

Chapel Talk
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Good evening, after the delicious Thanksgiving meal, I hope my talk won't put you to sleep.

Last March, I received a phone call from my sister, telling me that my parents were not in good health, and she was really tired of taking care of them alone for these past 10 years. I went to see Mr. Roach and asked if I could take my sabbatical to go back to Taiwan to be with my family. I was grateful for his understanding of my situation, even though it was such a short notice. He knows the importance of family, as he treats everybody in our community as his family member.

I was half worried and half excited. It was really hard for me to leave my students and advisees. I wanted to be there for them but I knew my family needed me more this time. All of these years, I was trying my best to be a good teacher, and I felt guilty for never being a good daughter or a good sister. The exciting part was, I had been away from home for 30 years, and this was the first time I would get to spend more than three weeks of summer vacation with my parents.

The first month when I went back to Taiwan, I encountered a lot of culture shock. This place I called my hometown become a strange place for me; all of the things I was familiar with were not the same anymore. I have been a teacher for so long; not being able to teach felt like losing a part of myself. I was so used to living a busy life; I didn't know what to do with all this free time. In order to feel more like myself, I started visiting Chinese departments at different colleges, attending language conferences, and networking with college professors. I thought that by keeping myself busy, I wouldn't be wasting my precious sabbatical time. I totally forgot the main reason I went back to Taiwan. Then one day I got a text message from my sister telling me that my father was in the ER while I was at National Taiwan Normal University for a conference. At that moment I could not hear any noises around me, I could only hear my heart beating so loudly. On my way rushing to the hospital, I realized nothing was more important than being by my father's side.

My father is my hero. He is the most influential person in my life. He taught me everything about how to be a decent human being. My father was the Chairman of the Law Regulation of Taiwan and the government assigned a car and driver to him. When my father had meetings in Taipei, the driver would take me to school. I remember when I was in college, one day the driver was 5 minutes late to pick me up. I was so upset: as soon as he showed up, I started to yell at him. My father sent me back to my room; he said if I didn't even know how to treat people with respect, I didn't deserve an education. He told me all these privileges I enjoyed were due to his

contribution to our country, not because of me. I needed to earn my own privilege and respect. He taught me to appreciate everyone that worked hard to make my life easy. He taught me no one is better than anyone else - we just contribute in different ways. He taught me to treat everyone with dignity, without prejudice.

Since I came to SAS in 2006, all I ever cared about was becoming a good teacher that my students deserved. I spent 6 years writing a series of textbook with four other teachers. Every Christmas break, I would be writing lesson plans while my husband took my two sons for a ski trip. Every Spring break, I would be conducting teacher training workshops or writing curriculum for another high school while my husband took care of my boys. I was so busy, I forgot that my boys were growing up every year, without me being there for them. For 9 straight years, I didn't go back to Taiwan to visit my parents so that I could conduct more teacher training programs and student summer camps. I was so busy, I forgot that my parents were getting older and weaker every year without me being there for them.

There was one afternoon, I was sitting in the living room with my parents chatting. I was telling them I travelled to 23 states, 31 cities to give presentations or to do training workshops over the past 12 years. I thought they would be so proud of me; but my mom said, having me sitting there talking with them was her happiest moment. I looked at my mom in confusion. The woman who taught me to be strong, to be independent, to be diligent, to endure hardship, to give without holding back, was happy just because I spent time chatting with her? I thought they wanted me to be successful, so I worked very hard to meet their expectations.

When I finally got to the hospital, seeing my father lying in the ER in pain made me realize no fame or fortune can be more important than my parents' health. I am willing to trade everything I have in exchange for their health. Then I realized what my mom meant in that afternoon: that all they ever wanted for me, was just to be safe and healthy. Because that's all I ever want for my children as well. I would love to see them live up to their full potential, but I also want them to know when to stop, when to ask for help, and how to live a balanced life. If I have to pick between their achievements and their health, I would choose their health without any hesitation. But I failed my parents' wish.

My health started to go downhill a couple of years ago. I would have to go to the bathroom in the middle of class to vomit. My students would pack up my bag and force me to go home, and they would give themselves work so I wouldn't be worried. I came back to class the day after my surgery because I didn't want to cancel any classes. I thought that I was being professional, but I was just abusing my body. My husband told me there are thousands of Chinese teachers but my sons only have one mom. His words made me understand that I needed to take better care of myself. I started to turn down invitations to do presentations or workshops during

the school year. At that time, my son Evan was taking a painting class at SAS and he found it relaxing, so he suggested I paint with him to release my stress. But it just increased the amount of stress for me. I felt I was never good enough. I wouldn't stop fixing a painting until I made everything perfect.

When I was in Taiwan, I went for a checkup. The doctor said I was too young to have such high blood pressure, that I needed to find ways to lower my stress level. At that moment, I realize my sabbatical was not just for taking care of my parents, it also was for me to step back and reflect on my life.

My doctor reminded me the importance of having a rainbow diet. Balance is the key to the Rainbow Diet. For optimal health, we need a rainbow of nutrients and colors. It suddenly hit me, if the rainbow diet is good for our physical health then why don't we have a rainbow diet for our mental health? Our bodies benefit from variety. We can prioritize our life into three categories: things we must do, things we should do, and things we could do. Not everything is equally important. Make sure you have a rainbow week, do different things to change up your routines, learn new things to re-energize yourself. Enjoy being with yourself, write a journal, learn a new song, do a silly dance, take a walk, enjoy this beautiful campus, be your own best friend. It's all about knowing your own worth.

In Taiwan, my parents' house doesn't have WiFi, so I learned to live without internet. I learned to slow down. I learned less is more. I took painting classes to improve my skill, I learned to enjoy the process and to not stress so much about the result. What matters is what you are doing to yourself, and for yourself. Nobody is perfect; we all have our own strength and weaknesses. We all wear so many different hats in our life; make sure you wear one just for you. Make yourself a priority once in a while; it's not selfish, it's necessary.

I would like to invite all of you to take a mental sabbatical with me. Please close your eyes. Let your mind take you to a safe and stress-free place. Imagine there is a beautiful rainbow in the sky, what would your 7 colors represent? What do you choose to do in order to maintain a balanced life?

Confucius talks about self-cultivation. Self-cultivation is to clear your own beliefs and values, to define your own mindset, and to be honest with yourself. Very little is needed to have a happy life. It is all within yourself, in your way of thinking. The most important words are the ones you choose when talking to yourself. You build yourself up when your self-talk is positive, understanding, encouraging, and kind. Take a moment to build yourself up every day. When you feel good about yourself, it becomes easier to treat others well.

Only when you know how to be kind to yourself, can you be a kind friend. Only when you know how to be a good friend, can you be a good member on dorm. A healthy community comes from healthy individuals. If you

care about global warming, start by turning off the light when you leave a room, turning off the water when you finish showering. If you want to be respectful, clean after yourself, don't create more work for others. If you want to be kind, lift each other up.

I am so grateful for this community. I am grateful for all the faculty that helped me raise my sons. I am grateful for my students, advisees and colleagues that helped me grow. I am grateful to everyone helping me have a smooth transition back to SAS. SAS can be strong and uplifting when each one of us is doing our best.

At the end, I have invited my students to sing a song. This is a famous poem from Song Dynasty. The poet only hopes that the loved ones of all people can be safe and healthy - even if they are separated by thousands of miles, they still share the same beautiful moonlight. The bond we build at SAS will always be in our hearts no matter where we are. Be grateful for what you have. Most importantly, be grateful for who you are. I wish you all and your families a happy Thanksgiving break. Thank you.