

**Eulogy by Tan Ser Peow, family friend and Professor, Mathematics Department, National University of Singapore**

To Mingwei, a kindred spirit.

I would like to share with you what Mingwei meant to me, and some of the many happy memories I have of her over the last twenty years.

Like many of Tarn How and Li Chang's close friends, I have known Mingwei since she was born, and watched her grow up before my eyes. I spent many, many happy holidays with the family, and countless dinners and parties at their home. You can say she was like family to me, but really, they more or less adopted me into their family. They were a remarkably close-knit and happy family, despite this, they always treated me like I was one of them, including Mingwei and Mingjuan, who were always happy that I was once again in their midst during a vacation, in earlier years often sharing their room and sleeping on the floor in a sleeping bag.

As a young girl, Mingwei was irrepressibly inquisitive, and already fearlessly engaging, even with many of us, her parents' friends. She was small, but was always larger than life, with a huge and somewhat unmanageable mane of hair, and you could never miss her presence. When she used to ask me "Uncle Ser Peow, why is this so, or how does that work", in her eager voice, with barely suppressed excitement, I was always secretly pleased at how the word "uncle" sounds so good coming from her, and also was constantly challenged to provide the best possible answers. She expected nothing less, but when you delivered, it was always extremely rewarding, because, then, you know you have earned her respect. Interactions with her were always engaging and rewarding, but more than that, always fun, and always real. She had a big personality, and was never afraid to speak her mind. Even when she was very young, I treated her as an adult, and always as my equal, - I think she relished it. She was a joy to be with, a bright, beautiful, precocious child. Perhaps a watershed point was sometime in her early teens, when we were all pondering over a puzzle about how to replace light bulbs, which stumped all of us, but which she solved with remarkable ease.

I have many happy memories of times spent with her and the family - she was always fully engaged and an integral part of whatever activities we were involved in. The earliest memory was when we were looking for turtles on the beaches of Kuantan, she couldn't have been more than two or three but already quite a bundle of personality, visiting the Tan's in Hongkong, when I convinced her and Mingjuan that I should be their best friend, building campfires on a camping trip to sisters' island, when she was really impressed by my prowess at fanning the fire, one of my finest triumphs, (she really wanted to learn!), snorkeling in Bintan and our collective excitement when we saw an octopus and caught a cuttlefish, playing boggles with the family – competitive but always friendly and supportive.

It was on a trip two and a half years ago to Mount Kinabalu that Mingwei came into her own as a young adult. Even though she was the youngest in our group, she was one of the fittest, and among the advance party up and down the mountain, while I "gracefully" brought up the rear.

She looked like she was ready to conquer the world, and Mt. Kinabalu was just the beginning. It was one of those unforgettable trips for all of us who were there, and I think I speak for all the other uncles and aunts in the group that we were in awe of her as we looked up at her as she ascended the mountain.

A visit to her and Mingjuan in Cambridge when she had just arrived there was even more impressive. In one week in Cambridge, she was already thoroughly assimilated into college life, had tried out for the University blues team in sailing (she eventually got a blues for karate instead), made several friends, and was ready and hungry for any challenge that Cambridge has to offer. She had also grown into a beautiful young woman, with beautifully styled hair. I will never forget the image of her striding down the street in Cambridge on our way to dinner, beautiful, eager and confident, waving to some of her new friends, and leading the way to the restaurant. After dinner, she proudly showed me her room in Peterhouse, made tea for Mingjuan and me, and offered me a sleeping bag and a place on her floor for the night, much as Tarn How had done 30 years ago, and the family had done on their many family vacations through the last twenty years.

In her two years in Cambridge, she achieved much, much more than many of us do in a lifetime, she challenged herself and pursued excellence relentlessly, in all aspects, because, why settle for anything less. She worked hard, and was heavily involved in activities like karate, had a group of very close friends, took trips to various countries in Europe but also to Botswana in Africa and Nepal, where her volunteer work with Aids patients and other less fortunate people opened her eyes to another part of life, and I believe, made her a better person. She had everything going for her, she would have conquered the world.

Mingwei and I shared a bond, I think we connected on a deeper level despite our intergenerational gap. I've always thought of her as a kindred spirit, a知己, a best friend. I was really proud at how she had grown, not just intellectually but as a person, how she had constantly sought out new challenges, new ideals, new inspirations. I was in awe, I was inspired.

I cannot imagine not seeing her anymore on holidays, or at the Tan's, or at one of our dinners. I shall miss her very, very much – her unconditional love, her loyalty, her generosity, her irrepressible personality, and the joy, stimulation and challenge she brings to each meeting and encounter. She had great zest for life and for excellence in all pursuits, she had so much to offer. She has light up so many of our lives for the last twenty years and was an inspiration to all of us. She lived more and achieved more in her short life than many of us do, and in her encounters with each of us, she made us all feel special, like we too make a difference. I don't really know how to make sense of this tragic loss, why such a beautiful and special life with so much potential should be taken away from us. When my father passed away 3 years ago, I took some comfort from listening to some of the Buddhist sutras, I'd like to close with the following lines from the diamond sutra, which seems to express how her time with us has been all too brief:

*"Like a tiny drop of dew, or a bubble floating in a stream;  
Like a flash of lightning in a summer cloud,  
Or a flickering lamp, an illusion, a phantom, or a dream."*

Mingwei, may you rest in peace, we love you, and thank you for all the joy you have brought into our lives.