

# My Literacy Story

by Ting Zhang

I have been interested in reading since I was a child growing up in China. I am hungry to read many books and curious about everything I read. One day my mom pointed to the bookcases in our living room and said to me, "These are all classic books that include *War and Peace*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *The Old Man and the Sea*. When you go to middle school you will have to read them. These will be very helpful to you." I still remember her words now.

After I read, I always ask myself, "Why are they writing so well that they can touch my heart deeply? How can I write as they do?" As I found some sentences and paragraphs that I admired, I would mark them down. As time went by, I learned to write my journal. My father, a teacher of Chinese literature in a college, found me interested in writing. He said, "Every day you should write down something—even just a few words." I followed his suggestion and day after day, I progressed. Then he taught me how to be a good observer of everything that happened around

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me. My writing was vivid and my thinking ran so quickly that I wouldn't stop. I enjoyed writing and every semester I received awards in student writing contests. While I was

growing up, my dream was to be a journalist. However, while my writing was improving, unfortunate things occurred in my country—the Cultural Revolution was rising up. It was a very serious and frenzied period of time. Under these circumstances, I had an extremely difficult realization: I must burn all my journals by myself before the Red Guard trespassed in my home. I looked at my journals in the flame and bitter

tears were running down my cheeks. At that moment, I felt my dream would be broken and I couldn't clearly say a word! I nearly lost my balance. A few hours later, the Red Guard intruded into my home and burned all the other valuable books. I was shocked and stunned.

From that day, I stopped writing and reading for six years because I was among the hundreds of thousands exiled to the countryside for "reeducation." To the Red Guard, I was "guilty" because I was the daughter of a teacher and a doctor. I was sent to a remote village with no electricity, no traffic, no clean water, no newspaper, and no machines—not even a clock or a watch. I had no chance to read and write any more. I had no news of my family. I didn't know what happened outside the village.

Many years later, when I wanted to go to college, I remembered my lovely dream and started to write down all my ideas, plans, New Year resolutions, and feelings in my new journal. The journal was the only eyewitness of me, and a mirror to reflect myself in bygone years.

Two years ago, I came to America and lots of changes have taken place. I was frustrated like a blind and deaf person because I didn't read and write even simple words in English. Life was hard for me.

I was so lucky to find a wonderful English class in Boston at the Asian-American Civic Association. Here, the teachers were good in many ways and stimulated my study activity.

Now, even though my English is really very poor, I feel more comfortable and significant in my life because I can use my second language to read and write and communicate with others. I will have opportunities to serve other people with all I have learned.

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*Ting Zhang is a student at the Asian-American Civic Association in Boston.*