

* Jason and the Homeless Man *

Carefully, Jason dusted the little altar in front of Yeh Yeh's photograph. He had been taking care of it since his grandfather's death six months ago.

Every Saturday, Jason looked forward to shopping in Chinatown with Mom. As they passed a newsstand carrying Chinese newspapers, Jason spotted an old man sitting on the sidewalk. His hair was long, white and matted. Frayed and torn clothing wrapped his thin frame and he had sandals on his feet. He smelled! The old man reached out his hand and touched Jason's pants leg. Jason jerked his leg and kicked the old man's hand.

"That old man touched me with his dirty hands!" he cried, "It's disgusting."

His mother said, "He's homeless, he doesn't mean any harm."

Jason was sorry that he had kicked the old man, who was banging an empty can on the sidewalk. After his mother had finished shopping and he had bought buns filled with mashed red beans for himself, they passed the old man again on their way to the parking lot. Jason had a thought. "Mom, can I give him my buns?"

Mom nodded. He put the buns in front of the old man who devoured one.

Jason felt better and asked, "Why is that man homeless? Where does he sleep?"

"I don't know. It's hard to be homeless in this weather."

All week, Jason found himself thinking about the old man who reminded him of his grandfather. Yeh Yeh didn't speak much English and Jason didn't speak much Chinese. They had fun anyway. Last year in fourth grade, Yeh Yeh taught him to play Chinese chess. Jason missed playing with him.

Yeh Yeh was skinny too, but had a twinkle in his eyes, a smile on his lips. This man looked so sad. Mom and Dad had always taught him that in Chinese culture, the young respected their elders, especially the old. Who was paying respect to this man?

On Friday, Jason came home from school and rummaged through the closets.

"Dad, do you still want this pair of old shoes?"

"No, what do you want to do with them?"

"I want to give them to a homeless man we saw in Chinatown last Saturday."

"Yes, go ahead. That's nice of you."

"Mom, can I give him this extra blanket?"

"Yes, Jason." She knew he was sorry about kicking the man.

The next day, Jason was anxious to get going. He took a bundle under his arms and rushed to the newsstand. There he was in the same spot. Jason opened his bundle and handed the old man the pair of shoes and the blanket.

"I hope they fit," he said. "Here's a blanket to keep you warm."

The old man stared at the shoes and the blanket. Then he smiled at Jason. He was missing some teeth. He bowed three times and mumbled something in a raspy voice. Jason took some money from Mom and bought buns filled with roast pork and a cup of hot tea for the old man.

For a few more Saturdays, Jason bought something for the man to eat. One Saturday, he asked, "Mom, can you buy something for him this time? I'll stay right here."

"All right, Jason."

After Mom went down the street, Jason pulled a small set of Chinese chess from his jacket pocket. He opened the board and put the pieces in place. The old man broke into a grin. Jason moved a horse diagonally. He waited. The old man looked at the board for what seemed a long time. Move the pieces the correct way, Jason pleaded silently. The man picked up a soldier and moved forward one step. After two more moves by the old man, Jason grinned at him.

He heard Mom's startled voice, "What are you doing?"

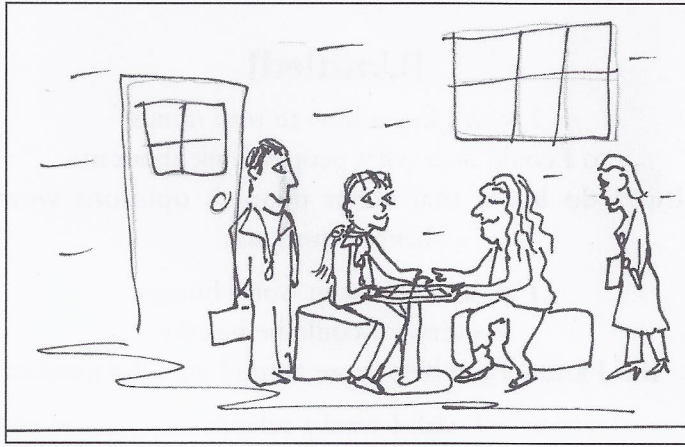
"He knows how to play the game."

"You can't play here on the street. Let's go, we have a lot to do at home."

Jason was so happy, he didn't argue. He put the chess set back into his pocket and followed Mom



A Part of Me



home.

“Why aren’t you eating, Jason? I made your favorite soy sauce chicken,” asked Mom.

Jason looked at his parents, took a deep breath and said, “Can the old man move into Yeh Yeh’s room?”

Mom opened her mouth without uttering a word. Dad choked on his rice.

Dad found his voice, “You can’t just take a homeless man off the street into a home. He may be sick or mentally ill.”

Mom added, “He doesn’t seem to be worse off than when we first saw him. At night, he must have a place to sleep. I don’t even know which Chinese dialect he understands.”

Jason ran to his room and threw himself on the bed. Mom came in and sat on the edge of the bed.

“I know you miss Yeh Yeh a lot. We can’t just take the old man in. There are problems that are too big for us to solve.”

Dad was listening at the door. He came in, patted Jason on the head.

“You can bring your chess set and play with him. I’ll call some social agencies and see what can be done for him.”

Jason sat up. “Thanks, Dad. Do you want to meet my friend?”

“Sure, I’ll come along next time.”

Jason put the chess set in his jacket pocket. As he passed Yeh Yeh’s altar on his way to Chinatown, he looked at the photograph and mouthed the words, “Thank you for teaching me how to play Chinese chess.”

—Fanny Wong, Chinese American, grandmother of three, retired business woman. Art by Paula Gregovich.

I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes on September 15, 2006. I was 6-years-old. My mom was suspicious because I had lost a lot of weight over the summer, and I was constantly drinking water and feeling hungry. When we went to the doctor, my blood sugar was so high that the glucose meter couldn’t read it. I was immediately sent to the hospital for a four-day stay, during which my mom and I learned how to inject insulin and count carbohydrates. Basically, I learned how to maintain my health so I could live a normal life.

Today, I don’t let my diabetes stop me from doing the things I enjoy. I have sleepovers, I play sports, and I love skateboarding and swimming just like many kids my age. Having diabetes has had a big effect on my life and personality, and I can’t image how my life would be without it.

Everywhere I go, I meet people who have one form or another of diabetes: My father and my babysitter have Type 2 diabetes; my Uncle Phil and Grandma are both borderline; and my rabbi’s grandson has Type 1. I have also met people at my school and at amusement parks, and even some in Denmark and the Dominican Republic, who live every day with the same diagnosis I do.

I know I’m lucky for so many reasons: I have friends who are supportive of my diabetes; I have an insulin pump which has changed my lifestyle; and I have a family who stands by me every day, supporting and helping me. Even though there are obstacles to overcome I have faith, and I have persevered through tough situations. Sometimes I do get the blues about having diabetes, but then I think about how I am not alone, and I hope that one day a permanent cure will be available. Having diabetes is part of who I am but it will not stop me from fulfilling my dreams and living a normal life.

—Hunter Littman, 11, New Jersey.

“Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.”

—Albert Einstein.