

## **The Adoption of Xiao Shu**

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The child's father walked with her to Cathwel office's ground floor.

She asked him: "This is our last chance to see our daughter, would you like to go up and see her?"

Not knowing what to do, he drew his hands out of his pocket, then put them back again and said: "No. You can go up alone."

So she went up alone to the office on the second floor, put her baby in her arms once more, and then signed the affidavit for adoption.

"No more baby; I have never given birth to her."

Years later, when she recalled that moment, her eyes still flooded with tears immediately. She said: "The moment I signed the affidavit for adoption, I told myself I had no more baby, just like I had never given birth to her." It took her only ten minutes to make a final decision, but it felt like it was a lifetime! She felt like she was doing something that would affect her whole life, a lifelong business. "Time seemed stop running. I forgot I was her mother who should always be around her, always thinking about her present situation and her future. At that moment, we could not afford to pay the medical expenses; about her future, how I wished she would be adopted by a loving couple."

She just could not stop her tears; she cleared her eyes and she went on saying: "I wondered the last time I had her in my arms whether I had fed her; I only remembered her rosy cheeks." In a lovely gesture, she put her hands on her own cheeks and finally she smiled: "I could see that Cathwel took very good care of my baby, my child had grown into such a cute baby."

She still remembers she was then accompanied by a Cathwel social worker Cecilia Chyn who comforted her: "Maybe one day both of you will meet again." But she silently told herself again: "No more baby; just like I had never given birth to her."

She quietly went out of the Cathwel office; the child's father was still waiting for her. He wanted to ask her something, but she was too weak to say a word. Since then, she became a lonely woman who felt guilty forever for surrendering her own daughter.

### **The adoption of Xiao Shu**

When Cathwel accepted the baby, Sr. Rosa, Mercedarian Missionaries of Berriz, gave her a simple, yet poetic name, "Xiao Shu." (It means "little tree.")

The premature Xiao Shu was under 24 weeks, weighting less than 600 grams. Her body was translucent, and her internal organs could indistinctly be seen through her skin. She was so small that she could even be placed in a pocket. Xiao Shu's mother recalled, "I did

not hear her cries when she was born; I thought she was lifeless. Later, the doctor asked me what I would like to do with the baby. I entrusted the decision to the doctor that he could do whatever he would like to; but he responded that the baby was still alive; I had to decide.”

“When the doctor asked me what I wanted to do with the baby, he was in fact also shocked by the serious situation of this premature baby. The baby was immediately placed in an incubator. At that time (in 1990) there was no health insurance yet, and it cost me NT\$ ten thousand daily. It was very expensive, and generally, only few people were able to afford it.”

Xiao Shu’s mom and dad were then only boyfriend and girlfriend. Neither of their families was wealthy. It was her aunt, who helped to pay the medical expenses. After paying around NT\$ forty thousand for the first few days, the aunt could not help anymore. Then the doctor told her about Cathwel where she might find help and adoptive parents for her baby.

Xiao Shu’s mom felt as if a knife was piercing her heart, but she did not know where to get the money to save the life of her baby. Her boyfriend said that the medical expenses were too much, and even if they could collect the amount they needed, they were not sure that the baby could survive.

Her aunt reacted: “Whether the baby can survive or not, if we bring her to Cathwel, I am sure there would be people to help for the medical expenses.”

No matter how, her only wish was to keep the baby alive; she had no choice but to give the baby away to Cathwel. While the baby was in the hospital for medical treatment, at the same time, the Cathwel personnel was also looking for adoptive parents abroad where there were more medical resources. Meanwhile, the baby grew stronger and healthier; she gained more weight and kept up with the babies of the same age. Her face became round, with adorable baby fat, and she had chubby cheeks.

The more she looked at Xiao Shu, the more she felt attached to the baby, and it made her very sad to be separated from her baby. Those feelings were too complex to describe. Within a year, a Dutch family wanted to adopt Xiao Shu. As a mother, she felt happy for her baby, but at the same time she felt so helpless that she needed to encourage herself by constantly repeating these words: “I want her to be happy; I want her to be happy. I hope she will be happy,” but she just could not stop weeping.

The Dutch couple was both full-time teachers, but in order to adopt Xiao Shu, one of them had to surrender the work and to stay at home. Xiao Shu’s mother recalled: “If this couple can sacrifice so much for an adopted child, I believe they will take good care of Xiao Shu, and she will be very happy to be with this family.”

Even though she surrendered her baby unwillingly, she painfully agreed to surrender Xiao Shu, and bravely signed the affidavit for adoption in the Cathwel Office.

### **They have exactly the same small thumb**

After that, Xiao Shu's mom had an unstable life with a lot of ups and downs. She separated from her boyfriend, the father of her baby, and had several new boyfriends. However, she would never desire to have a baby again. She used to tell her new boyfriends: "If our relationship is heading towards marriage, then be prepared to know that I do not want to have children." Her guilty feeling about giving Xiao Shu away had prevented her from sharing her maternal love with others; she wanted to keep it secretly only for Xiao Shu alone.

She began to receive letters from the other side of the world informing her about the growth of her daughter, such as her first time to ride a bike, or learning to swim, the first time she played on the swings, her birthday celebration with classmates and neighbors, etc. From the various pictures she received, she noticed that Xiao Shu's small thumb looked exactly like hers. As the days passed, Xiao Shu grew up and became a beautiful girl just like her biological mother.

When Xiao Shu was seventeen years old, she participated in "roots-finding" activity sponsored by Cathwel. From the Netherlands she came back to Taiwan to seek her biological mother. Xiao Shu's mother immediately agreed to meet her daughter. She said: "I definitely needed to give her an explanation. She certainly would like to know why she was adopted abroad, what had moved a mother to make such a decision, how she looked then... and how I felt about her adoption...."

Through the arrangements of Cathwel, both of them were able to meet. When they met, Xiao Shu's biological mother was surprised that her daughter had grown so pretty, and Xiao Shu was also surprised that her mother was so beautiful. So they chatted like two good friends. Then Xiao Shu's mother told her as much as possible all the truth about the past. The two even placed their similar small thumbs together and took a picture. At the end, she asked her daughter if there was anything she still wanted to know. It seemed Xiao Shu was satisfied and said: "It was enough; you even told me about my biological father."

After going back to the Netherlands, Xiao Shu was excited and told her adoptive parents: "My mom was very pretty and young!" When she knew that, she was happy, but at the same time, she felt uneasy and worried that she might have been too naive; those words might hurt the feelings of her adoptive parents. But the adoptive mother replied with a big heart: "Yes, your mom was really beautiful!" The response of the adoptive mother made her relax, and it showed that Xiao Shu had a good relationship with her adoptive parents. They had given her enough inner security to express her feelings freely.

### **Second reunion**

Another year had past; the whole family of Xiao Shu came to Taiwan to visit her biological mother, and had a grand reunion with her grandparents. This reunion brought a very complicated feeling to Xiao Shu's biological mother: she was touched by the well-educated adoptive family, and they were so kind. She also felt fortunate for Xiao Shu to have grown up in such a loving and caring family. At the same time she felt shame and guilty at giving Xiao Shu away. She had contributed nothing in raising her daughter to happiness.

What made her feel more embarrassed was that it was her family, who had demanded her then to send Xiao Shu abroad for adoption, and now when they saw that Xiao Shu had grown up beautifully, they started to desire that Xiao Shu would come back to her own clan in Taiwan.

She remembered that time, her father told her: "You had the courage to deliver a baby, now you have to find the means to raise her by yourself; I will not help you, even if you should cry and beg for my help." The man who did not recognize the baby as his granddaughter that time, now was expecting Xiao Shu to come back. Through Xiao Shu's grandmother, he was saying: "Since Xiao Shu is using our family name, then she has to come back to be my granddaughter." (Xiao Shu used her biological mother's surname.)

Xiao Shu's biological mother thought it was a very selfish idea, and not fair to the adoptive parents who care for Xiao Shu so well. Xiao Shu had grown so well, that her family felt regret for what they had done before. She told her mother: "At that time you did not accept this granddaughter, and cut your relationship with her completely. Now you are asking her to come back to you. I tell you frankly, it will happen only over my dead body."

She felt so ashamed about her family and herself, at the same time, she did not like to disturb any more the perfect life of Xiao Shu in the other country. Since then, she stopped responding to the letters of Xiao Shu. She never answered a word to her daughter such as greeting cards, gifts....

### **A letter from her daughter**

One day, her mother called her office and told her: "You have a letter." She immediately and instinctively told herself: "My Daughter!" After her office work, she called Cathwel and talked with Cecilia Chyn: "This is Xiao Shu's Mother." Cecilia Chyn was surprised and said: "Finally, we were able to contact you again. I would like to send you all that we have received from Xiao Shu. Is that all right?" She replied: "Yes! Please do so."

### **The silent six years had passed.**

In fact, she had secretly collected all the things that Xiao Shu had sent and that had been forwarded by Cathwel: greeting cards and gifts...

Whenever she received anything from Xiao Shu, she would buy a card and imagine herself writing to her daughter; but in fact, she had never picked up a pen to write even a word on them, nor had she sent the cards even once. On the contrary, she had kept all of these things in the innermost place of her cabinet: all the cards from Xiao Shu, and the letters that Xiao Shu had intimately written, as well as her own empty cards, Xiao Shu's birth certificate, etc.

Now she has a steady boyfriend who accidentally saw the letters and gifts forwarded by Cathwel. She admitted to him: "I had a daughter."

"Where is she?"

"Abroad."

"You sent her abroad?"

"No, I did not send her, she was adopted abroad."

Finally he said: "What you have to do is to face it."

### **True confession**

Having no response from her biological mother for such a long time, Xiao Shu was puzzled. It seemed that the first part of her life had become stuck. Naturally, her biological mother had the same feeling; both of their lives seemed to be stuck in the past. To gradually solve this situation, Cathwel suggested her to start writing again to Xiao Shu.

But what would she write? Whenever she started to write, she felt so heavy in her heart. Her mother encouraged her to just write anything, such as simple greetings, Happy New Year or Merry Christmas.... She replied: "In that case, it is better not to write." She knew well that Xiao Shu would not like to read only those words.

In the office of Cathwel, Xiao Shu's mother sat facing a tape recorder, as if she wanted to say something which she had been preparing for many years. She spoke as if her daughter were in front of her: "Xiao Shu, I was always afraid that, if I told you the truth, you would worry about me. Since you were born, I have never given you even a little bit of love. Now I was going to start to write to you again. If, in the first letter, I hide some things from you, I would be telling you a lie, and I did not want to do that. That was the reason I could never pick up a pen and write to you again."

"If I should tell you I was doing well, or if I told you I hope you are having a nice, happy life, I was sure you would feel relaxed when reading those words; but to communicate with you in that way might make you feel I was not sincere. I never liked such a superficial communication with you. I guessed what you would like to know was how I really was, how my life in Taiwan was, how I missed you—these are what I wanted to tell you."

As if to avoid the pain of talking directly to Xiao Shu truthfully and from the heart, she changed the object from YOU to HER. She said: "The problem was how I could tell her

about my real life situation. What good it was to tell her the truth that I had undergone serious or minor surgery that I had been afflicted with illness that kept on bothering me... would she not feel pain, if she knew my true life? I believed she would.”

In general, the heart of the mother and her daughter were connected, Xiao Shu and her biological mother had this wonderful telepathic connection. When her mother in Taiwan was not well or ill, Xiao Shu would also feel unreasonable discomfort. When her adoptive parents asked: “What has happened to you? Why didn’t you get up? Why don’t you eat? Are you sick?” Xiao Shu could not give any reason; she just felt bad. Cecilia Chyn said this phenomenon was amazing: “However, people do not believe in such a wonderful telepathic connection between mother and daughter.”

Xiao Shu and her biological mother had the same shape of small thumb; both of them had been through exactly the same experience of dystocia when they were born. “Three days before my birth, the amniotic fluid had gone out from my mother womb, and because there was no more fluid, it was difficult for my mother to give birth. Finally, when I was born, I did not cry; my mother thought I was already dead. She asked the doctor with a weak voice: ‘What happened to the baby?’ The doctor spanked me, but I still did not cry. Then he found out that my thumb was in my mouth. After he pulled it out of my mouth, then I began to cry. Before that, the doctor had predicated that either I was already dead, or I would have mental problems because of the lack of oxygen. But I survived. Xiao Shu and I were such strong babies who were able to survive any struggle for life!”

It was clear that she and her daughter were not only connected in heart, but also shared the same fate; she was so proud of Xiao Shu. She imagined her own experience of dystocia at birth—she was so fragile then but survived. At the same time, she recalled the birth of Xiao Shu, the fragile newborn baby, and her strong will to survive. When she flashed back to all these experiences again and again, it seemed she was sending a message to herself and her daughter: Be strong. She would like her daughter to be strong, and she would like herself to be strong too.

### **“Father” and “Typhoon”**

Underneath the cry for strength, perhaps unconsciously, there was the fear about the fragile nature of her life and the life of her daughter. Throughout her whole life, this fear had been the darkest shadow which she would never reveal to Xiao Shu. The trauma of domestic violence caused by her father against her mother had hurt the family and her own feelings. She said: “In front of Xiao Shu, my father was a good grandfather, and I wanted Xiao Shu to keep this image of a good grandfather in her heart.” For her, Xiao Shu was a well-educated lady, also such a wonderful daughter! It was a sign that the life of her daughter would be brighter, with the possibility for her to have a more beautiful life than her own, and she could not bear to have anyone or anything destroy Xiao Shu’s dreams, as well as her own dreams.

In human civilization, the father is symbolically or substantially the guide and the norm, but he also has the tendency to be the nightmare of his family and children. The Japanese culture even placed “father” and “typhoon” in the same category. They were the inevitable natural disasters of human life. For the biological mother of Xiao Shu, her father was simply the height of the typhoon in her whole family. He would never hesitate to hit his wife or to beat his children. He could emotionally and verbally abuse the family, just like a storm occurring in the desert—it happens too fast to protect oneself. She really did not feel proud of her father, so between her father and Xiao Shu, she had to put something to protect her daughter; and this had been her important reason for not writing or responding to Xiao Shu’s letters for six years.

“Do you think Xiao Shu is unable to bear the truth?” We asked.

“Yes, she can, she is very strong.” She answered.

“Then why do you not let her know the truth?”

“It will hurt my father.”

She had to cope with so many concerns! If it were not the fear of hurting her daughter, then it was the fear of hurting her father, or her mother. But perhaps her deepest fear came from trying to protect herself from being hurt again, because this would bring damage again to her own life. Her life had been filled with regret before, but now she had finally stitched up her world thread by thread. Unfortunately, her fear had accidentally kept her from expressing her true love to her daughter.

### **Everlasting bond**

But true love could not be suppressed. She took the pile of cards to the Cathwel for an interview, and showed them one by one: this card was bought in the year when Xiao Shu sent that letter; or that thank-you card was for the gift sent by Xiao Shu; .... Even though those cards were empty, just like blank sheets without any written words on them, those empty cards made us feel sad to realize that she had been carrying such a heavy burden, and had no way to declare true love to her daughter.

She had also prepared two identical necklaces, one for Xiao Shu and one for herself. She was imagining both of them living at different ends of the earth, but wearing necklaces of the same design. One day, she would personally place the necklace on her daughter’s neck, and ask her daughter do the same to her, so that the necklaces would be the witness of their everlasting connection.

However, she is still contemplating and searching for the most sincere mood, the most authentic words, the most proper moment, to tell her daughter, word by word, her deepest and the most real love.