

My Story
Fu-Hua Chuang
July 2021

When I was ten years old, a fire accident occurred downstairs in my house. I could not be able to escape in time and thus inhaled too much smoke. Carbon monoxide poisoning caused permanent impairment to my body. At that time, I had been fallen into a coma for nearly four months. Slowly I regained my consciousness afterwards. I woke up, finding myself lying in bed with complete darkness in front of me. I tried to scream but found that I could not even voice out. All of a sudden, the world was an abyss and nor was I out of it.

A long long road in darkness, it is love that lights up the way.

Twenty-seven years ago, the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) services and knowledge were about to develop; thus, information in this field was still scarce. My Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) tried every attempt to meet my needs for communication. After investigating research from abroad, she found that the Mandarin Phonetic Symbols (Bopomofo) could be programmed into codes. With the coded phonics, I was then able to express myself. This communication method endowed me the freedom of expression. I felt like breaking out of the confinement. My life turned into a new page when I finally had the ability to freely express what I thought. I was no longer limited by the binary Yes/ No answers.

One day, my SLP asked me, “The Assistive Technology Engineering Lab is holding a conference in National Taiwan Normal University. Would you like to go?” Absolutely YES! While in the conference, I met Dr. Shi. Dr. Shi tested my knowledge of Morse Code to see if I was as clever as he had heard of. I came there fully prepared, so I passed his test with ease. Dr. Shi promised me that, “In just one month, I will make your wish come true.”

Dr. Shi fulfilled his words. On the day of my eighteenth birthday, I received a precious gift which I had been looking forward for so long. It was sent by the Assistive Technology Engineering Lab and Dr. Shi. It was a customized high-tech ACC. With it, my voice was fully articulated. I travelled to many places, along with my AAC, to share with people my life story. This high-tech AAC has enabled every possibility in my life as it solves people’s questions about my language expression. With it, I can study in university and participate in exams. I can make friends with

more people. Thus, my world has been broadened even more wider.

In my daily life, I enjoy listening to audiobooks, which allow me to take a big leap out of my physical limitation. Inspired by those motivating stories, I have learned to write down my thoughts into words.

“I need a key,
To open the infinite spring;
I should like to become a barn swallow,
Fly up toward the
endless sky.”

My emotions have finally found an exit when I wrote about my grief into letters. I composed my stories in poetry and later published a poetry collection, *Sea, Sky, Wave*. It was well-received after publication.

My life story was also filmed in two documentaries, *Capturing Dreams in the Dark*, and *Breaking Dawn*. In 2013, there was a documentary biennial festival in Japan. *Breaking Dawn* was nominated as one of the best documentaries of the year. This documentary film captured the deepest bond and daily moments shared by my mother and I; it moved so many participants there. Meanwhile in the festival, I had a chance meeting again my Japanese friend.

Mr. Tanbata, my Japanese friend, has the similar impairment as I do. He can also communicate with people with the aid of AAC. At the time when we met, he employed the 50 Japanese phonetic syllables, while I employed Bopomofo. Aided by personal assistants, we had a good time talking to each other.

I also enjoy outdoor activities. So far, I have experienced surfing, parachuting, canoeing, and skiing. Daring these outdoor sports is no doubt a huge challenge to my courage. But I never withdraw from those difficult tasks. Certainly, I own a group of good friends who always stand by me and encourage me to dare every challenge. I would say that people who stay in their comfort zone will never understand the fun of adventures.

I heard a news one day about the Robotic Exoskeleton, which allows people with acquired paralysis to stand up and walk again. After hearing the news, I started to search for related information. The doctor of rehabilitation explained to me that this robot so far can only assist paraplegic people. For people with the total paralysis, time is the one thing we need in order to stand up again.

After the outbreak of Covid-19 ever since 2020, the world has been severely devastated. I lost my job which I had been working for 12 years. I was perplexed, wondering where to go in the future? There was a time when I was pondering my future and listening to the classical music at the same time, I came across an inspiration. I could simply go studying in Taiwan Painting Talk Association. There were teachers and friends whom I was acquainted with. Painting made me forget all my worries about unemployment. My despair was soothed because of paints and colors.

Taiwan Painting Talk Association was founded by a special education teacher, also a polio infectant. Every week, I go to the Association to study painting. I love flowers there and the breeze there. Most of all, I love people there. There are many volunteers. Some talented volunteers designed a painter's hat, special painting easel, and special brushes for me. I had enjoyed painting long before I was injured. Now my passion for painting is recollected. It is a tremendous encouragement when I realize some people collect my art work because they simply love my art. For the past 27 years, my world has turned into light from sheer darkness. Through light, now I can see a world in abundant colors. To this, I am deeply grateful. I feel a great joy simply because of painting.

AAC enriches my life, enabling me to get involved in the society as well as allowing me to go beyond my limitation. Although I have no idea if I will be able to stand up again and walk, I do believe one thing: with faith, I can bravely and steadfastly walk out a way of my own.