

# A Legend and Her Extraordinary Love

Ethel Ai-Ci Hu 胡愛慈

Most people know that Dr. Hu Shiu Ying was a world-renowned scholar, a super achiever with the greatest success. I was blessed with a wonderful opportunity to experience the very personal sides of her, a wonderful grandmother figure who had the biggest heart, filled with love.

Dr. Hu was my beloved great-aunt (Gu Nai Nai 姑奶奶). Thirty years ago, I arrived from China at her doorstep in Brookline, Massachusetts. My life lessons had just begun. An Ding Tong 安定堂 (her home in Brookline) was always full of people. She opened her door to family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers. Every room including the basement was filled with long or short-term guests, visitors or students. The house was very busy, yet she managed it in an orderly fashion with food shopping, cooking, and chauffeuring people around. At age seventy-four, she was continuing her research work at Arnold Arboretum on a daily basis and she had more energy than most people less than half her age. When summer came, she drove my father and I across northern America to Maine, Canada, down to Niagara Falls, Ithaca New York, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., then back to Boston, Mass. We camped, hiked, and visited family and friends. Along the way we were filled by her powerful and contagious laugh, which permeated the entire trip. "Nature is wonderful!" she sighed. Thousands of miles were driven, and she did it all herself at age seventy-five.

Gu Nai Nai was extremely observant and sensitive to other people's needs. When winter came, she would drive my father to Brigham & Women's hospital where he was seeking advanced training at that time, and then she would drive me to school. If the school bell had not yet rung and the door was still closed, she would wait, yes wait (Dr. Hu never waits?!). She would pull out a piece of scrap paper and start teaching me English (I did not know one English word when I arrived in America). This is how I started my first ESL lessons.

My father decided to return to Mainland China to continue his medical practice after two years of training. It was a very sad day for me to watch my father leave, since we were extremely close. Dr. Hu looked carefully at my face and then said, "Walk with me, Ethel." Next thing I knew, we stood inside of *Steve's*, an ice cream parlor near Coolidge Corner in Brookline. She seldom ever would eat out at that time. "Order whatever your little heart desires, my treat!" she said. My face lit up and I broke down and laughed.

I had the privilege of living with my beloved great-aunt until leaving for college. She guided me with her faith, loved me with her giant heart, taught me with her brilliant mind, and

helped me with her firm hands. I owe all I am to her because of her extraordinary love for people and life. Thank you! I am eternally grateful and miss her profoundly.

Farewell, Gu Nai Nai, until we meet again.