

Jennifer Chun-Yi Wang

Let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure, for self is a sea boundless and measureless. The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed. The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals. The PROPHET, *Kahlil Gibran*

I come from a great tradition of storytelling. As early as I can remember, I listened to stories in large banquet halls told in loud, riotous Mandarin or in the secret nooks and crannies of my parent's bed as the intonations of my father's deep, cello voice captivated me for hours. Everything that I have come to believe in and live for has been passed down to me in the form of stories. I have been taught that there are no scales to measure my life; that limits are only in the mind. My father, who grew up in dark Mumbai alleyways amidst masses of other penniless, fatherless street children, escaped to Taiwan as a seventeen year old boy with big dreams. Though he spent most of his childhood in India stealing food to survive and running from shopkeepers whose obesity saved him from vicious beatings, he still managed to develop a passion for reading. Years later, he fell madly in love with my mother after a single conversation in which she introduced him to Shakespeare.

When I first heard this overnight love story, it made perfect sense to me. My father always lived guided by his heart, taking great risks while trusting in the benevolence of fate. The voice of intuition and faith spoke strongly within him. That night, he had been stunned by her beauty and profound understanding of literature. My mother, the daughter of a wealthy, four-star general who fought under Chiang Kai Sheik, found him unique among the myriad of Taiwanese suitors that pursued her. Ultimately, after nearly a year of doubt and turmoil, she gave up her family and country, swayed by his infinite generosity, iron-horse work ethic, steadfast commitment to his own chivalric code of morality, tenacious optimism, and boundless passion. From my father, I learned to live modestly, to focus on what is most important in life—family and education—to have the courage to envision the far-fetched, and to pursue seemingly impossible goals.

Because my parents had instilled in me the value that education was of paramount importance, receiving my college acceptance letter was a pivotal moment. For my mother, it was vindication from the death sentence that my grandfather had pronounced on her when she eloped with my father. *Go then, live a long and miserable life filled with suffering and poverty. Raise ignorant, dark-skinned children, but not as my daughter.* For my father, it was not only his own life, but those of countless generations before him that I had altered. For months afterwards, the colorful stories that had woven the fabric of my childhood resurfaced with incredible intensity. The juxtaposition of my father's stories against those of my own were striking—having been given the privilege of a blissfully happy childhood culminating in the opportunity to go to college, I was still ever conscious of my humble roots and the legacy of my past. Nothing would make me more proud than to continue the spirit of his philosophy by using my life to enrich the world around me.

Upon graduating from college, the celestial fervor of youth coursing through my veins, I dreamed of starting a company whose mission would be to awaken youth in the way that I felt my parents and teachers had awakened me. After settling for a finance position, I lived in my imagination, doodling logos on scratch paper, envisioning the story of my future.

Born in the year 2000, Insight was only one of a multitude of fanciful ventures sprouting all over Silicon Valley. Yet to me, it encapsulated my grandest visions of inspiring youth to believe that they could do whatever they put their minds to, that their lives had no limits. I was given the impetus to jump into action after Judy, a close college friend, accepted an

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invitation to join the venture. Seventy hours a week we would meet new families in the daytime and then handle finance and marketing late into the night. In July, the height of California's famed summers, I only saw sunlight through the thick double-paned glass of my ten by ten office. Yet I woke up each morning invigorated. Counseling students to build their study skills, confidence, and leadership abilities as well as guiding them to pursue their extracurricular and academic passions proved to be the most fulfilling work I have ever done. What made my experience even more powerful was that I could personally relate to each of my students, nearly all of them of Chinese or Indian descent. In these cultures, parents live for the sole purpose of seeing their children become successful and believe the key to future opportunities lies in education. Students often felt an extraordinary amount of pressure to live up to their parents' expectations. Thus, I was not just a counselor, but a mediator between parent and student, helping both sides see that they were really interested in achieving the same goal.

Insight is the beginning of my own adventurous tale. While listening to stories as a child led me to dream fearlessly, enacting my own story helped me connect the netherworld of idealism with the constraint and rigor of pragmatism. Only a month after we started Insight, the property manager showed up to announce that we had signed an illegal sublease. We were given an ultimatum: pack up in twenty-four hours or face eviction by the sheriff. After a week of sleepless nights, we persuaded the owner to negotiate new terms. Only a few days later, Judy informed me that she wanted to leave. Working under the same stressful conditions of Wall Street but earning a meager \$1000 a month for similar hours had pushed her to the limit. Despite the wild panic that tempted me to give in right along with her, I could not help trying to persuade her to reconsider. Our client base was growing exponentially. It was only a matter of time before we could raise our prices to a profitable level. Moreover, if she gave up now, she would be leaving over fifty students who had formed an intimate bond with her. Yet she stood firm, the sharp, biting words of our last conversation resonating in my mind for months to come: *Let's face it, neither one of us knows what we are doing; this whole idea was far-fetched. You are a dreamer, an idealist who will die before you abandon your brain-child. I am a realist, the only one willing to face reality.*

The nights that followed taught me to be strong even in my solitude. It was an overwhelming task to salvage the business alone, but I heard the power of my own voice calling to me, and I listened. Now four years after Judy's departure, having built Insight into a reputable business run by four full-time counselors, I reflect on the past with a wistful romanticism. Insight's infancy, though quite possibly having shortened my life expectancy, has solidified my belief that there are no limits to what I can accomplish when I believe passionately in my mission.

Through Insight, I relished in sharing the stories of my life to motivate my students, awakening them to their own abilities and talents. I was also the voice of my students' parents, many of whom could not speak English, helping them understand their rights within the school district. My desire to speak for those who are unheard and empower those who lack information has led to my interest in policy activism. A law degree will be a stepping stone towards impacting others on a much larger scale. In my mind, I will always be an advocate, whether in education or the many other issues I feel so strongly about: sex trafficking, domestic violence, and human rights. But now, my idealism is also grounded in the reality of what it takes to reach far-off goals: self-discipline, unconditional faith, unwavering dedication, and confident pro-activism. I have

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learned to build something out of nothing, to carve out programs, policies, and structure where none existed before. Now I am the protagonist of my own story having realized that though it is essential to be a dreamer, it is far more difficult and meaningful to be a builder, a doer, *a creator*.

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