



A Chinese-American's Journey During the Cold War

Ox Horn Bend

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Prologue

armored vehicles rumbled into Beijing's Tiananmen Square (天安门广场) and smashed through barricades. It was June 4, 1989. Relentless army boots pounded the concrete pavement; PLA troops took aim at the massive crowd of peaceful demonstrators for democracy. "You are the People's Liberation Army! We are the people!" cried the defenseless students and workers. A moment of eerie silence . . . Suddenly, the unmistakable cracking sound of automatic weapons shattered the peace. My mother and I froze, as bloody images of carnage filled our Sony television screen. "It is difficult not to use the word 'massacre' to describe what happened,"

reported ABC's Sam Donaldson on the evening newscast.

It was calm in the San Francisco Bay Area where we had finally settled down to a peaceful life in 1978. My 76-year-old mother was just getting ready to turn in when the horrifying news came on the air. "Thank God we are no longer in Beijing," she sighed. I nodded, but my chest tightened; the very thought of the brutal dictatorship brought back memories of our miraculous escape fifteen years ago.

"I know you've been through a lot on account of Father's decision," my mother said. "And I can appreciate your frustration."

My father, Wei-hsien Tsung (宗惟贤), had served the Chinese Nationalist Government as Chinese Consul in New York City. In 1953, shortly after the Communists took over mainland China, he moved us from New York City, where I was born, back to his hometown, Beijing. It was the height of the Cold War, and this turned out to be an irreversible decision that tormented me for years.

"It's not that I don't love him. I honestly respect his patriotism," I admitted to my mother. "But look what he has put us through! And why in the world did he burn the bridges and make it almost impossible for me to return to the States?"

My mother shook her head. "Your father was a brilliant man."

"Then someone must have influenced his final decision," I said. Ever since our escape from Communist China in 1974, I had been retracing my father's footsteps, searching for answers.

"You need to move on and find inner peace," my mother advised. She was petite and slightly stooped; but here was a woman who had followed her husband to Communist China at the height of the Cold War and escaped with her son to an uncertain future twenty years later.

I glanced around my mother's room as she climbed into her bed. My eyes fell on an old black-and-white portrait of my late father sitting at his weathered Remington typewriter in Beijing. It was the last photograph of him, taken a year before the horrific Cultural Revolution took away his life. "Perhaps Mom is right," I said to myself. "I ought to find inner peace." My mind started to wander off into the distant past, searching for enlightenment.



1948 photo of my father, Wei-hsien Tsung, Cebu City, Philippines. We lived near Governor Cuenco's luxurious mansion (not shown), and right next to the Cebu American School. In the mornings, our chauffeur used to drive my father and his secretary to work, and dropped me off at school on the way. After school, I would walk home, sometimes taking a shortcut through a barbed wire fence.



“I froze momentarily and stared at the sky-high buildings and fast-moving thoroughfare of the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. I had just escaped from two decades of isolation behind the Bamboo Curtain, and I felt like a bumpkin, afraid to cross Queen’s Road, unable to open the door of a taxi, and dazzled by the neon lights, shiny limos and zooming Jaguars.”

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