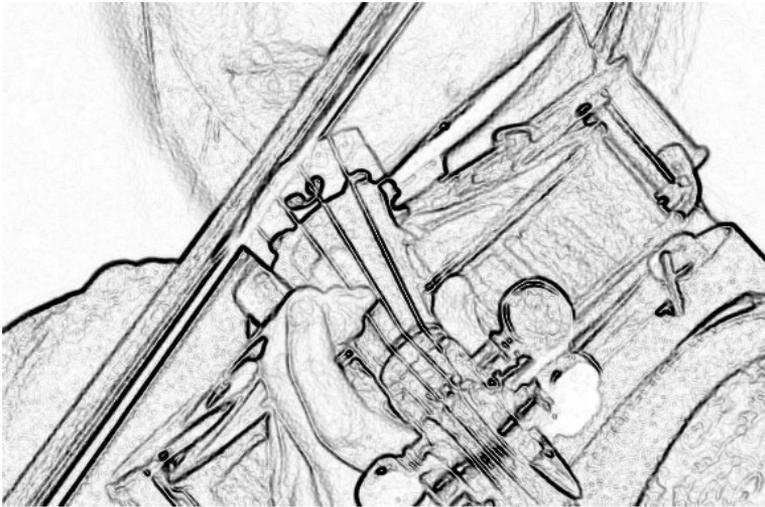


Rochester Chinese Christian Church

# ECHO

June 2005 Volume 23 No. 1



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## Three Unforgettable Songs

Pastor Herman Tang

I always love singing and my life has often been touched by the lyrics of certain songs. I like to share three of those unforgettable songs which I have learned back in Hong Kong from 1971-1975 when I attended The Alliance Bible Seminary. This seminary was affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance whose founder was Dr. Albert B. Simpson who had a strong vision for world evangelism. Therefore our school put much emphasis on evangelism and outreach. A. B. Simpson knew the Words of God and he honored Jesus Christ. The Lord has used his life and his work to bless many people including myself. Following are the three songs written by Dr. Simpson.

### ***A Hundred Thousand Souls***

*A hundred thousand souls a day, are passing one by one away,  
In Christless guilt and gloom.  
Without one ray of hope or light,  
With future dark as endless night,  
They're passing to their doom,  
They're passing to their doom.*

*(Chorus)*

*They're passing, passing fast away,  
In thousands day by day,  
They're passing to their doom,  
They're passing to their doom.*

I still remember that evening when I participated in the evening prayer time. I was sitting in the chapel on top of the beautiful island of Cheung Chau and singing this song for the very first time. The powerful words of this song impacted me very much. I believed the Lord has used this song to deepen my understanding and appreciation of the preciousness of people. As the Bible says, people are created in the image of God and they have an eternal soul. Because of that, I have determined to make an effort to tell people about Jesus whenever I have the opportunity.

### ***My Trust***

*Lord, Thou hast given to me a trust,  
A high and holy dispensation,  
To tell the world, and tell I must,*

*The story of Thy great salvation;  
 Thou might have sent from heaven above  
 Angelic hosts to tell the story,  
 But in Thy condescending love,  
 On men Thou hast conferred the glory.*

*(Chorus)*

*Let me be faithful to my trust,  
 Telling the world the story,  
 Press on my heart the woe;  
 Put in my feet the go;  
 Let me be faithful to my trust,  
 And use me for Thy glory!*

Many times I have sung this song. I remember this song because it reminds me of the glory of sharing the gospel with people. Almost without exception, tears of joy fall down from my eyes when someone prays with me to receive the Lord into his/her life.

### **Be True**

*We are going forth from the school of Jesus,  
 We have sat at His blessed feet,  
 We have drunk from truth's celestial fountain,  
 We have tasted its honey sweet.  
 We are witnesses for our blessed Master  
 In a world where friends are few;  
 And He sends us forth with the watchword holy,  
 Whatsoever it costs, be true.*

*(Chorus)*

*Be true! Be true!  
 Let the holy watchword rings;  
 Be true to your trust,  
 Be true to your glorious King;  
 Be true! Be true!  
 Whether friends be false or few;  
 Whatsoever betide,  
 Ever at His side,  
 Let Him always find you true.*

I think this must be the song that I have sung the most during the years of seminary because this is the theme song of the school. We sang it during every special occasion. How can I forget "Be true"?

At our church retreat, Pastor King-Fai Choi did something in one of his messages which puzzled me at the beginning. He used Jesus as an example on doing the work of evangelism. He gave Jesus grades by

judging how successful Jesus was in doing the work of evangelism. He used five occasions of Jesus' outreach experience. Pastor Choi graded Jesus' work with numbers from 1 to 10, with 10 being the best. In one occasion he gave Jesus a "6"; another a "9"; two with a question mark; and at one occasion he even gave Jesus a "0". He then summarized by giving Jesus a 50% in the overall result. In my simple mind, I was puzzled because I kept thinking that I would always give Jesus 100% in everything He does. Then King-Fai made a powerful point by saying that we should not look at the work of evangelism by the result. It is more important for us to be faithful to God. Evangelism is a mandate of the Lord. We have no choice.

Do you see the preciousness of eternal souls?  
 Do you see the glory of sharing the gospel with people?  
 Will you be true to the Lord?



## Grace and Peace

William Leiserson

When I was an undergrad at RPI, I had a friend, Rosaura, who has since become an Intersarsity staff worker at Vassar College. She informs me that Vassar has an extremely culturally and ethnically diverse campus. Consequently, one of her primary concerns is racial reconciliation. Upon hearing that I attend RCCC (and RCCF), she asked me to come and speak about my experiences as an individual from one culture entering a different culture. When she suggested it, I was somewhat taken aback. I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer, and I typically fail to notice non-verbal nuances. Actually, at one time, I derived a great sense of pride in the realization that Auntie Shirley wasn't actually everybody's aunt, but that this was a title of endearment and respect.

Gradually, it dawned on me that Rosaura wasn't so interested in a sociological analysis of Chinese culture at RCCC, but what it had been like, for me, to leave my cultural "comfort zone" and immerse myself in another. In particular, she hoped I would discuss, where does Christ fit into cross-cultural understanding? Being that I am just about as adept at interpreting my own experiences as I am at detecting subtle nuances in communication, even this is a challenging task.

Adding to the difficulty, at first glance, the Bible makes few explicit statements about successful interactions between cultures. It mostly shows examples of conflict. But, like many things cultural, there is quite

a lot of subtlety which can be gleaned from the text. Mike Thompson, the Intervarsity staff worker at RPI, once pointed out to me the uniquely Christian greeting that the various Epistles repeatedly use, "grace to you and peace." (Ro 1:7, 1 Co 1:3, ..., 1 Pe 1:2, 2 Pe 1:2, 2 Jo 1:3, Re 1:4) "Grace" was a typical greeting used by Greeks in their letters. "Peace" was a translation from shalom, the traditional Hebrew greeting. The Greek and Hebrew cultures, once distrustful, even antagonistic towards one another, were now united in "grace and peace."

Indeed, this sentiment has been profoundly applicable to my experiences at RCCC. Almost as surprising, to me, as the realization that Auntie Shirley wasn't everybody's aunt, was the realization that there are a variety of Chinese cultures within the Church. I had to wonder what distinctions there were, what the histories were, and how these differences affected interactions between people of different cultures. The closest thing I could come to an understanding was how I was treated when I arrived at RCCC.

Now, I'm not Chinese, even in part. I'm not even a pretty man. But my first Sunday at RCCC, despite a great amount of self-consciousness, I was made to feel very welcome by everybody. In no way did I feel like an outsider, even in the Mandarin/Cantonese service. After my broken-Mandarin self-introduction people came up to me to say "Ni Hao" (*How are you?*) Of course, I was very grateful. I know that it isn't easy to perceive such dramatic difference and still welcome it. This is especially true when two cultures have a history of strife.

That is grace, as I understand it: to offer forgiveness for past wrongs; not to lord it over a person, but to realize what Christ has called into being. But grace is difficult for both the provider and the recipient. The Good Doctor, who has come to heal the sick, has to cut in order for the wounds to heal, properly. There are two reactions one can have when injury occurs. The first reaction is like an animal with its leg caught in a trap which threatens anybody who approaches the wound. The second is like the patient who, though in pain, has faith in the Doctor to perform his craft.

Christ is present in our Church. And just as assuredly as there has been turmoil and disagreement, there will be healing and reconciliation. This is the peace of God which passes all understanding. Peace doesn't come through valiant or romantic struggle. It comes through grace. Grace is the means, and peace is the end. And in that end, we are all brothers and sisters, and we love each other, dearly. My own analytical clumsiness, notwithstanding, this I know. "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." (He 12:14) It is only through grace that the peace will come.

Again, thank you so much for the grace you've shown me. "En Dian" (*Grace*) and peace.

## Learning to Count Our Blessings

Larry Chen

It's been six months since we left Rochester. We have more or less settled down in southwest Washington, just across the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon. Hard to believe it's been a year since I lost my job at Kodak. I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you our journey in the past year.

In June 2004, less than 5 weeks after Baby Jessalyn was born, news came that my position at work had been eliminated. I was given two months to find another position within the company. No doubt this was devastating. I thought I was in the "growing" part of the company, but I guess I was wrong.

We had planned to live in the Rochester area for many years. We had built our dream house in Webster, and had lived in it for barely two years. Lin was working less than 10 hours a week, as a sanity break. Suddenly we were faced with such shocking announcement; we didn't know why this happened. We asked many brothers and sisters to pray for us. Somehow we knew the Lord would not close a door without opening another one.

Within a month, Lin was offered a fulltime position at her Webster Schools job. I stayed home to watch the baby while searching for a new job. I remember having phone interviews while holding the baby in a front infant carrier. Also we had to send Ethan to fulltime daycare at only age two. He adjusted well but was frequently ill.

By mid-July, I was offered a position at a start-up company in Silicon Valley. I was tempted to accept the offer, but high housing prices and the cost of living kept us from accepting the job. This was, of course, a difficult decision, as I didn't know when I would get another offer. After I turned it down, they still offered me a company visit before making a final decision. Meanwhile, several other job applications came through and I got a few more interviews. As a result, I had two more job offers. After some consideration, we decided to sell our house and move to Washington State.

Selling our house was another trial. We spent much effort building the house, and had such fond memories in it. We had our two children in this house. Little did we know that we would only live in it for two years. The time of the year was rather unfavorable for selling a house, but we had no choice. Thankfully we worked with a Christian agent who prayed with us as we put the house on the market. There was little interest in the house so we lowered the price just two weeks after it was on the market; time was running out. Ten days before our scheduled

move, we accepted an offer. Another blessing. It was painful leaving our dream home, but such is merely our earthly home. No reason we should get too attached.

Five days before moving day, the kids and I came down with the stomach flu. Ethan and I slept on the floor for two days, and I was too weak to help with packing. Talk about bad timing. Somehow the movers came and left, and we were on a plane flying across the country. The move went smoothly, and we had very close friends from college waiting for us in the new place.

We lived in a temporary housing for about two months where we and our two kids (and the cat) “camped out” in the same bedroom. In early January we bought a house where it was a bit more spacious. In retrospect, the Lord had provided with all that we needed and more. There was no decrease in our income at all. Life is full of unexpected events, but God is in control. I’m grateful that I had several offers to choose from. It’s not by my own merit, but by His providence. He made it possible that the relocation package covered all the moving expenses plus closing costs to sell and buy homes.

We continue to learn to count our blessings. We don’t know why the Lord led us to this new place. Adventures await. It rains quite a bit in the area, but we’re told dry summer months are just around the corner. We’ve explored the area a little bit. We’re getting reacquainted with our old friends from college. They’ve made our transition to a new place easier. My parents live with us for most of the year. They enjoy playing with the grandkids and watching them grow. My new job keeps me busy; Lin stays home with the kids. Lin has been going to a Mom’s group a few times and meeting new people. Ethan attends a Christian preschool one half day a week. In the fall it will increase to two days. He loves going to the playground in the park, and is eager to learn all sorts of new things. Jessalyn just started walking in the past week or two. She’s absolutely adorable. She tries to talk but we don’t quite understand her yet. What a joy to watch the kids interact with each other more and more!

We appreciate the prayers and encouragements you’ve given to us in the four-plus years while we lived in Rochester. How we miss you and the time we spent together! We look forward to your visit and the chance to visit you in Rochester. For now, these lyrics came to mind:

*And friends are friends for ever,  
If the Lord is the Lord of them*

...

*A lifetime is not too long  
To live as friends*

## Identity Through Christ: Who Am I?

Mimi W. Lee

These past few months, as I was swept up in organizing several programs to celebrate national Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (APAHM) in May, I'd encountered a number of opportunities to contemplate and reflect on the theme of identity; who we are in relation to our family, colleagues at work, the world and the many relationships we have, and always, the ultimate question OF "Who am I"?

Although the national APAHM 2005 theme is "Salute to Liberty and Freedom," our organization, Asian and Pacific Islander American History Project (APA-HiP), chose to showcase local Asian American artists by focusing on the theme "Identity Through Art" using oral history interviews of their life experiences and perspectives to explore who they are through their artwork.

In producing a documentary exploring identity, one of the questions that kept resurfacing was how do we identify ourselves? What label do we attach to our name? Which do we list first? Do we see ourselves culturally first - as a Chinese, Asian, Asian American, or just American, or is it our gender, as female or male, or is it our professional status, as a scholar, artist, engineer, doctor, teacher, etc., or is it our relationships - as a parent, child, sibling, friend, employee, or, is it our affiliations - as an eagle scout, a community volunteer, a sports team member, a member of a church, etc.?

This identity question arose again when I was interviewed by a reporter for a newspaper article, and found myself explaining why it is essential that the artist be seen first as an artist, and not as an "Asian American" artist; the art itself should transcend personal ethnicities and all descriptors. For example, in labeling the names for each artist, "Korean Actor" connotes subtle cultural limitations, which just the word "Actor" does not.

Identity has great power. If we think about it, identity is what creates many of our struggles and conflicts. And we can be very passionate about it. Take for instance, the Taiwan/Mainland China struggles recently. Taiwan was formed when the Nationalist army was defeated in China and retreated to the island off China. Since then, there have been many struggles over the identity of Taiwan: are they a separate nation—the Taiwanese, or are they part of Mainland China, as those of the "One-China" policy would argue? If you live in Taiwan, how may you identify yourself, as Taiwanese or Chinese, as part of China, or

something else altogether? Whatever side you take determines how you see yourself, think, act, and, how others perceive you.

Identity not only has great power, but in this world, it gives us significance and importance. Being a "somebody" or doing something generally achieves the identity we give ourselves, and then with great pride, we attach that significance to ourselves. However, when this something fades or is lost, what happens to our significance? We become a "nobody" and then struggle with the question again, of "Who am I"?

Our documentary director, a student studying filmmaking at RIT, shared that she considers herself a Christian, first and foremost, above being a woman, an African American, a filmmaker, a student, a daughter, etc. She believes that being a Christian is the most important identity she possesses, and what she wants to be remembered for - all others are distant seconds, thirds and fourths.

As I reflected on this concept further, what then should our identity, as Christians be? It should transcend all modifying labels. We are simply Christians. Our identity is through Christ and in Christ. We need no other terminology to help describe, clarify or put us in little brackets to enable others to understand who we are. As Christians, we are a new creation and no longer tied to the concepts of the old life or any of the identity labels.

The Apostle Paul illustrates this best when he responded to the problem in Galatia - the Jewish Christians had boasted that they were God's people because they had the law - they wanted to impose their Jewish ways onto the Gentiles, the non-Jews, "Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:25-29)

The basic and ultimate truth is that human designations and identifications don't matter anymore. The only truth is that we have been "baptized into Christ." Therefore, our primary identification is with Christ. We belong to Christ, we are all one in Christ, and our identity is in Christ for eternity, which will never fade or be lost. As Christians, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ; therefore we are one family, forever bounded in love for one another.

Who am I? I am a Christian, and that should suffice.

## **You Brought Me Out Of Darkness And Into Your Glorious Light**

Aileen Chow

I went through an upsetting experience when I was laid off from my job last year. During that time, I was depressed. I found myself not wanting to get out of bed. I lost my appetite. I felt alone even though my husband was with me. I was falling into depression.

I was a secretary for three and half years. I thought my job would be a long-term commitment. My company, Angelica Textile, supplies fresh linens to area hospitals, clinics and nursing homes. This job was the best experience I'd ever had and I was so sad to lose it and become unemployed.

On the second day of learning about my layoff, Barry and I were watching television. I could not pay attention to the program. I was sitting on our Lazy-Boy chair with a blanket over my head. When Barry saw me he was very concerned.

Finally, on the fourth day, Saturday morning, something happened to me. I woke up feeling so different. I made pancakes that morning. Barry came to the kitchen to greet me. "Good morning, my Love." I said happily to him. "You're finally out of the woods!" said my husband. "Yes. You know, I had a dream last night. In my dream God showed me that I had a new job – a better one." I paused and looked him in the eye. "I'm sorry for being so depressed."

Not everyone at work knew about my layoff until the final week. My coworkers were asking me, "What are you going to do?" I told them that I was going to move on and find a better job or just be a go getter and find things to do.

God showed me in a dream that he will provide me with a new job. I felt great to be out of depression, to brush aside the old job and to start over. I shouldn't get upset over this. But I did. And I got over it because God showed me the light. I know that we are to pray and to ask God for His help but I was too far away and too depressed. Instead, He gave me a remarkable dream of me working at another job that was far better. I believed the Lord saved me from the darkness. I felt at peace that my future was going to be in His hands.

On the first day of my unemployment I went shopping at Aldi. I was beginning to wonder what was going on at work and how crazy things would be without me. At Aldi I met an elderly lady who goes to our church. When we saw each other we hugged. Then she said to me, "Aren't you supposed to be working?" I sighed and told her about what happened. I also told her how depressed I was and she said to me right away, "Don't let Satan take you there." Yes, don't let Satan take

you down the dark hole. Don't let him get you down.

For three months, I stayed home to help out my husband. I believe we all have to prepare ourselves mentally not to be depressed if we lose our jobs. The most important thing is to let your family and friends know how you feel and they will pray for you.

There is a happy ending to this story. Sometimes, God works mysteriously. He has a way of turning things around for the good during a time of a stormy depression. I did get another job. My new workplace is Angelica's next door neighbor. It is so close to home again. So, I go to work the same way and go home the same way like nothing has changed, except for the job. You know, I don't understand it. It's just funny that I think about it. How in the world can one end up working in a building next door to their previous job is beyond me. The answer is: This is God's doing. God is always watching over us and knows when we are sad, He'll fix it and make it better than before.

So, whenever we feel depressed or upset, we need to remember that He is always there to heal your sadness. I also think in times of depression, we must never forget to ask God for His help. Sometimes we become too wrapped up in our sadness, like, one day, I was upset at work when I received a bomb threat call at Angelica. I was devastated because I felt that I was the only one who heard it and nobody else did. It happened so fast that I tried to remember the caller's conversation. She told me her boyfriend placed a bomb in the building and we had forty-five minutes. Before she hung up she said, "This is no joke!" I told my boss about the call and then I had to report the incident to the police.

I felt awful. Production came to a standstill. Everybody waited outside the building. Nobody was allowed inside until the bomb sniffing dogs cleared the building. When I saw all this I broke down and cried in my coworker's car. Nothing happened during the time we stood outside. No explosion. I felt upset and wished it wasn't me who answered the phone. But my good friend, who is my coworker, was with me and she talked sense out of me. She said she would have felt the same way if she answered the phone and got the bomb threat call. She even said she believed me and said none of this was my fault. Although her words comforted me, I was depressed during the whole evening.

I found myself not wanting to get out of bed again. I watched the sun's ray stream through our window. As it got darker, I covered myself under the blanket. So, have I forgotten about God? You see, I think in times like this when I am so withdrawn from God I should have prayed or called His name. But I was into myself and so depressed. In this world when a lot of things can go wrong and make us upset, I learned we should seek God in times of depression, so our belief in Him will always be strong to send us out of darkness.

## A Miracle

Tom Chang

Though I sometimes wish it was not so, I have always been very skeptical when it comes to real life miracles. I am talking about short-term events where their miraculous nature is immediately apparent, as opposed to long-term changes in lives brought about by God. I have no struggles with the miracles recorded in the Bible, and I believe that God is very much active in our lives today, at times in ways unexplainable to us. But somehow when I hear of modern day supernatural interventions of God in people's lives, I hover somewhere between believing the validity of the stories and fully 'buying into' them. It's not that I question people's experience or whether they are genuine when they share, but some rational, analytical part in the back of my mind tells me to just take what I hear at face value and not think too much about it, otherwise I may be tempted to think that people are overly zealous in their interpretation of events.

It is then with much deliberation that I write this sharing and state that the following is an account of a miracle that occurred recently in my life. I simply find no other way of viewing the sequence of events and explaining their meaning and impact.

I had known Alvin (Spivey) for some time prior to the beginning of the 2004~2005 school year. He had been coming to the college fellowship and church regularly for almost a year before that, but our relationship remained a friendly, distant and polite acquaintance. We would carry on small talks, and smile "hi" and "bye" if we ran into each other in school, but we did not engage in deeply personal conversations and did not know each other well. I remember one time I saw Alvin arriving in the airport as I was picking Jing up, when he politely declined my offer of a ride and (as I later found out) opted for a cab instead.

This started to change sometime in September, 2004. I cannot remember any reason behind starting to talk more, but we ran into each other a lot more frequently and carried on longer conversations each time. In a very short time we were getting to know each other well and becoming very comfortable around each other. I vividly recall two lengthy (2~3 hours) conversations we had that were pivotal in our friendship. In the first we shared about our experiences and I spoke of some troubles I had been going through. In the second we had a big debate/discussion about emotions and how we are to handle them. I have always believed that it is best to experience fully emotions we go through in life, yet Alvin held the position that experiencing unappealing emotions was unnecessary.

In contrast to happiness, which he would fully embrace, when it came to sadness and grief, he would block the emotions from influencing him

and, in his words, reach the goal of being at peace without going through the process of pain and sorrow. Crying for losses, for instance, Alvin deemed pointless. While I could agree that dwelling in sorrow and refusing to move on can be unwise, I had a problem with his point of view. This led to numerous conversations in which I repeatedly brought up the topic and often challenged Alvin with hypothetical situations. I would always push on Alvin the idea of acknowledging, experiencing and talking about one's emotions and the virtue of such practice. At times I would even half-jokingly say "some day Alvin, some day you are going to need to know how to handle emotions," to which we would both laugh. I cannot say that either of us persuaded the other much, but through the dialogue, we understood each other better and became closer friends. This was the beginning of a friendship that established a foundation upon which much more was built, but up to this point, it was just something I enjoyed greatly.

Another thing I learned as I got to know Alvin more was that like me, he had a hard time being on the receiving end of people's help. Both of us tend not to want to trouble people much, even when the help was willingly offered. This explains the airport incident. Because we are similar in this regard, I suggested that we should learn to ask for and utilize each other's help and often insisted and even forced Alvin to accept my rides when he would have walked. Through our interactions, we had bonded and shared much; Alvin even requested a ride to a public library once later on, and we simply became close good friends that talked and hung out often.

Some time in November, we watched *The Passion of The Christ* in Sunday school, the first time for me. I was overcome and let my emotions flow right out in tears and trembling at the end of the movie. Now I think that may have influenced Alvin somewhat because unlike what he used to say, it did not seem like he found my crying stupid, weak or pointless. Perhaps seeing me vulnerable like that also helped him to open up to me.

Around this time, my brother's family moved back to Taiwan so I had the house all to myself. Furthermore, as I was at the tail end of my job search, I had a lot of free time. Both of these contributed to how we were able to cope with what was to come.

Near the beginning of December, Alvin told me he felt that school was increasingly demanding; both in his studies and his duties as a TA, and that there were always people around him to the point where he could not quiet down to pray. I offered my house to him whenever he would need time alone. This conversation is a good indication of just how different our friendship had become; for Alvin to share his troubles with me and for him to be open to accept such an offer from me.

A few days after this, on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Alvin called and told me

that he had just found out that his roommate and best friend Dennis had been missing. We talked briefly and each prayed about it on our own. Later that evening, he called and asked whether he could come to my place for a while. Everything seemed normal when I picked him up, the smiles, the jokes, the casual conversations. So much so that when I inquired about Dennis's whereabouts, I thought Alvin might have been joking when he told me that Dennis had committed suicide. As soon as he told me, and for the remainder of the car ride, he stopped blocking the emotions, and I had no idea what to do or say but to drive.

The following few days were extremely difficult for Alvin. He was tormented by denial, guilt, pain, anger, grief; and was tossed between blocking the emotions and carrying on, and facing the emotions and being consumed by them. It was like nothing he had ever gone through before. I could only share a tiny fraction of his pain, and it was already smothering. As hard as I tried to be supportive, I simply did not know how to help. Time and time again I was made painfully aware of my inadequacies and limitations as I clumsily attempted to accompany and comfort him, as well as my shortcomings and weaknesses when I found myself cowering away from being with Alvin.

Yet it is in our limitations that God's glory shines through. As we prayed, we could really feel God's presence with us. When I did not know how to pray, God gave me the words to speak. He gave me the stillness and strength to sit by Alvin. He gave me the heart to empathize and mourn with Alvin. He gave us peace when peace seemed to be so far out of reach, truly a peace that we could not understand. He even gave us joy at times as we realized what was happening. I find it impossible to describe this fully, as any expression I can utter now just falls so short of doing the experience justice. The following is an excerpt of my journal entry on December 15<sup>th</sup>.

"...We talked, he talked, and we wept, and we prayed. This tragedy opened Alvin up and changed his perspective. It brought us closer than we could ever be. We were able to open up and talk, about everything and anything. And we edified each other and experienced God's providence. God was with us. God prayed through me for us when my words failed. And we realize that this has been a miracle. If Dennis' loss was inevitable, then God could not have prepared us better for this. God prepared Alvin, partly through me, to open him up to receive support, and to provide for him, me. God prepared me, giving me all this free time, this friendship in Alvin, and helping me become close enough to him to offer support. I didn't know what to say or what to do. But God worked through me, and how glorious it was to be used by God, to be a part of a miracle..."

Indeed it was a miracle. Without warning, God brought Alvin and I together into a close friendship, gave Alvin a friend that wouldn't stop bugging him about confronting emotions, helped Alvin and me to learn

to depend on and trust in each other, and in addition to the happenings documented here, many other incidents and timings just worked together to weave a tiny portion of His plan. Here are just a few I can recall:

- I had Daniel (Hu) over in my house for days and was just driving him back to school when Alvin called that day.
- God gave me a job offer that I was very happy to accept in mid November, effectively ending my search and freeing up my time and mind.
- Due to my negligence, I completed procedures necessary for my acceptance of said job offer two weeks late, resulting in a delayed departure from Rochester.
- Alvin was starting to get to know others in the fellowship better as well and was able to share in confidence with some.
- Both Alvin and I remained in Rochester throughout the Thanksgiving weekend, during which we spent much time together and grew even closer.

As I type now, I cannot help but feel inadequate again in describing just how great God's grace is. Nothing I can say can give enough glory to Him. Alvin and I are truly blessed, and we share a deep friendship that is rare in life. I do not in any way mean to trivialize or celebrate the tragic loss of Dennis, and I know that the pain and the grief are still deep in Alvin's heart today as they may be for the rest of his life. But even in the worst moments of our lives, especially in the worst moments of our lives, the power of God and his endless love just surpass all. Our God is an awesome God indeed. Praise Him.



## **My Beloved RCCC**

Sam Ng

Counting the days until our farewell has not been easy. After all, God has given us such tremendous mercy and blessings through you that I have come to think of you as my dearest spiritual haven. Before Wendy, Elias and I embark on the next big adventure of our lives, I just want to recapture some of the precious memories of you as an encouragement to myself and as a reminder to all of us the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father.

It's been almost thirteen years since I first came to Rochester to pursue a BM (Bachelor of Music) degree at Eastman. I still remember that I skipped church on my first Sunday in Rochester because I didn't know where to go to worship. Having attended Sunday services in Chinese for 18 years, I wasn't ready to walk into an American church, where I imagined that the language, ceremony, and format of worship would be so entirely different that I would not be able to handle. You cannot imagine how happy I was when I heard about your existence the next week!

In my first two years in Rochester, you were my source of comfort when I was a miserable wreck at school. Overwhelmed by culture-shock and self-consciousness, I become introverted and nerdy at Eastman, and totally shunned myself from normal interaction with people. Every night I would sit alone in the cafeteria in the dorm, writing letter after letter to old friends in Hong Kong, while other Eastmanians were mingling and fraternizing in the aroma of late-night pizzas. The dull and unsafe downtown Rochester only exacerbated my misery. Soon, I found myself trapped on Gibbs Street, meandering between a "brick prison" and a "stone jail." That's just not the kind of college life I expected. Every week I looked forward to the several hours that I could come to you during Saturday choir rehearsals and Sunday services, partly because these were the only times when I could escape from the confines of two buildings on the same street!

Despite the loving support of so many brothers and sisters in the college fellowship, I decided at the end of my sophomore year that it was too much to bear. Feeling that the BM that I was pursuing had come to mean something closer to a "Big Mistake," I decided to return to Hong Kong to seek a more normal and hopefully a happier college life. That summer, I was accepted to the music program at a university in Hong Kong. I was supposed to feel happy about this; yet, I actually felt this turmoil in my heart about leaving you and Eastman. As much as I was convinced that I must put an end to my miserable school life at Eastman, I also found it extremely difficult to give up the chance to finish my studies in a top music school, and that I was probably not going to see you again. At the end, I knew in my heart that I had to come back to Eastman to finish my BM.

Returning to Rochester in 1994 turned out to be a real blessing. That year I met three new people in the fellowship – Andy, Jeannie, and Oliver – who have since remained my closest friends. Their friendship and fellowship sustained me and carried me through the difficult times when Wendy and I were physically so far apart. I don't know if God had specifically wanted me to return to Eastman in 1994; but I do know that after making the decision to come back, God sent these three "angels" to give me courage. In my speech on graduation night 1996, I shared

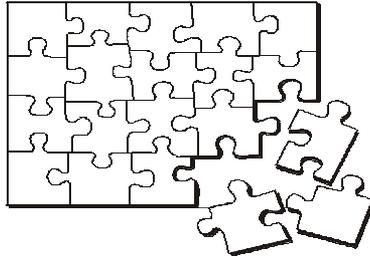
that the biggest mistake – which “BM” had come to stand for since the end of my sophomore year – was not the decision to come to Eastman; rather, it was allowing myself to be so engrossed on the problems and obstacles, and be completely unaware of the blessings that God had constantly showered upon me. The more I focused on the problems, the bigger they seemed. It was like looking at a black dot on a white sheet of paper: I became so focused on the black dot that it became like a big black stain. I didn’t realize that the paper was in fact 99.9% white, nor did I care to ask God to remove the stain for me. Instead, all I did was to throw the entire sheet of paper into the trashcan, thinking that getting rid of the paper means also getting rid of the stain, and that somehow I would soon be given a better, whiter sheet of paper. God didn’t let that happen; instead, he picked up that sheet, taught me to focus on the whiteness of the paper, and the black dot gradually faded away.

At the end of four years of college education, God had taught me a more valuable lesson than any music theory jargon I had learnt: focus on the blessings and refuse to be overcome by problems. Whenever I sit at the piano and see each and every face in the congregation that has been saved by God’s grace, my heart is filled with joy and thanksgiving. I realize that all the negative things that happen here and elsewhere are not worth lingering upon. As God says through Paul: “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Having completed my BM, I said good-bye to you in 1996. This turned out to be only a temporary farewell, as we – Wendy, my newly-wedded wife, and myself – came to Rochester to pursue our graduate studies. The adjustment to married life was already daunting in itself; to compound this with an entirely strange environment for Wendy and the pressure of being a graduate student pursuing an MA (Master of Arts) for myself made our first two years of married life especially hard. Although going back to school after three years of intellectual hiatus was tricky, I soon realized that the MA degree was comparatively innocuous while I was faced with two much thornier “MA”s – “marriage and money anxieties.” Looking back, Wendy and I now realize that when we got married we were actually not completely ready to enter into holy matrimony. The effect of this unprepared-ness became manifest when we struggled to adjust to our lives in Rochester – me with schoolwork and teaching, Wendy with social life and church. As a result, there was constantly much tension between us. In the midst of our conflicts, I found myself trapped in a spiritual chasm, falling way short of the role of a spiritual leader in our household. At church, I became a self-righteous critic who could only see the speck of sawdust in my brothers’ and sisters’ eyes, and paid no attention to the plank in my own.

At the same time, with my pitiful stipend at Eastman and Wendy's extravagant tuition at UR, our bank account was seriously bleeding. One would think that this second MA (i.e., money anxieties) would only deepen the problem of the first MA (i.e., marriage anxieties); yet, God actually used one to solve the other. During times of financial trouble, God so unfailingly provided us with our needs that our hearts were greatly encouraged and bound together. I have shared on many occasions about how God provided through miracles and the generosity of brothers and sisters. Through your love and kindness, Wendy and I found no more excuses not to humble ourselves and learn to love one another as the Lord loves us. Our relationship has since grown deeper and stronger because you have shown us the love of God.

Words will never suffice in telling how much I thank God for you. We have received so much from you that we know God has called us to Baton Rouge to take this giving spirit to the church and the community there. Until we meet again, we shall constantly remember you in our prayers, and always cherish the very fond memories of the years that you and I have shared in Jesus our Lord.



## **Remembering Tianpei One Year After His Passing**

Xiaoxue Cheng

March 27 was the first anniversary of Tianpei's passing. The day before on March 26 we had a memorial gathering at our house in Webster. At the meeting I shared some of Tianpei's diaries. One of them was about his trip to see Robin Helstrom of Geneva to begin his natural/nutritional treatment. Robin is a devout Christian who loves God, and God used her to salvage our spousal relationship which was collapsing at the time. This piece of diary was written on the first day of our trip to Geneva while living in the cottage beside Robin's home near Seneca Lake. I was greatly moved by this diary and would like to share it with brothers and sisters.

At the cottage (1-12-2004)

*The moment I stepped into the cottage, I had a realization that God is going to use this place and the next few days for some special things, not only for my physical health. We need a lot of healings; we need to make mends with God, with ourselves and each other. God started to save our marriage ten years ago with the near fatal car accident for my wife. Now He is using my terrible sickness to finish up His work---to make a beautiful testimony of His great love and power. Last night I had the chance to talk to Robin. She shared many stories that God change things in special ways. She believes that I will be healed physically, and our family, especially our marriage, will be much blessed because of this. We prayed together. A few minutes later, I got downstairs where Xiaoxue already laid in bed. I went to say good night but only to find she was very upset. "You hurt me most in my life in this world, Tianpei. I even told PengTiantang." I told her that we didn't want to continue to hurt each other and God gave us this opportunity to heal. "I don't think there is any hope for us."*

*A while later, she came over to my bed and said she could not sleep. "I don't have peace in my heart, and there are so many hurts." Praise the Lord; we started to share like never before. I told her that I confessed all my sins before God and I forgave all her wrongs in the past. About an hour past, she was in tears and told me that she felt much better. I prayed to God later that this is really something new; the beginning of some real change from inside. I prayed that she could learn how to turn to God when she needs help. I believe that's when the healing starts*



"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

## My Epitaph

Ron Auty

During the 2002 RCCC Retreat our speaker Pastor Tam asked of the congregation, “What will be your epitaph? How do you want people to remember you?” Since I hadn’t arrived until that Sunday, I wasn’t there for that particular message, but he mentioned it again during his Sunday morning message. It set me to thinking, “How *do* I want people to remember me? What would I want inscribed on my tombstone to let others know what kind of a life I lived here on this earth?” I looked up the word *epitaph* in the dictionary. According to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, an epitaph is, “1) an inscription on or at a tomb or a grave in memory of the one buried there, or 2) a brief statement commemorating or epitomizing a deceased person or something past.”

Ironically, as I was nearing the retreat that Sunday morning, I was listening to a portion of a message given many years ago by Keith Green, a musician and preacher who was killed at a young age in a plane crash back in 1982, along with two of his children. I’d like to share that message with you now, because it affected me very much at the time and was the first thing to enter my mind when I began to ponder the question set forth by Pastor Tam:

“ ‘And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.’ [Galatians 6:9] I want to share with you that the message that I think the Lord wants to leave you with is that on Monday, will you still feel as good as you do tonight? Well, wait a minute; even if you don’t, it doesn’t mean you shouldn’t still do good according to the word of God. If I went on my feelings, every Monday I would drop dead.

“We had an incredible man of God come through our ministry a couple weeks ago. He taught some incredible things on Saturday. On Monday another friend of mine and I were talking over it, and he said, ‘Boy,’ he said, ‘Keith, that was an incredible feeding time that I had from that teacher that came through.’ I said, ‘Me too,’ I said, “But you know what?’ He said, ‘What?’ I said, ‘Now it’s Monday.’

“The message of the Lord tonight is, ‘He who endures ‘til the end, it is *he* who shall be saved.’ [Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13] Because, it is so easy—when the sky is blue, when the weather’s fine, the food’s good, the fellowship’s sweet—to feel like you can get through any kind of tribulation, any kind of terror, any kind of attack. But it’s the end of the race that God is looking forward to. And to get to the end, sure, you’ve got to run a good start, and sure, you’ve got to run a good middle...but the finish line is where the judges are.

“Will you end as you have started? When God calls you before His judgment seat (like everyone will have to stand), will He say to you, ‘Well DONE, thou good and faithful servant.’? Not, ‘Well run,’ or, ‘Boy, you sure had a good time, I’m glad you did,’ but, ‘You finished! And you finished among those who get to enter into my rest and my glory.’”

Finishing the race (1 Cor. 9:24). Fighting the good fight (2 Tim. 4:7). Setting your hand to the plow and not looking back (Luke 9:62). Enduring until the end (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13). These are the marks of maturity of a true disciple. How many of us have started something and never finished it? How many of us are willing to obey God’s word and to do God’s will, so long as it doesn’t inconvenience us? As Keith mentioned, it’s so easy for us to have great aspirations of glory for God’s kingdom, but when the opportunity for application is lined up in front of us, so many of us decide it’s time to sit down and let others do it.

Those of you who have advanced college degrees can understand the need for persistence, of continuing on even when you’d really like to quit. Of remembering the big picture, keeping your eye on the future, the end of the road. This kind of focus, this kind of persistence is what is needed—and doubly so—in our walk with the Lord here on earth.

Nothing of any lasting value is ever achieved without hard work. Things that are handed to us will never be worth as much as those that we’ve had to work hard at to attain. And it’s not always a mountain that we need to climb to reach the end. Maintaining a slow and steady pace as in a marathon is just as difficult as pouring all of your energy into a short sprint. The little things we do day-to-day at work or at home are just as important as the more “visual” things we can do while standing before or among fellow believers in church.

“Sure, you’ve got to run a good start, and sure, you’ve got to run a good middle...but the finish line is where the judges are. Will you end as you have started?” My exhortation to everybody reading this (including myself) is the same as Paul’s in Hebrews 10:35-36:

<sup>35</sup>Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup>For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

What will be your epitaph? Some of you may have already decided this. Some of you may never have thought about it until now. Taking the time to think about it may just affect how you live the rest of your life, so that when you’re gone people who knew you will truly be able to say, “Amen,” to it.

My desired epitaph? You may have already guessed it: “He finished.”