaning of the Tiananmen movement, and God's future plan. I've come to realize this is not a book I could write on my own; rather, it's a book that could only be written *through* me.

By May 2011, I finally was able to write about the events of my life in their entirety. I used to feel hurt and betrayed by so many; now I've been healed from most of the pain, and God has given me the strength to finish the story.

Over the past twenty-two years, many reports have been written about Tiananmen Square, and no doubt most have mentioned my role there. I have not read them all, nor would I be able to even if I wanted. This book is *my* story, a story of youth, passion, sacrifice, and triumph in the search for freedom and justice against great evil. And it is a story of the ultimate truth that sets us free.

PRELUDE

"We're not going along with you this time!" my father said out of the blue. He looked especially frail and upset as he stood in the entryway of my home with his hand on the doorknob, ready to storm out. "Twenty years ago," he said sternly, "you were young and brave and full of hope. You were so lucky to survive. We are fortunate to have half our family intact. You know how much we miss your mom and Grandma. . . ."

He paused, and we became silent. In 1991, we had lost both my mother and my grandmother, and it was still painful enough that we didn't talk about it often.

After an awkward silence, Dad continued at a slower pace: "Things are different now. We are older. We are tired. We can't do this again. . . . And you—can you do this again? You are no longer young and naive; you are a wife and a mother now. Getting involved in the movement again, after all you went through—what kind of consequences will you bring to us as a family? What kind of grief will you bring to your children?"

This was my father, the most amazing dad, who had been a devoted and talented doctor in the Chinese army, and later the head of a hospital, but who had given up everything he had worked for his entire life to be with us in America. Now in his seventies, he had stood by me, his eldest daughter, in the midst of the most difficult period of our family's

life, with no resentment and no complaint. But this time he was putting his foot down.

"Why can't you be like your sister and your other friends and try to live a normal and common life?" Dad looked at me, shook his head, and walked out the door. A nice Sunday brunch ended abruptly.

All I had said was that, in a few days' time, I would be on a plane to Washington, DC, to celebrate with Fang Zheng, a fellow survivor of Tiananmen Square, who had lost his legs during the massacre and who was now going to be able to walk—and dance—for the first time on prosthetic legs he received after coming to the United States. It seemed my father was making a bigger deal of it than was necessary. Yet, at the same time, I knew all too well his concerns could be well founded.

"What do you think, Bob?" I turned to my husband, hoping for some perspective. "Should I still go to DC?" I knew the impact on him might be the same as it was on my dad. He had seen the consequences of my involvement in the Chinese democracy movement.

Bob, in the middle of watching a Sunday football game, shot back a quick reply. "Of course you should go," he said. "It's fun. It will be great." To my husband, a typical American, politics are as simple as a sporting event. You win or you lose, but you don't die.

The situation, of course, is much different in China. There, trying to live a common life can lead one to become a revolutionary or a wanted criminal. And even if one leaves the country, the persecution doesn't end. Recently, my dad was given a severe warning by some leaders from China: "If Chai Ling continues to join the movement, there will not be any good consequences for all of you," they said. "China is different now; we are stronger and more powerful. A lot of things could happen . . ."

What was left unsaid made a big impression on my dad, but it isn't something the average American can understand. Life in America is hectic and stressful, with concerns about money, bills, and a shortage of time. But the stakes are much higher in China, where you can lose your freedom or your life for merely trying to express yourself.

In the spring of 1989, the simple act of bringing water and bread to fellow students at Tiananmen Square led me to the top steps of the Monument to the People's Heroes—center stage in the student pro-

tests for government reform and greater freedom. Later, in the face of oncoming tanks and troops, I would have to make a choice between life and belief. Now, after all these years of sweat and tears to rebuild my life in America, could a simple trip to Washington, DC, lead my family and me into another Valley of Weeping?

But how could I not go? How could I give up what we stood for? What if this were the very work I was kept alive to finish?

On the morning of October 7, 2009, I woke up early, knowing this would be a big day. Just four months earlier, on June 4, we had marked the twentieth anniversary of China's Tiananmen movement and the Beijing Massacre; today we would celebrate a major victory in the life of one of the survivors.

Two decades had passed so quickly. In my mind, I was still the same young woman who had escaped from China, after months in hiding, as one of the "21 Most Wanted" student leaders at Tiananmen Square, not knowing if I would live or die. Now I live in the Cradle of Liberty—Boston, Massachusetts—the site of another historic massacre in the cause of freedom and democracy (though only five people died in Boston, compared to hundreds or thousands in Beijing).

Twenty years ago, I was a lonely immigrant—in exile—who barely spoke English. Now I am the mother of three young children, the wife of a loving American husband, and a successful business entrepreneur with a nice home—to many, perhaps, a poster child for freedom and the American Dream.

Even in my wildest dreams, I could not have imagined my life would turn out this way. What I have experienced is far beyond what any country girl from a fishing village in China could ever have expected. Often when I'm at an expensive country club or a fancy fund-raising event, I still feel a bit out of place, like I'm living in a fairy-tale world. Sometimes I wonder, *Who am I now? Is this my true destiny?*

I said good-bye to my husband and my girls and settled into the taxi that would take me to Logan Airport. The light of the morning sun dappled the colorful leaves of the majestic oaks that give our home the

feel of an old English estate. As we drove along the gleaming Charles River, which winds past the ivy-covered brick buildings of Harvard Business School, my alma mater, the morning turned into a glorious New England fall day. The air was fresh and crisp, the sky a sapphire blue.

Aboard the plane, as I squeezed into a middle seat between two large passengers, I reflected on the twenty-year anniversary of Tiananmen Square. An article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* had called it "The Great Forgetting."[1] Few students inside China today would recognize the iconic picture from 1989 of a lone young man standing in front of a line of tanks. And many middle-aged Chinese no longer talk about the reform movement. In a more prosperous China, they no longer are interested in discussing politics or think it is relevant to their busy lives of raising their families and getting on with their jobs. I was deeply saddened by this.

That's why the day's event was so special. While the rest of the world tried to forget Tiananmen, a few still chose to remember. That's why it was important for me to drop my daily duties to be with Fang Zheng, to celebrate and be a witness to his amazing triumph, and to thank the people who continued to do the right thing by offering love and support to the oppressed.

My dad's voice still rang in my ears. I wished I could tell him that I had to do the right thing, especially when the rest of the world remained silent. If I became afraid and caved in to the pressure, I would deny the very person I am.

Maybe Dad was just overreacting. Maybe I'm just imagining things.

My stomach started hurting again. How much I hated this kind of conflict! What would it be like to live like a common person, never having to confront or experience this kind of pain or mental anguish?

The steady noise and motion of the aircraft dulled my senses and lulled me to sleep.

I awoke to an awful sensation of suffocation, as if someone were choking me. I opened my mouth as wide as I could, but I could not breathe. My arms and legs seemed to be losing strength. If this is not what it's like to die, then I don't know what dying will be like. I tried to shout, but the noise of the plane drowned me out. The two giants on either side of me must surely have heard my cries, but for some rea-

son, they kept looking straight ahead—as if I were crazy and their best response was to pretend I wasn't there.

Finally, I tapped the arm of the person sitting to my left, closest to the aisle. "I can't breathe," I said. "Please get someone to help me."

A few minutes later, a flight attendant arrived and escorted me to the front of the cabin. She gave me a cup of water and a bag to breathe into, which helped a little. My face must have looked as pale as a sheet. A doctor traveling on the plane checked me and asked me a number of questions.

"You are having an attack," he said. "Are you anxious? Are you nervous?"

"I don't think so," I replied, a bit confused. I had never experienced this kind of debilitating emotion, even at the height of the Tiananmen crisis or throughout my underground escape.

"It seems you are suffering an anxiety attack," he said. "Have some more water. You should get better." He told me to call my physician when we landed, and he went back to his seat.

Anxiety attack? I couldn't believe it. I didn't know that what was happening in my subconscious could have the power to create such a powerful reaction in my body. On this day of joy and triumph, my past journey and my future destiny decisively collided.

Like Abraham going up to the mountain to offer his most beloved son, I felt as if I were climbing the mountain for a second time, to again face the anxiety of possibly losing everything most near and dear to my heart. The first time happened in the last hours at Tiananmen, as the tanks and soldiers converged on the Square. Then, we were young, passionate, and with a big dream to reform China. And though our dreams were crushed and my heart was broken, our lives were spared, like the life of Abraham's son. But now I had real children, beautiful and innocent children, who knew nothing about the cruelty of evil. How could I rejoin a battle that could not be won and in the process sacrifice my most precious loved ones? Who was I, a common individual, to take on a battle against an entire regime with enormous resources and networks, against the backdrop of a world that seemed to have forgotten—or at least was unaware of—the situation in China? I felt the wind being

sucked from my sails. I could not move forward, and I could not move back. I was stuck in an ocean of anxiety.

A year later, in June 2010, I caught the same flight from Boston to DC—this time to announce the beginning of a movement called All Girls Allowed, whose mission is to end China's one-child policy and stop the world's largest gendercide against women and girls, a massive crime against humanity that has taken more than four hundred million innocent lives. This new battle seems so much larger than Tiananmen, yet I no longer live in fear and conflict. My life is truly filled with peace, and I overflow with joy and laughter.

If someone had told me in 2009 that my panic attack would be the beginning of a beautiful chapter in my long, arduous—yet splendid—journey; or that shortly after my return to Boston, God would meet me and lead me to the summit of a tall mountain from which I could look down upon the torturous path of my life with new understanding, I would not have believed it. Nor, perhaps, would you. This book, which started out as a simple memoir for my American-born children to know their mother's history of coming to freedom, has become an audacious hope to record and reveal what might have been the mind of God all along—to free China and to free girls and women under oppression around the world. But for you to see and believe, we will have to start at the beginning of the journey. . . .

DAUGHTER OF CHINA

1

GROWING UP IN THE CITY OF SUNSHINE

I went to Beijing for the first time when I was seventeen—a young girl on the threshold of life. So much would happen during the short span of time between that ride, in 1983, and the one I would take *out* of Beijing in June 1989 that decades could well have passed since the morning I traveled through the Chinese countryside to begin my university studies.

On the bus from Rizhao, my father sat beside me in great spirits. He didn't say much, but every so often he let out a sigh to show me how happy he was that his firstborn child was on her way to Peking University—or Beida, as we fondly call our school—the most prestigious institute of higher learning in all of China. He was relieved, because he knew things could have turned out differently. For a father who valued Chinese tradition, I—his firstborn, but not a son—was once a big disappointment. Still, as a young girl determined to overcome her "gender deficiency," I had brought home the prize, which gave my father a profound sense of pride and contentment.

"Ling Ling," he said as we settled in for the seven-hour trip from

our village in Shandong Province, "you are leaving your home now. You know, I also was seventeen when I left home to join the army."

Like most Chinese names, my father's name, Chai Jingjin, which literally means "Going to Beijing," embodied a cherished family wish. My grandfather had fervently hoped his son would grow up, leave the countryside, and go to the capital city to find a better life in serving the emperor, perhaps as a scholar. Dad never got to seek his fortune in Beijing, but he did leave the countryside to pursue a career as an army doctor.

Now he and I were headed for Beijing on a crowded bus, which bucked and jolted along a winding road through the Eastern Mountains on its way from our seaside village to the vast interior of the Chinese heartland. A perilous abyss yawned below us on one side, and the sun seemed to scorch the sheer rock walls rising sharply above us on the other. Every so often, we'd pass a pitiful collection of little straw huts shaded by a lone tree. I saw rags set out to dry on the hot rocks and small children scampering about in open-slit shorts that exposed their tiny backsides as they shouted and chased their goats in a haze of dust. On a far mountain ridge, a man with a bare, dark-brown torso moved in and out of view as he toiled behind an ox and plow, swaying in perfect rhythm under the broiling sun.

Along the roadside, women and children would stop whatever they were doing and stand motionless, their mouths agape and faces blank, staring at the bus and its passengers as we drove past them into a distance they couldn't reach and a future they could not even imagine. I was deeply saddened by the sight of these people on the mountainside, trapped in the suffering landscape with no way to make life better and no hope for the future of their children.

It reminded me of the time when I was five years old and was left in the foster care of a peasant family while my parents were sent on a military mission. I lived with these people in their mud-brick hut, with its central platform that served as a place to eat meals, sit during the day, and sleep at night. I remember the smell of smoke coming into the room when the bed was warmed by burning hay on winter nights. Now I was leaving behind these villages filled with helpless poverty, illiteracy, and boredom, but my heart ached for them. I felt they were a part of

me—the earthy, hardy places where I came from and the roots that gave me the foundation and strength in my life.

"Bye, now," I said silently as my view of the people faded behind the bus. "I am going away to learn, but I will be back someday when I am older and stronger. I will help you, bring you hope, freedom, and more. Someday!"

The sight of those poor peasants reminded me of my dear grandma—and thinking of her made my heart ache even more. Grandma, who had come to live with us and who had raised me, was the stable parenting figure in my early years when Mom and Dad were constantly sent on military missions. Her face had many wrinkles, and her tiny body had withered with age, but hidden within her small frame was the heart of a hardworking, enduring, tireless woman. The veins that stood out like blue ropes on the backs of her hands were a testimony to her years of manual labor in the fields, in every season and right up to the last hour each time she gave birth. She had married Grandpa at a young age and gave birth to seven surviving children, often returning to the fields within days of delivery.

As with many traditional Chinese women, the years of hard labor and subsistence living left Grandma with a strong set of values and traditions. Because Grandpa had died of starvation during the three-year famine in the late 1950s, Grandma was extremely careful not to waste food. She never started a meal when we did, but would wait for us to finish and then eat our leftovers. She got up early every morning, at five o'clock when my parents did their calisthenics, and began to make breakfast, wash clothes, and straighten up the house. She often went tottering about on her bound feet to gather twigs and leaves for kindling. On bone-chilling winter mornings, we would see her form rising and falling in the gray mist; and when she returned with an armful of sticks, her silvery-gray hair, which normally was combed neatly and coiled up into a bun, was blown down all over her forehead. My dad, a young officer with great potential and always concerned with appearances, forbade Grandma to go out, lest one of his army comrades see her and wonder

why an officer of his rank had his mother out gathering sticks. But Grandma would say, "I'm no good anymore anyway. What's wrong with helping you save a little money on kindling so I'm not just freeloading all the time?"

When Dad still strictly forbade her, my siblings and I inherited Grandma's job. We quickly learned that she believed in Master Chan's saying: "If you don't work, you don't eat." Though Grandma was illiterate and uncultured, the virtue of hard work was deeply rooted in her life—and now in mine.

Hard times did not keep Grandma from having a big heart full of mercy and kindness to people and creatures in worse situations than hers. One time I bought a number of little chicks, and Grandma helped me raise them. One of the chicks was crippled and could not completely stand up. A neighbor suggested we make a nice chicken soup, but Grandma felt a special compassion for the poor chick and always gave her more food and care because of her illness. Later the chick grew into a hen and laid many eggs. Grandma always said that hen worked extra hard to thank her owners for showing mercy and kindness.

When I told Grandma I was going to Peking University, her ancient, wrinkled face lit up with joy. In that moment, all the years of toil and strife fell away, and she was transformed into a young girl again, radiant, with a glimpse of sparkle in her eyes. I couldn't remember ever seeing her so happy. She beamed and laughed and showed her missing teeth. All her long-buried memories rushed up, vivid and beautiful, and burst out in a flurry of words.

"In the old days," she began, "when a student passed the exam and made the emperor's list, the imperial palace sent a messenger by horseback to the village to deliver the news to the family. Can you imagine? The whole village came out to celebrate. They banged drums and performed dragon dances. That was a lot of fun, I can tell you. If the student happened to make the number one list, he won a chance to marry the emperor's daughter and live in a palace in Beijing. Sometimes he'd bring his bride back home to visit the village and see his parents. Then the whole road would be strewn with flowers and brightly colored paper, and soon a team of horses, palace guards, flags, carriages, and sedan

chairs—each one carried by eight people—would arrive. It was the greatest honor a son could possibly bring to his family."

Grandma went on and on, as if she had just returned from a voyage to another century—the century before 1911, when the last emperor in a series of dynasties was abolished. In Grandma's generation, those stories had been kept alive through folk music and plays, but my parents' generation and mine—those who grew up in the "new society"—never saw such a thing.

"That's why we named your father 'Going to Beijing,'" Grandma said. "It's too bad that when your father was growing up, China was in a different time. They didn't have those exams anymore, or that kind of fun. But now my granddaughter is going to Beijing!" She clapped her aged, weatherworn hands. "At last, somehow, that Chai family wish has come true. How wonderful is that?"

Usually when Grandma got going on all the good things she missed about the "old society," as the Communists called it, my dad would tell her to stop talking. He worried someone would overhear what she said and report that our family didn't like the "new society"—a crime that could lead to death or a life sentence in a forced labor camp. This time, though, I guess she touched a soft spot in Dad's heart. Instead of stopping her, he joined in with his own rhapsody.

"Today's exam is no less competitive than in the old days," he said. "It may even be harder. Only fifty spots for this university are permitted for our province, with millions of bright kids competing."

Dad and Grandma were grinning, and my mother beamed with joy as well. She could clearly recall the day she passed the exams and entered medical school. She remembered what joy she'd brought to her mother and what pride she'd given her family. I couldn't tell whether Grandma heard what my father had said, but this much was clear: The whole family was overjoyed that a family dream had finally come true after three generations. As it sank in, the realization that I was going to Beijing had a different meaning for everyone, but the whole family agreed that a bright future awaited me, and they acknowledged the luster and glory I had brought to the family. I loved the idea that I had done something to give my mother and grandmother such joy. What made me even happier

was the thought that, by leaving, I would get out from beneath my father's thumb.

I love my father, but I was intimidated by him when I was growing up. Our relationship became better when I started doing well in school, but less than a year before my acceptance at Beida, he and I got into a major conflict when I told him I didn't plan to join the Communist Youth League. I felt so hurt by his reaction that I did not speak to him for some time. I decided to skip a class in order to test for university. Surprisingly, he later went to talk to the school principal, who agreed to establish an accelerated program for a few students, and some of us went on to college.

My dad saw college as the next step on a set pathway to success within Chinese society. I saw it as the gateway to freedom and happiness. Though focused on different destinies, we agreed on one thing: Beida was the culmination of the fairy-tale dreams of three generations of Chais.