

On Being Bicultural

by Florence On

Dr Florence On (1943 – 2007) served as a Pediatrician at Taitung Christian Hospital for two decades. She bonded deeply with the land and people; half of her ashes were buried in Taitung. Florence only began to reflect on her TCK identity a year before she was called to her eternal home. Though in great physical pain, her soul found peace and an anchor as she penned her story, slowly and painfully. In January 2007, with a brother's help, her long story was done to her satisfaction. Florence left us this gift which she could only imagine its significance.

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Nowadays, it is not unusual to see mixed racial couples and their offspring on the streets of the cities of North America. Usually not even a glance is thrown their way, unless it is to admire their unusually good-looking children. In fact, now, marrying interracially may not necessarily imply a bicultural union as well, because often the man and woman, if they are 2nd or 3rd generation North Americans, share the same cultural heritage, even if not the same skin color. That was not the case when I was born.

My father was a new Cantonese Chinese immigrant to the U.S., my mother from a 1st generation Spanish family in New York. So I was not only of mixed race but also bicultural, and in those days, at the end of WWII, a so-called “half-breed”. Many states including Virginia didn’t allow interracial marriages, and even in urban northeast U.S., it was difficult. Both my parents were baptized Christians, but had to search before finding a minister who was willing to marry a mixed racial couple. None of my mother’s family attended the wedding. There were only 6 guests including the best man and the bridesmaid.

My father was the dominant cultural influence in our home, especially when we lived in New York City near his relatives in Chinatown. We would meet our “Uncles and Aunties” for Noodles or Dim Sum every Sunday after church. My father taught us to respect and obey our elders, our teachers, the importance of education, doing well in school, and of course family was most important. I, as the eldest child, was expected to set a good example to my younger siblings, and if they misbehaved, it was also my fault. He often instructed us with Confucian sayings. Since he was a great cook, we had Chinese meals (3 dishes and soup) for supper, and all of us children used chopsticks since age 3 or 4. We were discouraged from talking during meals as my father wanted the quietness to appreciate the food, and maybe also felt

that children's chatter was not proper, as he had been taught at home in China. Sometimes I longed to have warm conversations at meals like my American friends. Discipline was harsh.

My mother was responsible for our spiritual upbringing. She made sure we went to church and Sunday school. She read the Bible and prayed with us every evening, and helped us memorize many Psalms. She also encouraged us to read books and took us to the library weekly until we were old enough to walk there by ourselves.

I was the first of 5 children born over a period of 14 years, and maybe the difficulties of being both of mixed race and bicultural were more pronounced in the 50s and early 60s. We looked more Chinese as toddlers and young children. My teachers were kind for the most part, though there were a few specific episodes of racism in 3rd grade elementary school when a teacher discriminated against myself and a boy from Eastern Europe. Once, I was not feeling well and told her. She put me in the coat closet for a while, thinking that I was disobedient. When she took me out I still kept my head on my desk. I was sent off to the principal, who established I had a high fever and sent for my mother. Our doctor diagnosed scarlet fever. (This teacher was later fired for alcoholism and being drunk in school).

My father had a Chinese hand laundry and a Chinese gift shop. Sometimes the neighborhood children would run by the laundry, throwing stones at the window, yelling:

*“Chink Chink Chinaman, sittin’ on the fence,
Tryin’ to make a dollar out of 15 cents”*,

among other epithets. After school we spent most of our time in my father's store doing homework, helping out, serving customers, and delivering laundry etc. Working in my father's store also made me feel so different from other children. However, I remember being comforted in Jr. High because a pretty German / American girl named Ingrid used to walk home from school with me. Her parents owned the German delicatessen across the avenue from our store and they also lived behind their shop, where she and her brothers helped out after school.

My sister, who is 4 years younger than I, and who during her school years never verbalized any dissatisfaction with our upbringing, began, after she was grown and married, to bemoan our underprivileged childhood circumstances, my father's frugality, and his form of discipline, etc. She expressed the lack of affection our father showed us as children. True, when we were toddlers and until we started school, my father would hug us, lift us up on his lap, and play with us, but not after school age. Also, my father never praised us, even when we did well in school, sports, or music. It was always “you can do better”. If our grades were B + 's we were to get A's. If A's, then we were to get A + 's. He was distant and feared. My sister felt that my father favored my brother (who was 11 months younger than I). I never thought that to be the case. If anything, my brother bore the brunt of harsh discipline and sometimes corporal punishment for disobedience or school problems. All of us were encouraged to get higher education, despite the fact that my father only had a Jr. high school education in China. He was most unlike other Chinese of his generation who believed it was a waste to educate girls.

Though Chinese in general don't celebrate the birthdays of children, but only do so beginning the venerable age of 60, it was remarkable that my dad did celebrate our birthdays. (In Taiwan many of my friends, colleagues, my age or younger had never celebrated their birthdays!). He showed his love by cooking for us. We were allowed to choose any dish we wanted for our birthday dinner. My choices were squab and sharks fins soup (the squab ordered in from Chinatown ahead of time by my uncle, the sharks fins from the American neighbors who were hobby fishermen).

Since I had already been to Malaysia and then Taiwan on short term missions trips when my sister started complaining, I remember telling her that in Asia, many Chinese families lived behind or above their shops, the children were expected to help out after school, and were seen running in and out. The lack of expression of outward affection and praise, and the harsh discipline, seemed to me to be common among Chinese fathers. If we had been brought up in Asia, we would have been the norm!

There were many things that troubled me as a mixed race child. Every school year we had to fill out a form and check off whether we belonged to the category: white, or colored. I was never sure what to do. When I was about 8 or 9, our family drove to Virginia to visit a cousin of my Dad's who wanted to sell him his family restaurant. While stopping to eat at a diner, I had to go to the bathroom, but didn't know whether to go to the "White" or "Colored" one. If I went with my mother, I could go to the one with the sign "White". But my mother didn't need to go, and I couldn't explain my distress to her. My Dad was quite interested in buying the restaurant, but a sheriff in the town (friend of my uncle) advised him not to. My uncle and aunt were both Chinese. However, in Virginia mixed race marriages were illegal, and if my father died, my mother would not be considered his legal Wife and we would be "bastards", unable to inherit.

For a time I secretly despised my mother in my heart for marrying my Dad and bringing all that turmoil upon me. Now, of course, I am deeply ashamed of these childhood feelings. She was a good mother to me when I was in elementary school and Jr. High, and she herself had many problems adjusting to my dad and his alien culture (and vice-versa). I asked myself why she should marry a Chinese. One day my brother and I were going through my Mom's things and found her High School graduation autograph book. There was one entry by a classmate:

*"Red, blue, yellow and pink
May you never marry a chink."*

My brother and I looked at each other with distress, wondering why my mother didn't heed the warning. We never said another word about it. There were very complicated feelings in my heart, for though I was ashamed of being half Chinese, still, I felt deeply the injustice of my father's inferior social status due to race. I noticed the way sometimes his customers, the church people, and my mother's friends ignored or looked down on him or her.

As my features grew less Asian, I wanted to hide my origins, but it was impossible because of the association with my father's Chinese laundry. I had numerous clashes with my parents because I didn't want to work in the front of the store and be seen by customers; there was seldom work in the back of the store for us children except in the evening. My parents thought I was lazy and I could never bring myself to explain to them the real reason. I just wanted to be like everyone else and not be "different", which I later found to be the cherished desire of many immigrant or bicultural children.

All throughout my school years, I was very quiet and shy, and lacked the self-confidence of typical American students, and although I did participate in some intramural sports and other school activities, I never felt like "part of the gang", but always like an outsider. I didn't know how to "let go", to crack jokes, and I didn't understand the typical humor of Americans.

In college, things changed. Though still a quiet and shy person, I made my first real friendships and belonged to a clique of academically minded students, who were fun and outgoing and loved music. The small college I attended was quite monoethnic: there were only 2-3 blacks and 1-2 students of Asian background, but none of them were in my class. Separated from the stigma of my father's Chinese hand laundry, I simply ignored the Chinese part of myself and my non-typical background seemed to concern

no one else. Even when I attended Harvard Graduate School to obtain my Masters degree in language and literature, I lived in a very monoethnic dorm and never befriended any Asian Americans. It was a time of my life when the Chinese part of me was dormant. I concentrated on my Spanish / European heritage. It was at that time that I became a Christian and was influenced greatly by thinking Christian Americans who had been brought up in Europe and were also “different”.

At this point I want to explain why I rebelled completely against Christianity, secretly during my H.S. years and overtly during my college years. I didn't become a Christian until I was 21. In my childhood, I noted that many of the people in the large monoethnic churches, which we attended from my 4th grade onwards, didn't accept my father. They practically ignored him for the most part. He must have felt strange... my mother would linger on to talk with friends after the service, and my Dad and I would walk home immediately. In my Jr. High years, he began to attend the evening service instead, and I went with him. We would sit in the back, and were the first to leave, in order to avoid any uncomfortable social rebuffs. Later (when I was in college) my parents found a small church where there were several races represented, and he felt at home. The hypocrisy of Christians unsettled me, particularly regarding racism. There were many churches that still preached that marrying a person of another race was against God's will.

One of my roommates in college was a Christian girl from the South We argued often about whether the blacks were inferior and should be separated from the whites (her opinion). I spent a weekend with this friend and attended her large and beautiful church in Virginia. It just so happened that the Sunday I attended, a black family entered the church to worship, and were told to leave. I felt extremely uncomfortable and wondered whether if the church elders knew I was half-Chinese, I would be kicked out too. I scorned the various Biblical texts used to support the racial inferiority theories and injustice.

Later at Harvard I came to believe in Christ and realized that it wasn't the actions of so-called Christians that I should look to, but follow the example of Christ and His Word and the true Christians I encounter. I remembered a few godly professors at college, like our choir director Dean Arlton. He was a composer, music teacher, and role model, especially for our concert choir. Every Easter we traveled around in the NE U.S. and Canada for 2 weeks giving concerts of spirituals and classics. When we were asked to sing in 2 large prestigious churches and on the radio, but were to exclude our 2 black choir members (a bass and alto with beautiful solo voices for our spiritual pieces), as blacks were not allowed in the churches, Dean Arlton immediately refused. With these thoughts of holy men / women and the supreme role model of Christ, I came to a spiritual peace, though I still had many racial and cultural issues to grapple with.

When I went to Germany in 1968 to study medicine, I experienced a profound and bitter emotional upheaval. Looking back, I now recognize that what I went through was a deep culture shock. I had never heard the term “culture shock” then. This term, describing the phenomena of cross-cultural experiences, was coined by a Finnish / Canadian anthropologist in 1954 and wasn't in current usage yet. Since I had studied German language and culture in college, I went to Germany with knowledge, but idealizing its culture, its music, literature, art, as the height of European civilization. I soon found out that even though WW II ended 20 years before, there was still a deep vein of Nazism and racist thinking in Germans, especially among those 45 years of age or older. Some of our professors in medical school had a known Nazi past and were even on the “Brown list” (a list of active Nazi participants who committed crimes against humanity). They were prejudiced against foreign students and since many of our exams were oral, foreigners could easily be failed. One of the worst Nazi professors was an intelligent anatomist who gave lectures on Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo's anatomical drawings; a cultured man, but one who hated foreigners. I had to suffer under his tutelage and was failed by him on one important exam that could have ended my days as a medical student if I didn't, on my repeat oral exam by him, have the

support of the head of the Anatomical Institute and the Student Union President as witnesses.

When riding on the bus, the older Germans would often single out foreigners loudly and say: “there are too many foreigners, if Hitler was still alive, you wouldn’t be here...” etc. Even educated people like my German friend’s parents, after drinking a few beers, would start talking about how great the Nazi times under Hitler were. We foreigners were often unable to rent a room or get jobs, because there would be signs on the cards of the University bulletin board advertising for part-time jobs or rooms stating “no foreigners wanted”. Sometimes on the phone I would say “I’m an American” and would go for the job interview or to see a room, and would be told, “but you’re not American, you must have been born someplace else, Asia or South America.” In the line-ups at the butcher’s or deli or bakery I would often be ignored and / or pushed to the back of the line.

The Germans of the younger generation were not usually racist and were in fact rebelling against the ideas of their parents. But most of the German students turned to Socialism and Communism and were avidly anti-religious and anti-American, not just anti-Vietnam War. There were lots of sit-ins and protest actions. I felt as lost among them as I had felt in high school. So if I was discriminated against by the older generation of Germans for my olive skin and “exotic” looks, I was also criticized by fellow students for being a typical capitalist Christian American (disregarding the fact that our family existed below the poverty line). As my German language became more fluent, I would sometimes retaliate by asking the German students to look at the way their own country treated foreign students and “guest” workers.

It seemed like I could not tolerate remaining in Germany. I was not accepted for either of my heritages. I became very bitter and depressed. My disillusionment was profound. Were it not for the fellowship of the Inter Varsity Christian group on campus, where there were German as well as foreign Christians from all over the world, I’m sure I would have become deranged. I spent many hours together with fellow Christians, talking, making music, studying the Bible and discussing all sorts of topics including literature and politics and how they relate to Christianity and to living a Christian life. We prayed together, went on retreats in the mountains, organized University lectures by Christian professors in Germany, attended concerts in the great churches in the city, worshipped together, and reached out to the alienated among the students.

It was during this time that I made friends with Asians: Chinese Indonesians, Koreans, Taiwanese, Japanese, and found that although we were from different countries, I had more in common with them in terms of humor and social interaction, than I had with many of the Europeans, the Germans, British etc. All these influences calmed me and when I finished my studies and internship, most of the bitterness and identity crisis I went through were abating. I also was beginning to see myself as a Chinese American, not one or the other.

My return to North America was a relief, and my Pediatric training was in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. We had many fellow Interns and Residents who were overseas Chinese. We seemed to click instinctively and I became close with many Malaysian, Singaporean, and Hong Kong Chinese. Our sense of humor, the way we related to each other socially, and our interests were similar (except that I liked sports and mountain activities, and few of the other overseas Chinese did). I loved to cook and we shared our recipes. I could cook delicious soups, like shark’s fins and bird’s nest, and even crispy squab, as my father had taught me, and they in turn taught me how to make Hainan Chicken, Shanghai cold noodles, curries, etc.

In 1981, when China was just opening up to Western tourists, I arranged for my father, mother, cousin, and I to go on a group tour to China for 18 days. My father was thrilled to be returning to the land of his birth after 45 years in the U.S. Although we were not able to visit his poor home village in the Pearl

River Delta, we did spend some days in Guangdong province. There, my father could speak his dialect (Toisan) and Cantonese to some extent. In the other places we visited, he would communicate with the Mandarin speaking locals by writing Chinese characters and receiving the written answers. He enjoyed himself thoroughly, and as for me, I was also amazed to be in Asia for the first time. I took hundreds of slides and photos. I went through a period of admiring everything Chinese, its history and culture. I read many books about Chinese history and the translated classics. I was proud of my Chinese heritage, but yet I knew my roots were not really in China, so I began to read literature by North American Chinese like Jade Snow Wong, Wayson Choi, Maxine Wong Kingston and felt a resonance, a realization “that’s partly who I am, many of their experiences are my experiences too” (even though the authors were mainly of pure Chinese and not mixed racial origin).

I think my father, after so many years in the U.S., also felt alienated from his birthplace and culture, though he was happy to have had the opportunity to step foot on his land of birth again. It was on a Thanksgiving Day after that trip, that our family was all together in New York at the dinner table when my father indicated he wanted to speak. This was extremely unusual for him. In front of us all, including in-laws, he expressed his apologies for being such a stern, unaffectionate, and distant father. He said that the only way he knew to bring up children was from his own experience as an orphan, raised in a poor farming village, where conditions and discipline were harsh. He said that after living in the U.S. for so many years and observing the way Christian American parents raised their children, he felt there was a much better way to raise children than he had done, We were all in tears, knowing how difficult it was for him, (especially with his deeply ingrained Chinese cultural mindset of not losing face and not apologizing) to speak his regrets to us.

My reason for going into medicine was to help others and to serve. I wanted to be like the fine G.P. and Pediatrician who came to do house calls when we children, especially my brother David, who has Down’s syndrome, were ill. I had long investigated the possibilities of being a missionary doctor, so I would have more opportunities to touch the body as well as the soul of those less fortunate than myself. I felt that although I had gone through many emotional and psychological trials, I had come through relatively intact. I was healthy and lived simply, and had been given the gift of intelligence and an education. The best way to thank God for these gifts was to pass this thankfulness on to others.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer influenced my thinking a lot. Initially I thought of South America, because I could speak Spanish, but I learned from other missionaries that I would have to take medical exams in Spanish before being permitted to work in most SA countries. I had just completed German, Canadian and American Exams, so I was not inclined to go through that stress again. I looked for other avenues of service after I finished my Pediatric training. I had the opportunity to go with a Christian relief organization to help out in the Vietnamese refugee camps of Malaysia for 6 months in 1982. I was first required to take an orientation course in Seattle with speakers from Seattle Pacific University, anthropologists, theologians etc. That was when I first learned the terms “cross-cultural”, “culture shock”, received an introduction to missiology, and learned how to live as a Christian in another culture. I enjoyed that course so much and it seemed to awaken me to the riches of a bicultural heritage.

Those 6 months in Malaysia, where I was Medical Officer in charge of a refugee camp in Sungei Besi with about 2000 refugees, many of them Chinese / Vietnamese, and where I did brief clinics on the receiving island of Pulau Bidong, I never felt any kind of culture shock. From the first morning I awoke to see the mists over mountains and palm trees, I was so entranced and happy, excited to be able to serve as I had always wanted. But I realize that things were made easy for me. First of all, we didn’t live in the refugee camp itself. The Malaysian Government would not allow it. Our team lived on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur in 2 large apartments. Our team consisted of young men and women volunteers, all Christian Americans, and 2 retired American Vietnamese missionaries. We got along well together.

Everyday we were driven in the Red Crescent Society (Red Cross equivalent) or United Nations jeeps / trucks to the camp and back. We had pretty good Vietnamese / English interpreters, and the Malaysians who helped the personnel and us spoke good English.

In the evening we would seldom cook, but roam the streets and buy food from hawkers of many different nationalities. We ate curries on banana leaf, ngan, char kwei tiao, sate, laksa, chendol; we tried as many different foods as possible. Other than the heat, which I didn't tolerate well, I felt at home as I had never felt before. The church I attended (we were not allowed to attend the Vietnamese Sunday services in the camp except on special occasions) was a Presbyterian church with a mixed ethnic congregation, worshiping in English. I could hardly believe that they had 3 manual pipe organs, which the Malaysians had disassembled and hidden underground during World War II to prevent the Japanese from destroying it. I had taken 4 years of classical organ lessons and was overjoyed by the opportunity to be able to play for the Easter service, when the regular English organist was on vacation. (Where I lived in Canada there were few real pipe organs and no opportunities to play.) How could I not feel at home in a place where there were so many inexpensive delicious foods, lovely people of many ethnic backgrounds, and a good team to serve with, Culture shock was not a possibility!

In 1983, the opportunity came to serve as a Pediatrician in a mission hospital for mainly aboriginals in rural Taitung, Taiwan. When I received the invitation, I started learning Mandarin in earnest. Previously, I had already learned many characters over the years, but could not speak a word of Mandarin, only a bit of Cantonese, closer to my father's dialect. It was a small 50-bed hospital and I was to care for all the infants and children on the wards, in the OPD and Emergency room. I can truly say that I had very little time to learn more Mandarin or to absorb much Chinese culture. I lived with a lovely American nurse anesthetist, Carol Gunzel, who generously shared her apartment. This apartment was in a compound, which housed 3 apartments for single expatriate missionaries and an elementary school for missionary children. I spent most of my time in the hospital running from one emergency to the other, resuscitating newborns in the nursery, starting cut-downs on severely dehydrated and moribund infants, and doing exchange transfusions for intensely jaundiced neonates. Many of our little patients were referred from other hospitals as there were no other Pediatricians in the county, and the condition of the patients was serious. Since I often had to stay in the hospital all night, I was given a room across from the nursery, which I could use when I had critically ill patients. I can truly say sometimes I was working at least 120 hours / week.

A few of the national nurses spoke English, and I also had a national interpreter during the day who followed me around on my rounds, in OPD, in the Emerg. Dept. etc. The lack of language ability did cause me some frustrations, as well as the fact that the equipment and training of the young aboriginal nurses were not always what I was used to in Canada. On one hand, they were bright, lovely, and cooperative, and it seemed to me that I could help them improve, expand their skills, and increase their knowledge. I launched a series of classes on neonatal and pediatric topics and skills.

Although at times I struggled with relating to hospital authorities, I still wanted to return to Taitung, not just because of the medical and spiritual needs, but to encourage the aboriginal staff. It was a commitment out of this compassion for the underdog, wanting to stand together with them. Over the years God has enabled me to encourage some of them, and lift them from their feelings of inferiority. Some of these beloved co-workers have indeed gone on to obtain further education, university degrees and higher positions, and one even became a cross-cultural missionary.

I often felt torn between the circle of western missionaries versus that of the tribal nurses. I longed to get to know the local people with the little free time I had. I was disillusioned with the perhaps unconscious paternalism exhibited toward the nationals and overseas Chinese by some of the missionaries

I otherwise admired and respected. I had some trouble adjusting to the worship style, religious language, and fundamentalist subculture as well. This presented a deeper adjustment to a Western subculture than to the local culture.

Fortunately God gave me the friendship of a wonderful, understanding overseas Chinese / American couple, Dr. Titus and Helen Loong and their daughters, who prayed with and for me, opened their home to me and advised me in many situations. Also, an older American medical couple, Dr. and Mrs. Tucker, were a great support to me, spiritually, emotionally and in medical questions. Dr. Tucker, a Harvard graduate, was born in China of 2 missionary doctors. Gradually, I was able to span 2 graduate worlds and make a few Taiwanese and Aboriginal friends. Titus and Helen gave me a plaque with a verse that was to be my inspiring verse as a missionary doctor: I will put my Spirit on my servant and he will bring justice to the nations - Isaiah 42: 1.

After 7 months in Taiwan, I returned to Canada and practiced for a short time. Then I was off to Taipei to study Mandarin for 8 months at the Taiwan Normal University, looking towards future possibilities of further service in a Taitung. I disliked the large, crowded, polluted city of Taipei, which seemed to me to have no aesthetic qualities, and very few trees and greenery. The people of Taipei were unfriendly for the most part, not like the people of Taitung.

When in 1988 I was again asked to help out in Taitung, I was glad to do so. For the next 9 years, I spent about ½ of each year in Taiwan serving at the mission hospital, and ½ of each year in Canada, practicing medicine in Canada to support myself and my ministry in Taitung. During that time, since I was going back and forth, I didn't seem to have feelings of cultural displacement. My Mandarin improved and I had made many local friends. I would cringe whenever the expatriates would get together and complain about all sorts of things and issues that bothered them about Taiwanese or Aboriginal culture. I did not experience the emotional upheaval of several short-term missionaries who developed culture shock. I was less than humble; in fact I was secretly proud that I had never yet experienced true culture shock in Taiwan. Why should I, being half-Chinese and exposed to Chinese cultural influences from birth! I was to be proven wrong.

Beginning in 1998, I was given a stipend by the newly nationalized mission hospital in Taitung, and therefore I didn't need to spend half of each year practicing medicine in Canada to support my service in Taiwan. I never thought I would have problems adjusting culturally, just coping with the usual medical and professional difficulties and frustrations. I came closer to my Taiwanese and Aboriginal colleagues and deeper friendships developed. For the first time I felt the frustrations of feeling the differences in our cultural backgrounds. It was not the lawless driving, or the disregard for the rules or any of the other typical complaints of the expatriates that bothered me deeply. I discovered that the closer I got to a person in friendship, the more our cultural differences interfered and caused misunderstandings.

For example, I discovered that the Taiwanese and the Aborigines (from which group I had the most friends) regarded friendship in an entirely different way. It was often hard to understand them and their social excuses. They would call at the last moment to break an appointment and just explain that "something had come up" ("Wo yo shih").

It seemed that they had a low commitment to friends but a high commitment to the large extended family that often overruled everything else, even if they were Christians. For example, if a 2nd or 3rd Uncle whom they had never seen or hadn't seen for 10 years, died, they would rush off to the funeral, a 4-5 hour or more drive away, or attend the wedding of the child of a 4th cousin whom they had met once, forgetting their promises / commitments to friends or to the church. The extended family being huge, this would often occur. An Aboriginal pastor's wife (former Pediatric Nursing Head at our hospital), who

became a close friend, Helen Swun, once explained these difficulties to me in regards to church life.

Westerners including myself often admire the Chinese for their kinship and family commitments. Indeed it is sometimes touching to see how the young care for the older generation. But I have experienced the flip side of this sometimes rigid regard for family among my friends and colleagues that cause them great hardship. For example, often a whole family, most of them hardworking and trying to get ahead, and to get an education, would practically have to bankrupt themselves to pay off the gambling debts of a profligate and philanderer. I know a Pastor who cosigned a mortgage with his irresponsible and dishonest brother against the wishes of his wife. When the brother later refused to pay the mortgage, the Pastor was left with a huge debt, and had to sell his own house and move into an apartment. Meanwhile, the brother and his wife, who had both been working, bought a new house with their own money. It would pain and anger me to see my friends having to support other family members and their children's education, because the latter refused to get a job, or would drink his / her earnings away.

We all occasionally use social "lies" to prevent others from being hurt, or even to protect ourselves. The Taiwanese seemed masters and frequent users of this type of social evasion, which was often used to avoid causing others or themselves to lose face. But sometimes this type of dishonesty caused more harm... another point of difference that I tried to accept, and to understand the meaning "behind the spoken language".

The Taiwanese / Aboriginals seemed to become angry if they themselves were proven wrong. They would rarely apologize, even for an obvious mistake. I didn't understand this reaction until a Filipino / Chinese Surgeon pointed it out to me. It was difficult to reconcile under these conditions sometimes. An apology for an obvious wrong was never offered.

I enjoyed the warmth of the aboriginal personality, which was closer to my Spanish heritage, as opposed to the pragmatic, less emotional relationships with the Chinese Taiwanese. It seemed easy to become friends. However I sometimes experienced, (as Dr. George Lesley MacKay, the famous Canadian missionary to Northern Taiwan expressed in his autobiography "From Far Formosa", when describing the difference between Taiwanese and Aboriginals) that the emotions were short-lived and shallow.

Something I finally understood was a difference in entertaining friends. To us from the West, it is considered an honor to be invited to someone's home, to join the family, and eat food specially prepared by the hostess / host. But the Chinese must show respect by inviting their friends out to a restaurant, and usually in larger groups; the more noise the better. So, while I would love to invite a couple and their children, or a few friends to my apartment and cook for them, I felt that they didn't consider this as highly as if I asked them out to a restaurant. (Even though they liked the food I cooked and all the dishes were always clean!). They would have to have many guests, whereas I preferred to only have a few, so we could talk in depth and become closer, helping each other by sharing in a quiet environment. Almost every time I invited friends, they would ask, "Who else is coming"? I would never ask such a question, which to my mind was impolite.

The closer I came to someone in friendship, the more I realized the gaps in our understanding of each other. In fact I could say, the closer the friendships, the more misunderstandings occurred. Sometimes I was deeply hurt; it is also probable that I hurt others, but the culture seemed not to allow for frank discussion of problems. However, I was able to discuss my hurts honestly with Helen Swun, and she helped in my appreciation of our differences and in accepting them.

I learned humility and forgiveness of self and others along my life's journey toward self-acceptance and self-understanding, and I have found a comfortable identity. As one grows older, one realizes that the

identity crises that one goes through, the process of finding oneself, and accepting who one is and where one came from, though sometimes excruciatingly difficult, brings wisdom and compassion. Gradually, one realizes that whether one is of monoethnic background, or a bi- or tricultural, or multiracial origin, there are riches that God gives each one, in order that we may be distinct. I thank God for sending so many special friends my way, and mentors of different races and nationalities who have helped me along the difficult path of finding myself. Ultimately, the most important thing is to become what God created us to be, persons who will serve and help bring Christ's justice, love, and hope to others whom we encounter.