

## Beyond Park

#1

After a beautiful summer, an early snowfall dusted my hometown's amber leaves. The auburn carpet of leaves crunched below my feet as my grandma and I walked along the path. I was the youngest child in my family. When I was born, my cousins had all grown up as adults, my grandpa passed away, and I stayed with my grandma during most of my childhood.

We were most fond of going to the City Memorial Park — as a teacher, grandma took her students and me to the park every semester, where the natural beauty and richness of the 4000 years of Chinese history were aesthetically blended. “A new semester will start,” she whispered. “Remember the story about that carved stone statue I told you before? Seven hundred years ago, this physician combated a widespread plague,” she pointed to the side of the path. “I wish more children can learn from those stories,” grandma told me secretly.

We slept together every day. I told her my secrets at school and taught her how to play PSP\*. I introduced Contra\* to her. She learned so slowly, but with great curiosity and passion, that after I became a middle school student and came back home every two weeks from the dormitory, she would bring me tired eyes and excitedly share her progress with me — steadily one Episode — and we would then play together. For the whole afternoon, we ate OREO cookies, exchanging the console one at a time when the game role's blood was used up.

Besides playing PSP, I never knew how grandma spent her day when I was at school. She might watch TV sports games, eat snacks, bask in the sun, read books, and go to Memorial Park just like what we used to do, but alone — she was often alone, as my parents were busy working and I was busy with schoolwork. I once saw her call someone on the telephone with a paper phone book in her hand, laughing and talking merrily.

On new year's eve, family members gather together, grandma's eyes turn red, sitting in the center, and I sit beside grandma, seeing the smile on her face all the time; dishes are appetizing, dumplings are steaming, fruits are fresh and juicy, corks pop out of the glass bottles of Baijiu\*, chopsticks knock on the plates; television is turned on, the voices keep on, cousins watch the spring festival gala, children watch the blazing fireworks, adults are chatting loudly, grandma is drunk, everyone is cheerful. Years slipped like flowing water, the PSP was lost somehow, grandma still turned on the telephone sometimes, we celebrated Chinese New Year every year, and I grew up fast to catch grandma when she was getting older.

#2

Grandma owned her dream to improve the education situation in China, which was the secret between only me and herself. She made up her mind to organize a retired teachers' volunteer group. We went to ask the Memorial Park manager for an allowance together. My voice was shaking when I faced him, a middle-aged man wearing big black frame glasses, with wrinkles on his face. I tried to keep myself calm, shared my grandma's experience, and presented my

idea. The manager listened carefully and expressed tremendous support. “I wish my mother could be part of this group.” He said in the end, with a little shaking voice as well.

A few months later, the volunteer group was eventually established. To our surprise, 52 more grandmas and grandpas signed up. Next autumn, I wheeled grandma to Memorial Park. Her eyes were welling up with excitement, gratitude, and pride. Surrounded by a curious crowd, she seemed to go back to her primetime again, when she could connect with young students and help them grow. She retold many fascinating stories about the history behind the monuments, again and again, encouraging us to stay brave and passionate to pursue our dreams and change the world just like those historical figures who are commemorated today.

My hometown developed fast over the years, and the city center gradually evolved into a golden area. The memorial park started to charge for the tickets. Considering the business value, it was finally rebuilt as an amusement park. During the later three months, we went to Memorial Park many more times than we used to — the park bears a lot of our shared memories, reminding grandma about her dream. The asphalt road, the petals of every flower, and each carved stone statue all spoke to her of time with her students here.

One year later, grandma passed away quietly without pain. Once at midnight, I had a long talk with dad, and he told me many past stories. Grandma was once in a great depression after retirement. During those several years before I was born, she couldn’t control herself to have early symptoms of Alzheimer’s and gradually became peevish. No one in my family could accompany and understand her well. “That’s why they only came back home when the New Year arrives.” Daddy sighed, “Brothers loved her, respected her, but no one could endure yearly staying with a person with a weird temper though that person is their mom, including me.” Dad choked, with his eyes looking down at the ground, repenting himself. Grandma often dialed her old friends, but quickly hung up — she wanted a chat like they used to have, but most of them had passed away before her, which she forgot. “But she remembered those history stories, and she missed you so much every time you leave home for school,” Dad said at last.

My poor grandma — lived so long and so alone, that the shadow of her husband and old friends has faded away, though human life is too short, that it is too late for her to witness her dream climbing up to the sky like a hot air balloon. She didn’t know how to express love, hurting her sons and herself. My great grandma — devoted all her life to her career, and never gave up her dream to give students a better education. She loved them so much, as well as she loved teaching.

#3

Her organization became larger and more famous than before. Some students came and mourned her. A large number of workers flocked to Memorial Park to finish its removal. I have never seen Memorial Park be so crowded, however, since the day that grandma’s organization was first set up. Trees fell on the road, blocking the heavy traffic; The statue of the physician was carelessly broken by a worker, and it lay in the truck, with some gravel

scattering on the ground, just like my grandma's dream, great but fragile, floated away quietly.

Three years after grandma passed away, I dug out the old PSP in the corner of the drawer under the television. When I turned on the dusty and fragile switch, checked its drummed battery, and searched for Contra, it said: Data corruption. Until that time, I realized the only relationship between grandma and I had cleared away.

Later one year in Amusement Park, autumn comes as usual, but leaves are not falling — they are flying, singing a song of life in the air, sweet and bitter, joyful and painful, carefully nurturing new leaves to grow.

*“A new semester will start,” she whispered.*

*“Remember the story about that carved stone statue I told you before?” She pointed to the side of the path. “Seven hundred years ago, this physician combated a widespread plague. I hope more children can learn from those stories.” Grandma sighed.*

“You are the most suitable person to tell those stories, Grandma,” I said to myself.

\*[1] The abbreviation of PlayStation Portable, a handheld game console.

\*[2] **Contra** is a run-and-gun shooter video game. The arcade version of Contra consists of seven stages. The player loses a life if their character comes into contact with enemies or their missiles. When that happens, the character will revert to his default weapon on his next life.

\*[3] Baijiu is a Chinese alcoholic beverage made from grain. It is a strong distilled spirit, generally 52% alcohol by volume