

A Bittersweet Cure

By: Kayla Lam

If you looked through the medicine cabinet in my house, the first thing that you would notice is that some of the bottles would be written in English, and some in Chinese. I grew up with Eastern and Western medicine. My childhood was full of bitter teas and sweet grape-flavored Tylenols. My mother is a licensed California pharmacist trained in Western medicine. On the other hand, my Ye-ye (paternal grandfather) was a Chinese herbal doctor who learned the art of Eastern medicine while growing up in China, which he would later teach to my father. While one half of the cupboard was lined with glass jars of dried flowers and herbs, the other half would include a neat array of bottles of pills and liquids. They were two medications from two different worlds, each with its own meaning for my family.

Life was difficult for my father and his family back in China. He and his family barely had enough money to survive. Whenever they were sick, they couldn't just buy medicine from a drugstore like today. Instead, my Ye-ye would have to use his medicinal knowledge to make them herbal medicine. My father's family took that knowledge to America with them, and my Ye-ye continued to make cures out of bitter herbs. Whenever the bitter taste hits my father's tongue, he would always say how it was like a reminder of the difficult life he left behind.

Like my father, my mother's life in China was also hard and she and her family decided to immigrate to America. Despite the strangeness in this new country, it felt like paradise to them. Though they weren't wealthy, there were so many more opportunities. When she first came, my mother had horrible stomach cramps. To ease the pain, an American doctor prescribed these small tablets for her. My mother thought they tasted so sweet, almost like fruit. To this day, whenever she is dispensing the same tablets to patients in the pharmacy, she would muse about how it reminded her of the sweet flavor of the pills she first took it as a child newly immigrated to America. It also reminded her of the bright future she saw ahead of her in America.

Eastern and Western medicine are like yin and yang, two parts of one whole. They represent the journey my parents took from China to America. They represent my past and my future. They are what defined my life as bittersweet. Most importantly, they can not be separated. When my Gong-gong (maternal grandfather) was diagnosed with cancer, he tried both chemo and herbal teas. Each individual treatment benefited him in some way that the other could not. That's what gave me the inspiration to find a cure for cancer. I want to fuse these two separate entities into one. I will work hard to get into medical school and ultimately find the cure for cancer that I believe lies in the marriage of Eastern and Western medicine.

Like my life and the journey my parents took to get me to this point, the cure will be unique. It will be a mixture of bitter Eastern medicine and sweet Western medicine. My cure for cancer will be *bittersweet*.