

Thank You

Feng Xue, April 4, 2015

I came home yesterday. My return has been much delayed; it was late by seven years, four months and thirteen days. It seems that my homecoming could not have happened before every possible thing that could go wrong had been exhausted. What was originally planned as a mundane business trip scheduled to last merely one month turned into much more.

It is a miracle that we have survived this ordeal. Right now, every single cell in my otherwise aching body is singing “free at last, free at last”.

My heart is filled with gratitude.

- ❖ I am grateful to my family for their love. When the disaster struck, they refused to be put asunder and chose to face it together with me. As the sky fell, my wife stood tall and looked far. She secured a private environment for our children so that they could grow up without external disturbance. She taught them to face the vicissitudes of life with calmness and resilience, and to have charity towards all and malice towards none. Our children showed courage beyond their ages. My wife and the two kids are the real heroes to me.
- ❖ Countless friends all over the world, numerous neighbors in our community, and all the teachers of our children gave my family encouragement and support. Some of them have given so much help that we felt as if they were part of the family. Professor Dave Rowley, my long time mentor and friend, never stopped believing in my character and did so much for me and my family. Mr. John Kamm, The Dui Hua Foundation, made great contributions to help improve the treatment of prisoners in China in general and of me in particular. I will always be grateful to these two individuals who provided such an important light of hope to our family. There were also others who might have pulled strings in the background, which we may never know but are equally grateful for.
- ❖ No words are sufficient for me to express my gratitude to our diplomats at the U.S. embassy in Beijing. They paid me a total of 87 visits over the years. It seemed as though the sun rose only one time every month: their monthly visits offered me an opportunity to use their normality and kindness to recalibrate my view of human beings that had been inevitably distorted by the peculiar environment I was in. I feel so privileged to have the pleasure of getting to know many of our diplomats, including Tony, Ryan, Teta, Cathy, Holly, Maria, Jane, Eilene, Audrey, Ben, Aleta, Sandra, Molly, Lori, Coby, Nina and so many others. When allowed, they always brought to me letters, magazines, books, and much needed nutrients from family and friends. I cannot imagine how I could have survived without their assistances. Ambassador Huntsman rekindled my hope of keeping at living. I came to realize with his help that seeing my children graduating from college carried more meaning than proving my innocence. Ambassador Locke, in his two visits, helped significantly improve my living conditions there. I thoroughly enjoyed the stimulating conversations with Ambassador Baucus about life, history, philosophy, among other topics. Deputy Chiefs of Mission Bob Goldberg, Bob Wang, Dan Kritenbrink went to great lengths in requesting fair treatment for me.

- ❖ I am grateful to the journalists who have been following my case from the beginning for their efforts to tell my story to the world and for their discretion in reporting, which has allowed my children to have a private environment to grow up in.

Without help from these wonderful people, we could not have survived such an ordeal, and the kids certainly would not be able to grow up so well. Therefore, we owe a great debt of gratitude to them.

- ❖ In hindsight, I should also thank those people who plunged my family and me into this agony. The anguish made us stronger as a family, gave us an opportunity to prove and further build our character, and offered us a chance to shed old baggage and start a new chapter of our lives. In addition, some in the same system tried to no avail either to declare my innocence or to secure an earlier release of me, risking their own livelihood. They taught me that the beauty of humanity can be found anywhere. I prayed for all of them every day.

I came to realize that my experience provided me with the mother lode of wisdom. It is more about how I have responded to and survived the challenge than about the suffering itself. Time will reveal that my response rather than the pain will define me as a person.

As I took my first step on the wet ground outside of the barbed-wired wall, I looked up at the sky of Beijing and said to the receding clouds: “gratitude rather than grievance.” Yet as I disembarked from the airplane and once again walked onto the Land of the Free, I recited Fyodor Dostoevsky with tears welling up in my eyes: “There is only one thing I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings.” I am starting a new chapter of my life, during which I shall make myself worthy of what I have gone through. To that end, I count on you all to continue offering me encouragement, advice and support.

I understand that many of you are interested in knowing the specifics behind my experience and that some even would like to express your views as to me based on the information that you believe to be true. I certainly appreciate the interest and respect your right to form opinions. However, please allow our family some time to start the process of recovery from this agonizing experience. I promise that I will come back to you in due time. Until then, take care.