

Steamboat

by Liu Li Wei

Liu Li Wei followed his missionary parents to Thailand when he was in fifth grade. For eight years, he lived and went to school in Chiangmai. When he graduated from high school, it was his clear intention to return to Taiwan for university. Throughout this process, he has experienced God's grace. He is graduating from Tung Hai University majoring in Fine Arts. His parents are with Care Ministries International.

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Hello, everybody! I am a junior at Tunghai University, Taiwan, majoring in Fine Arts. My name is Liu Li Wei. I am a MK (missionary kid) who has lived in Thailand, which is famous for steamboats. My life is somewhat like a pot of hot with lots of ingredients mixed in it. I grew up in many cultures. I consider myself to be a standard multicultural missionary kid.

When I was very young, one day after children's service, the preacher asked, "Who would like to trust in Jesus Christ?" I raised my hand and said, "I would like to trust in Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is very special and precious to me.

When I was in kindergarten, my father studied theology in Hong Kong. I have beautiful memories of Hong Kong. When I was in fifth grade, my parents felt that God was leading them to Chiangmai, Thailand to be missionaries. They asked me how I felt about it. Then, the three of us prayed together. They brought me, a ten-year-old child, with them to Chiangmai to seek the guidance of God. To me, this was very abstract. I asked my mother, "Why hasn't God led us to Hong Kong to be missionaries?" However, God was humorous. When my father asked me what I thought of Chiangmai, God allowed me to think about Minnesota where our family went to visit my uncle. The scenery and street decorations in Minnesota were similar to those in Chiangmai, very beautiful. This was how God eradicated the fears in my heart. Actually, I had already forgotten about this incident. Later on, my father reminded me about it. Because of my childlike answer, my parents were clearer about the guidance of God, and followed His lead.

Together, we moved to Chiangmai, Thailand, to a beautiful small town between the cities and the countryside. I enrolled in an international school where I had to learn English and Thai at the same time, which was very difficult for me. Even though my father also had a difficult time learning Thai, he spent time coaching me in English and helping me with my homework. My parents also bought me an expensive electronic dictionary to help me study. The first year was very difficult, and I ended up repeating my fifth grade. For a long time, I felt like a dummy. I would always forget or not understand the reports and assignments given by the teachers. I also misunderstood what people said and entered the wrong classroom. My parents knew that I was quite stressed.

The school's requirement of Thai language standard was not high. I spent three years learning English as a second language. In that school, I finished my elementary education and my first year of high school. In the second year of high school, I went to a new school for the children of missionaries called Grace International School. Since I just passed my English as a Second Language examination, I was the first graduating class of the new school. I spent the rest of my high school years in this school. I familiarized myself with the Thai culture and immersed myself with the local environment. In this international school for children of missionaries, I studied with students from many nations for three years.

The academic life at Grace Academy was very pleasant. Since I was shy, I found it difficult to speak English with those schoolmates whose mother tongue was English. But God allowed me have classmates from Germany, Switzerland, Korea, Japan, and Hawaii. We played basketball together and grew in our band together. I was the only Chinese, and therefore everybody in the school knew who I was. Every year we played basketball in the inter-school league for all Thailand high schools, and I was a member of our school's basketball team. When I entered the game to play, the foreign students of our school would cheer for me, by shouting "Levi, Levi." Though I was not as strong as other foreign

students, my three pointers were deadly. The team coach would send me in at critical moments to win the ball game.

During our last year, most classmates were studying for the United States Scholastic Aptitude Test and applying for universities in the United States of America. Some made plans to go back to their own country for university education; and a few wanted to stay in Thailand for further education. At that time, I was also thinking about my university education, but where? Several universities in the United States of America wrote to me, welcoming me to study there. But I had doubts and fears. I prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ whom I had trusted in since I was a child, and yet I did not know Him much. I tried to ask for His guidance. God gave me a passage from the Bible as His response. In Proverbs chapter three verses five and six, it says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." There was still one more year before I was to graduate from high school. I finally made a decision to go back to Taiwan for my university education. This was not easy, because at that time, I had already left the Chinese educational system for seven years. The Chinese I retained was from reading Chinese martial arts novels. My Chinese level made it very difficult for me to prepare myself for the university entrance examinations in Taiwan.

I had to put my trust in Jesus Christ when I prepared to return to Taiwan for my university education. I felt an ease when I trusted Jesus Christ, which I could not find in any other way. On important decisions, I asked Jesus Christ for His opinion. I deeply believed that Jesus Christ was directing me in the roads ahead. I would go where He led me. My soul was set free! I spent my senior year studying for the Taiwan exam, and I experienced the trustworthiness of our Lord. I began to have a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. I still played basketball and played my instrument in the band. After school everyday, I rode my motorcycle to the food court in a shopping center, searched out a quiet place, and sat down to study because local libraries were already closed at six o'clock in the evening. After eating a simple supper, I studied until nine o'clock and went home to have dinner, which my mother would prepare for me. Now when I think about it, if God had not helped me, I could never have made it through.

Thanks to the Lord for His grace, I was admitted to Tunghai University, Department of Fine Arts. I liked to study fine arts, but I did not have enough confidence. I learned painting in high school from my arts instructor, and that's all. I have never studied under any other artist. Now I am a junior and Fine Arts is not a difficult subject for me after all. There were various tribal groups in Chiangmai, Thailand; and growing up in Chiangmai allowed me to embrace the tribal peoples' beautiful expressions of colors, lines, and forms, with multicultural characteristics. I expressed these freely in my paintings.

What I found more difficult was my adaptation to the Chinese language and culture when I returned to Taiwan for my university education. My official identity was a local student of Taiwan, and therefore I was not given privileges of expatriate Chinese students from other countries. Whether I was at the university or church fellowship, no one considered me a foreign student. At the university, I was a freshman just like everyone else. At first, even I myself did not recognize any differences that I had from the rest.

Not until I was a sophomore at the university did I realize the difficulties I had when I discussed issues with my coworkers at the fellowship. I experienced difficulties in interpersonal relationships and communication. I was really down-hearted. Finally I realized that I had not been in Taiwan for eight years. Even though I made brief trips to Taiwan to attend high school fellowship camps of Campus Crusade, my home was Thailand. I spoke Chinese only to my parents. Some technical or special terms or words were foreign to me. In language ability, I had gone down several rungs. Actually, when I came back to Taiwan when I was a sophomore in high school, I had some embarrassing moments. One time when I was in Taipei taking the Massive Rapid Transit, the people surrounding me spoke languages that I was familiar with; a lot of them were youths like me, however, I did not understand what they were saying. I was so shocked, and for two weeks, I did not dare open my mouth to utter one word. My parents speak fluent Taiwanese, but mine is only “half and half”. When an old lady neighbor spoke Taiwanese to me, I could not understand. I smiled, nodded, and uttered, “Yes, yes.” She probably thought that this kid could only smile.

While I was in Chiangmai, I was accustomed to a slower pace of life. All of a sudden, I was pushed into the fast-paced university student life of Taiwan. I felt like everything was non-stop. No wonder every summer when I went back to Thailand, my mother thought I was fleeing from a war and coming home to recuperate.

I thank the Lord for His grace in helping me through these three years of my life in Taiwan. I have experienced, “You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.” He knew my growing up years would become like a ‘steamboat’, and there must be some deep meaning to it.