

# For A China More Just

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good evening! It's a great honor for me to tell the true story about what happens to my father and me in China. I sincerely appreciate that Oslo Freedom Forum has given me such an opportunity.

My name is Grace, and My father, Gao Zhisheng, was a human rights lawyer for about twenty years during which he was harassed, assaulted by Chinese police numerous times , and then was thrown into Chinese Communist Party's prison for three year. Since 2014 he has been under strict house arrest in a remote village in the hinterland China. You can read a great deal on the internet about what my father has done. So today, as I stand here in front of you, I want to tell you stories about my father that are not widely known. I want to tell you about a different side of my father, a side that only his daughter knows.

Growing up, I actually didn't get to see my father that much. He was always busy working. My mom would take me to my dad's office after school once or twice a week. I remember his office always being full of people. Some people were in wheelchairs, some were on crutches, and some were weeping. At the time, I was only 4 years old, so I did not understand what was going on. But I knew that my dad was using his "superpowers" to help them. Sometimes I saw him crying as well. He cared a lot about his clients. When I came to visit, he would pat me on my head, exchange a few words with my mom before he rushed back to his office, leaving us waiting in the lobby.

My dad was so dedicated to the people he helped. One of his clients was a elder veteran. His name was Mr. Chen. Mr. Chen had surgery after a car accident and his doctor accidentally left a piece of medical gauze(GOZ) in his body which resulted in horrific consequence. Mr. Chen tried for two years to sue the hospital but couldn't succeed due to corruption. He finally reached out to my father who was able to help him win some compensation. Mr. Chen kept in touch with my family for years. When he told my father that his peddler's bike was stolen, my father gave him the money to purchase a new one without a second thought.

My dad had chronic back pain. I remember that I once hoped him to be in pain, because it would mean that he would have to stay home for couple of days to rest, and I could spend time with

him. But he was so devoted to his clients that he would continue to go his office, even when he was in such great pain that he had to lie down on his sofa during meetings.

I asked my dad why he was so committed to his work. He said said: “In a country where law has been trampled by power, lawyers are powerless. But people come to me because they have not yet completely lost hope. Even though I cannot change their fate, I can listen to their sorrows, and offer compassion, empathy and respect. And THAT is meaningful work.”

Most of my father’s clients were pro bono. I remember the story of Zou Weiyi, who was a little boy from Liaoning province. He lost his hearing when he was only 3 months old due to medical malpractice. After 6 years of trying to get the hospital to take responsibility for the accident, his family nearly gave up before they approached my dad. Over the course of a year, my dad and his assistant travelled between Xinjiang and Liaoning on their own expenses many times and eventually he was able to win compensation for their family. After that, my dad sent money to the Zou family on Zou’s birthday and on holidays. In return, his grandmother loved my father as if he were her own son. In 2006, when the government kidnapped my dad, this elderly woman took the overnight train to Beijing. She stood outside our apartment holding a picture of my dad and cried out his name again and again until the police finally asked her to leave.

My father’s clients were victims of the Chinese government. All my life, my father was busy helping these vulnerable people with all of his energy and might. This made him a target of the government. And as I grew older, the persecution against my father intensified. I lived in constant fear of him disappearing and I often woke up to the sound of my mom, weeping. At one point, our apartment was under 24-hour surveillance. There were 8 police officers in our home at all times. They literally watched us eat and sleep. They even watched me shower. When I went to school, they followed me and beat me in front of the other students. Despite all the humiliation and aggression, what caused me most pain was the fact my fellow classmates avoided me as if I had a contagious disease.

I had nightmares from the trauma, and even started resenting my father. I remember once I was up late waiting for him to come home. I refused to sleep until I knew he was safe. When he finally walked through the doors and found me sitting on the floor, his eyes welled up. I begged him to devote himself to us; I told him that I wanted to have a father and a normal life. My father was quiet for a moment. Then he said, with tears running down his face, “give me a few more years. Then I will be the light for our family.” Whenever I think back to that moment, I feel guilty. I was too young to understand the sacrifices he was making to fight a cause greater than us.

January 9, 2009 was the last day that our family was together. That morning, I woke up and sensed an indescribable atmosphere. My dad gave my little brother a tight embrace. Then he did the same to my mother and me. I realized that we would be separated, this time maybe forever. We wept in each other’s arms. My father then walked out of our apartment. That’s the last time I saw him. Later that day, my mom, my brother and I started our journey as political refugees. Eventually, we arrived in the United States.

In my father's newly released book titled "Year 2017, stand up China," he described his perspective of what happened after we left. He went back to the empty apartment, and put our slippers outside our bedrooms as if we were still sleeping there. He refused to enter the bedroom for several days to avoid seeing the fact that we were no longer there. Later that year, he was arrested. During eight years of imprisonment, my father was physically tortured, deprived of food, and kept in solitary confinement for long periods of time. He was released in 2014 but remains under house arrest and in poor health. Today, his freedom is limited, and I still do not have regular contact with him.

I recently received a letter from my father. He wrote, "I have indeed suffered. The worst was not the physical torture but the gut-wrenching cold I suffered while being locked up in the basement of a military camp in the dead of winter. The penetrating and all-consuming cold was above and beyond any type of torture. Yet, more miserable is the longing and guilt I have toward my wife and my two children. Their suffering causes me unbearable pain. It was very unfortunate that my children were born in this country. They are even more unfortunate to have me as their father. The pain I have caused them is something that I will never be able to erase."

There are in China tens of thousands of families like mine. Eight years have passed since my escape, but in the meantime, China's situation has become even more worrisome. Today, I'm speaking on behalf of all the children who have lost their family members to political persecution in China. As a victim, as a refugee, and as a daughter, I ask you: please do not ignore the human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government. Please do not stay silent.

Thank you.

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