



Pen-name Shizhi (index finger), GUO Lusheng was born 1948 to parents that were both soldiers of the Red Army. His given name, “born on the road,” resulted from the fact that his mother gave birth while traveling on the road. He started writing poetry when he was only ten but failed to continue education beyond middle school. A product of Mao’s campaign to reeducate the educated, he like millions of the “send-down youth” spent years in Xinghuacun village in

Shanxi Province before getting himself enlisted in the PLA in 1971 in Shandong Province, and later worked in Beijing Research Institute of Optoelectronics. More poems were written, “Recruit”, “The Song of the Erektion Soldiers”, “Lancang River, Mekong River” that reflected his military life. His published poems, including “Ocean Trilogy”, “Believe In The Future”, “Fisher Trilogy,”, “This is Beijing Stopped in Eight Past Four” etc. were widely read and well received in China. Two years later he was diagnosed for schizophrenia and hospitalized. In 1973, he was discharged by and released from the hospital, and married to Li Yalan, his wife of 7 years and the daughter of the Red Army commander Li Lisan. More poems came out: “Written In a Friend's Marriage”, a.k.a. “There is Such a Wedding”, allegedly chosen and read out loud by Chen Kaige, one of China’s famous film directors, when taking oral college entrance exam to study at Beijing Film Academy. In 1978, for the first time under the name of the Index finger, he wrote “Mad Dog” and “Love Life” to appear in a companion volume of “Believe In the Future”. In 1990, he was committed to Beijing Third Mental Hospital where he was treated for clinical depression for 20 years. In 1992, he was invited by Holland Poetry Festival and a university in the UK, but because of his health, his trip did not take place. In 1993, he joined the Beijing Writers Association; he was discharged and released from the hospital in 2002 to live at home.

## The Remorse of My Life

I was a student of Beijing Fifty-Sixth High School before the Cultural Revolution. The atmosphere of my class was the same as the general climate of schools and society at large at the beginning of 1966 when the Revolution broke out, tense and explosive in the extreme. The cliché of girls headed by kids of revolutionary cadres wanted me taken out and paraded. Because I had written poetry, liked foreign literature, and showed discontent with the existing educational system, I was among the problem-students to be disposed of at the school.

But, their attempts to make me the target of public criticism and humiliation never were successful; thanks to my passion for learning and my integrity in my dealings with others, the majority of my classmates were able to trust me, understand me and stood behind me. I remember one time these girls brought kids from other classes (most of whom from cadre-background) to “struggle against” me in the library; the meeting went nowhere since overwhelming majority of my classmates kept silent.

Then came the day when the two sides in my class clashed and became confrontational. Finding little in my past to go on, the girls found a breakthrough point in one of my classmates. The leading girl of my opposition pointed at a boy and shouted, “xxx! You were the one that introduced Guo Lusheng to join the Communist Youth League; but you yourself never stopped visiting your counterrevolutionary father in jail every week. Why haven’t you drawn a line between your father the counterrevolutionary and yourself? Guo Lusheng, did you know about this?! Xxx, stand up!” I was dumpfounded. His father had been indeed a “counterrevolutionary in the past”. I knew because he had told me about his father being in jail.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution when we were attending high school, China had just declared the “three-year hardship” to be over. Full of life and eager to learn new knowledge, we were excited at the nation’s making a turn for the better and becoming more prosperous. The boy was an outstanding student even though he was from a “bad family”. He and I would often talk about national events, encouraging each other to excel in our studies, to dedicate ourselves to the motherland, and to do whatever possible for fellow classmates and the class as a whole the same as Lei Feng. He had a lot of faith in me and told me everything about his father, including his visits of him in jail, urging him to transform himself into a new man. His father was also doing everything he could to help out the prison guards as well as his cellmates; he was well regarded for giving them haircut and cleaning after them.

I had reported to the League all of this, and the girl now accusing him should know because she was on the committee of our Youth League branch. However, my friend never told me that he had visited his father every week. Who at that time would often visit prison of all places!

In a panic mode and scared, I found myself saying to my friend, “xxx, you have never told me you would visit your father every week!” My tone of voice was harsh and resentmentful when I said it so quickly. Standing surrounded by classmates, my friend raised his lowered head and glanced at me, making eye contact from behind his spectacles, and then lowered his head again without a word.

It was then and there that I understood, the real target of the attack on him was me and my friend who was targeted and hurt because of me had a clear idea of what was happening. At the time when the situation was so tense, I became confused and lost my cool. It was not until later did I realize that no prison allowed visits every week and that the girl had made it all up to blackmail us. When intimidated and under the scrutiny of my classmates standing in shock (such information about one's family background was usually kept confidential among only the youth league members), my honest friend was wronged and yet said nothing to defend himself.

At that key moment I was unable to protect my good friend, inadvertently stabbing him from behind to get myself off the hook. From that moment on, my classmates' views of society, of our ideals, of me, and of everything we had ever talked about with passion all changed forever.

It has been over 40 years since then; although my conditions have not improved much, I am somewhat famous because of the poetry I wrote in the past four decades. In this information age, it is easy to find me; I have even been invited to the parties of the former classmates that used to be my opponents. Yet, there has not been any tiding from the boy whom I hurt out of my weakness. I don't think he would ever forgive me, wherein lies the remorse and self-incrimination of my life.

Index Finger, 2008.8

### **Her voice and smiles: my conversation with Aunt Ke Yan during the Cultural Revolution**

The news of Aunt Ke Yan's death came to my wife, Di Hanle, on December 13<sup>th</sup> from her father. Hanle was relating the news to me as she was talking to her father on the phone, telling him that the day was also my birthday. In a state of shock, I felt a sharp pang of guilt, knowing what had happened on that day. My last meeting with Aunt Ke Yan rushed through front of my eyes as if yesterday. ...



By 1968 the upheaval and chaos of the Cultural Revolution reached their worst point. It might be in September, when Qu leilei had made a date with me several days in advance to visit Uncle He Jingzhi\* to "let him take a look at your poems" in her words. When we arrived at Uncle He's, it so happened that Aunt Ke Yan was also home, an apartment on the fifth floor of a building in Mei Zha Lane near Wangfujing Blvd. (\*He Jingzhi was the playwright of the famous libretto *White Haired Girl*.)

I was reading my poems to Uncle He, and we became so into one another as he was also sharing his views on poetry. It was noon before we knew it. I used the bathroom and on my way back

saw Aunt Ke Yan making lunch (the kitchen was on the north side of the apartment, facing the front door). She was leaning against the kitchen door, smiling as she saw me and waiting for the food to cook. With Leilei and Uncle He busy talking in the other room, I started a casual conversation with Aunt Ke Yan standing by the kitchen entrance.

“I grew up listening to the poems you wrote for children: *The Secret of Hats*, *Two Generals*, I know them by heart. You should write more poems for children.”

Her smile suddenly disappeared; in a low voice she replied softly: “Ran out of steams already”.

Not even 20 years old and a red guard full of self-righteousness, I had no way of comprehending the meaning of her remark, feeling a little rejected by what she said. But I couldn't help asking “How did you write poetry?” She said, cooking at the same time, “Just like this, writing while cooking or knitting a sweater.”

“How could you create poetry like this?” I said in surprise.

As she was cooking whatever was in the frying pan she replied, “Whenever a sentence came to you, you write it down at once. Just like this.” My feeling of being dismissed abruptly receded when she turned her head and smiled at me.

“How did Uncle He write his *Song of Lei Feng*?” I pursued further, having just finished writing *The Trilogy of the Fish*, and *Trilogy of the Oceans* with great difficulty.

“He finished it by shutting himself inside this room for two weeks”, she said, nodding her head in the direction of the study in the east side.

“What about eating food?” which was one of the difficulties I had often experienced.

She said, “When the food was ready, I would put it on a bench by the door to his room; he would know when I knocked on the door. He'd come out to eat when he was hungry.”

“The food would go cold?” I asked.

“Then he had to heat it himself.”

I perfectly understood what she said. Creative writing was a hard business but poets enjoy nothing more.

Aunt Ke Yan turned her head again and said to me, “Tell them food is ready.”

I tasted Aunt Ke Yan's home-made food the first time I visited Uncle He's.

Their kids, Xiao Feng and Xiao Lei, were not home on that day, so there were only four of us eating lunch, three dishes, including a big plate of stir-fried threaded port. Delicious!

43 years have passed, but that casual conversation with Aunt Ke Yan was still vivid to my mind's eye. As I am writing all this down, I go through my thoughts time and again, to eliminate any error or inaccuracy on my part.

Aunt Ke Yan, fare thee well.

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