

MAKING LEMONADE OUT OF LEMON

In 1999, I suffered from a two-week coma as a result of the wrong combination of neuroleptic medications given to me by a psychiatrist at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto. Reason? Because I had been diagnosed as a woman afflicted with bipolar disorder. In layman's term, a manic-depressive.

Yes, my name is Caroline Fei-Yeng Kwok who graduated from Form Five's Arts class in 1968. When I was in Ying Wa, I was involved with the Literary and Debating Club and Drama Club. In 1970, I went to study at the University of Minnesota, majoring in English Literature. I did many odd jobs at the time, graduated with an Honours Award and returned to Hong Kong in 1972. I enrolled in the Diploma of Education at the University of Hong Kong and taught English as a Second Language at the Language Center there.

In 1974, I came to Toronto and received my Bachelor of Education at the University of Toronto, after which I began teaching English as a Second Language with the Toronto Board of Education. In the meantime, I also took courses for my Master of Education at the University of Toronto.

I might seem to have managed my professional life very well, but not so in my personal life. It had mainly to do with my marriage to a fellow student of the University of Minnesota whose major was Business Administration. Having been to a girls' school with over-protective parents and a lack of exposure to men while I was at the University, I was unable to cope with the emotional stress of my marriage. In 1980, in North York General Hospital in Toronto, I was formally diagnosed as a manic-depressive by a male psychiatrist. I divorced my husband in 1982.

I was confined to the psychiatric ward for four months and was given tons of tranquilizers without choice. There were not much understanding, neither was there much emotional support. Mental illness was and still is, to a lot of Chinese, a family shame, a loss of face, a taboo behind closed door.

The Canadian psychiatrists, on the other hand, did not seem to understand my aspirations either. My dreams of being a writer, a journalist, and a researcher were considered as "grandiose thoughts" (a symptom of being "manic") when I talked about them in my fast, accented English in the midst of distress.

As a new Canadian, I did not know the rules and regulations of the Canadian mental health system either. Neither did I know the names and the side effects of the medications.

In 1999, in order to "calm my manic state," a psychiatrist at Mount Sinai Hospital gave me the wrong combination of neuroleptic medications, after which, I was in a coma for two weeks.

It is God's blessing that I did not die in the coma and suffered no brain damage except that my handwriting has become illegible to others forever. I can still write, type, play the piano, and most importantly, think with a clear mind.

The major reason for my recovery has to do with my memoir, THE TORMENTED MIND, that I completed at Yale University. In this memoir, one of the chapters is called YING WA GIRLS' REUNION.

It is because of this memoir that I am the recipient of the 2001 Courage to Come Back

Courage to COME BACK



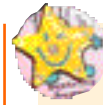
郭飛瑩是我三姊的同學，只記得她英語耍家，常在校際朗誦節名列前茅。我移民多倫多後和她飯聚，但因工作及家庭忙過不了，便很久沒聯繫。後來聽到她受一種躁狂與抑鬱交織的兩極情感性精神病(Bipolar Affective Disorder)困擾，親友日漸疏離。想起她是醉心文學的性情中人，面對傳統世俗對精神病的諱忌、恐懼及誤解，一定很是難受，心中也很掛掛著她。輾轉間，我又聽到她已康復的消息，並在耶魯大學研習寫作，而她的自傳"The Tormented Mind"不單幫助她戰勝病魔，更體現了她做作家的夢想，和讓她勇敢地倡導對精神病人的認同和支援。此書已被收納入一些大學課程，請參閱讀者及專業人士評語www.thetormentedmind.com及Amazon.com。飛瑩在2001年由主診醫生Dr. John Klukach提名榮獲加拿大安省"Courage to Come Back"獎，是唯一的華人。
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Award sponsored by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. It has opened many avenues for me, including my present teaching of literacy to immigrant psychiatric survivors, my research with a disability project, and my speaking engagements about social stigma towards mental illness.

But most importantly, it has helped me to have all my old friends accept and understand me once again, to have new friends who are understanding psychiatrists and social workers, and to regain my long lost confidence and independence.

In short, just like what Professor John Nash is reputed to have said in his biography, A BEAUTIFUL MIND, it is "safety, freedom, and friends" that have helped me recover. Most of my dreams have come true.

For that, I have to thank the late Ms. Pilkington and Ms. Hepple for giving me the ground work in Ying Wa, Dr. Richard Selzer, my professor at Yale University, for his encouragement, and Dr. Mary Seeman of the University of Toronto for her edition of the new version of my memoir, which I hope will find a major publisher soon.



MENTORSHIP programme

"Mentorship" is the creation of a supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee to enhance the latter's holistic development through positive communication in areas of mutual interest. The specific objective of setting up a mentorship programme in Ying Wa is to tap the invaluable resources amongst our alumnae to complement the efforts of the teaching staff in facilitating the all-round development of Ying Wa girls. It is also hoped that the linkage between alumnae and our Alma mater can be further strengthened through this process.

A total of 20 alumnae and 23 students in Secondary 4 and 6, registered as mentors and mentees respectively. At the Inauguration Ceremony on 26 March 2004, the participants met for the first time and shared some memorable moments when they exchanged sparkling buttons to mark the beginning of the programme. Follow-up meetings, phone calls and exchange of e-mails have been initiated. The second group activity was a visit to Cyberport in July.

The Mentorship Programme will be launched in full scale in the 2004-05 academic year. I would like to take this opportunity to call upon all alumnae to consider seriously joining this programme as mentors to help enhance the quality of school life for our fellow students.

Florence Ip Mo Fee '73

Being a mentor is genuinely meaningful for me. Although I am one of the youngest mentors and have no mentorship experience at all, I hope I could do my best to build a care network, and to provide some guidance on various aspects of life to my mentee.

Cecilia Fung '98

師友計劃

校祖日當晚，我們懷著忐忑、期待的心情，心裡都不約而同的問著這一句話：誰是我的mentor呢？「師友計劃」儀式簡單但洋溢著溫馨的氣氛，代表著一個新計劃的開始！

不同年代的英華校友為這個計劃而聚首一堂、在百忙之中騰出時間，向一群在校的姊妹分享她們的點滴，這種關懷、厚愛，我們是看得到的。我相信只有在未來的日子裡，主動積極付出，讓「師友計劃」在英華相傳下去，才能報答到師姐們的。我們亦希望將來有更多的師姐、同學們參加這個計劃，從中受益。

中六甲 葉翠雯 中六乙 彭慧嫻

