

The Cathy Factors

Everybody and everything, living or dead, has, is, or will affect all of our lives, even if it is in ways we will never notice. However, sometimes there is a person who will splash, breaking the formerly rippled pond of people to create a small, dwindling tidal wave. We notice them. Sometimes we know them intimately, and admire them for showing us the impossible to be possible. My splash's name is Cathy Bao-Bean.

Every summer my mom, my brother, and I, sometimes accompanied by my dad, take a road trip through Missouri, New York (state), and wherever SVHE is being held. SVHE- the Society for Values in Higher Education- is a conference which meets once a year at college campuses across the U.S. to discuss politics, ethics, and other cultural topics. Professors, modern philosophers, preachers, ministers, educated know-it-alls, and even a former CIA agent converge (actually, 'collide' or 'forcefully-magnetize' would be more exact) annually to have mini-courses on 'Popular Culture' or 'Security in the Homeland'. They have socials, silent and live fund-raising auctions, nights dedicated to music making, and- somewhere amidst the political jokes, radicals, and colorful opinions- a small, tight clique of young teens. We look forward to this one week for the other fifty-one weeks of the long year. One reason for our eagerness is, as I mentioned, how close we are and the promise of more memories. Cathy is another.

She's a petite-but-never-fragile, wise-but-never-old, dignified-yet-never-stuffy ultra-energized Chinese-American bullet train, to put it frankly. Maybe it's because she's also a philosopher, a professional thinker. I met her a few years ago, when the Society organized a youth morning group for us which she led. Much of her lessons were based on

her book, “*The Chopsticks-Fork Principle, A Memoir and Manual,*” in which she discussed, among other topics, how the principles of different cultures (like, Chinese versus American, say) can affect how their population would look at the same situation. “There are many cultures out there in the world today, and all of them can coexist, not *JUST* here in the United States, but *anywhere!* It doesn’t take space, just the right mental conditioning!” And boy, talk about mental condition. I truly think that this little woman has the biggest brain, heart, and soul possible to fit into a human. She reminds me of how sometimes people will micro store information by converting the files to MP3s (or some yibberish yap like that) and then store it, so they can fit more files. Cathy, I think, has an infinite number of MP3s, that even though she’s experienced so much she still has a long way to go before filling up. She’s gone so far in a lifetime; coming from China, getting an education, writing a book, raising a son that wound up as a one-time model on a trip to China, and marrying and living with a man that melts down all her jewelry to make a piece to barter for a suit to wear to the Whitehouse. Sounds to me like a very well-seasoned life, but even more amazing is that she’s ready for even more.

You never know just how a mentor will surprise you until she walks into the room with a “Buck Fush” pin on the side of her bag. Yes, Cathy knows how to conspire with teens and how to make them interested (obviously, the entire group of kids was enthralled trying to decipher the mysterious phrase). It was in this blend of fun and mobile fact that helped her to show us so much. I don’t even know if her showing us, or me, at least, the meaning of opportunity, but it’s there, a halfway point between her and her view of the multiple cultures. Of course there are the opportunities she uses to recruit us to sell the infamous fundraising raffle tickets for her husband's decorated bowls (or “Bean Pots”).

“Ohhh!! Look how big you are!! This really isn’t fair, now! Look how small I am! OH!

And here... are... yooouuuur... TICKETS!!” she fling-rips the tickets off their roll and dangles them two fateful inches from our noses, bouncing them with fluid twitches of her wrist until we take them. But there are also her more subtle opportunities, ones that she didn’t necessarily show us examples of or tell us anything about, the ones that can be derived from her mind/soul midpoint. You can have a situation, say the good-ole’ -half-full-half-empty-cup-game, in which you can pick one side or the other, the positive or negative. In this way, that there are multiple answers for a question, the situation compares to Cathy’s cultural points of view. But there is also the MP3 space (or time) storage. You can find opportunities everywhere- sometimes they’ve simply been downsized and disguised, making them harder to realize. Cathy has both of these down, and she learned how to utilize them early on in such a proficient manner that she blossomed richly enough for some of her wealth of life to overflow and nourish me. It may be corny, but it’s accurate.

Ultimately, Cathy has taught me lessons I will never forget, lessons I hope someday I, too, will be able to pass on to an idolizer in future years. You see now why I’m so eager every year to pile into the car and take that merciless trip? It’s worth every questionable gas station bathroom along the way. Oh, one more thing; I can still get up at four in the morning, put on workout clothes, and go lead an aerobics’ class that can exhaust students in their twenties.