

Variations On The Same Theme



It is seven o'clock in the evening in Vancouver, Canada. The Chinese television daily news is on. I hear a familiar voice, that of Mrs. Lillian To Wong Yim Bun (陶黃彥斌), or simply Wong Lai Lai (黃麗麗), as

she is known to us, her classmates of Class '62. What viewers see as a petite, delicate figure, often with a warm and gentle smile, belies the invisible might of an 'iron lady'. Her list of achievements speak for themselves. They include -

- The Canadian 125th Anniversary Confederation Medal, 1992;
- The YWCA Women of Distinction Award, 1999;
- Citation for Citizenship Award (by the Canadian Government), 2001

Lai Lai was also named by the newspaper Vancouver Sun as one of the 25 most influential people in B.C. in 1998, and was on the list of the Vancouver Magazine as one of the 50 'Most Powerful People in Vancouver' in 2002.

All this is because Lai Lai happens to be the Chief



Executive Officer of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. (United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society), a unique immigrant service agency which has become, over the past 15 years, the largest of its kind in the province of British Columbia, Canada. S.U.C.C.E.S.S. has a clientele of 460,000, with 350 staff members and over 8,600 volunteers. It provides employment training, family counselling, and programmes for the elderly, youth and women.

Although I live just five minutes from Lai Lai, I have more opportunities to say hello to her on the TV screen than in person, as her working hours are incredibly long and irregular. She is hard to get hold of. Yet, busy as she is, Lai Lai has never forgotten her Ying Wa friends. Whenever we have a reunion dinner, Lai Lai would always try her best to attend, if only just in time for dessert, or as we are about to pay the bill!

Such a focused life has its beginnings in the primary school years at Ying Wa, where Lai Lai excelled in everything she did. Indeed she was always first in our class. She also took an active role in students' affairs: she was the President of the Student Council in the early 60s. Any wonder that now, at the top of her professional ladder, she has become the embodiment of S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

As the saying goes: 'behind every successful man there is a woman'; in Lai Lai's case, it may well be said: 'behind every successful woman there is a man'. She is indeed fortunate to have a most supportive husband and two adoring sons.



2004 is the year of the Monkey. Quite a few of our classmates, including myself, were born 'monkeys'. Lai Lai was not, that is apparent. Yet, with a monkey's impish wit, I have succeeded on quite a few occasions to lure her into play! Lai Lai is so dedicated to her work that 'play' is not on her agenda. In the year 2000, we persuaded Lai Lai to travel to Hong Kong to attend Ying Wa's Centennial celebrations. Afterwards, she even agreed to cross the border to Shenzhen for shopping and a pampering massage.

Such is the stuff that we Ying Wa girls are made of. If you are gifted with the talents and capacity for hard work like Lai Lai, you would probably end up a CEO too. But if you are somewhat like me... do not despair! There's a special place (called 'niche') for each of us in this world. You just need some monkey tricks to find it!

Differences aside, Lai Lai and I still enjoy a life-long friendship which first began at Ying Wa. And we, each in our own unique ways, continue to live our days, doing our personal best, to make a difference.

by Poon Kwok Yin who attended primary school at Ying Wa ('53 to '58). She then went on to secondary school and the Royal Academy of Music in the U.K. A talented musician, Kwok Yin has four children and is currently working as a family therapist in Vancouver. She has never lost touch with her Alma Mater and the friends she made all those years ago.