



From Caterpillar to Butterfly

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I read a story some time ago about Jean Joseph Jacques Chretien, former prime minister of Canada. He was an ugly boy with a stutter. A childhood bout with polio caused his mouth to twist to one side when he spoke, and he also lost hearing in his right ear. In addition, a sudden attack of Bell's palsy left the left side of his face permanently paralyzed. Most young people would have been devastated by the double whammy of a distorted face and a severe disability, but Mr. Chretien refused to give in to fate. He put himself through the regiment of speech drills, and adopted eye exercises to improve his eyesight. He pushed himself so hard that his mother told him to stop tormenting himself. He said, “Every beautiful butterfly is reborn only after chewing up his confining chrysalis to set himself free. I want to become a beautiful butterfly.” Due to his strong will and hard work, the boy grew up to become the prime minister of his country.

I have been greatly inspired by this story. As my fate would have it, I have not been fortunate. My mother died shortly after giving birth to me because of a difficult childbirth. This was too harsh a blow to my dad and he lost his sanity. As a result, my grandparents raised me. Under the wings of my grandparents, I could have lived out of harm's way. Yet lightning struck again. When I was two years old, I went to herd the cows with my grandpa. Somehow I got caught between two sparring cows and one of my legs was stepped on and crushed. My life was saved but my leg was permanently damaged. I have walked since with a limp.

When I was little, my broken family and my disability did not bother me. I began to feel the pressure and the sadness as I grew older. The tender loving care of my grandpa and my grandma eventually helped me to get rid of the sense of inferiority and I grew up just like all the other kids. During my six years of attending elementary school, I never needed help in spite of my disability and the long commute involved. Be it sunny and nice, windy and rainy, or snowy and cold, I never missed one day of school and was not late even once. My schoolwork was at the top of my class and I was scored “superior all around” every year. A bright future seemed to be beckoning.

However, time and again I felt the pain of losing my mother and my good leg. I noticed that my aging grandpa and grandma were producing less from their farm and there was no improvement in my father's condition. I became despondent in the first semester of my junior high school years and my schoolwork declined drastically. At one point, I just wanted to quit! It was my grandma's words that helped me to pull myself together. Grandma said: “Granddaughter, it is unfortunate that you have never gotten to know your mother and your father is not himself and you miss your good leg. These are the facts of life that we can't change. If you keep on dwelling on your misfortune, we will never be able to change our future. Your grandpa and I are getting old and all our hard work will come to nothing if you don't brace yourself. Where did your self-determination go? My granddaughter is not a quitter. Besides, if you work hard, you can change your fate for the better.” There was not a great deal of theory behind grandma's words but I found them convincing. She went on to tell me the story of the great Chinese mathematician

Mr. Hua Luogeng. The late Mr. Hua became disabled as a child. Propelled by his strong will, he taught himself and became a world-renowned mathematician.

I was inspired by this story immensely. If he could do it, why couldn't I?

I stopped feeling sorry for myself and became determined to change my future by working hard again. My personal story caught the attention of my school and my fellow students. The school waived my tuition and fees including room and board. My schoolmates raised funds for my school supplies and furthermore, the school obtained financial assistance on my behalf. All this caring and encouragement worked as an incentive for me to study harder. I saved every penny I could to purchase an "English and Chinese Dictionary" and other reference books on English. I read magazines in English and watched movies and television programs in English. My grandma thought I was too obsessed with learning English and said to me: "Granddaughter, you are pushing yourself too hard." I told her: "Grandma, didn't you tell me that the plum blossoms thrive in the bitter cold. My road to education has never been easy. I want to work hard, to bring honor to those who have helped me along the way. I want to become a beautiful butterfly to fly to the world." My work was not in vain. I earned the first place in my school-wide English speech contest every year. Since the eighth grade, I have represented my school twice in the county-wide Chinese, Math and English contest and earned a first and a second place respectively. At the start of this semester, I earned the second place in the province-wide English competition for the Xin Yang city region.

We may not be able to change the unfortunate occurrences in our lives, which sometimes act as the chrysalis. Hopefully, with self-esteem, confidence, perseverance and courage, we will be able to break open the chrysalis and thereafter change our fate and turn ourselves into beautiful butterflies.