

## My Dramatic Life 2

Is this the little girl I carried?  
Is this the little boy at play?  
I don' t remember growing older,  
When did they?  
When did she get to be a beauty?  
When did he grow to be so tall?  
Wasn' t it yesterday when they were small?  
Sunrise, sunset,  
Swiftly flow the days.  
Seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers,  
Blossoming even as we gaze.  
Sunrise, sunset,  
Swiftly fly the years.  
One season following another,  
Laden with happiness and tears.<sup>i</sup>

It was a sunny morning on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. As soon as I arrived at Tunghai University, I received a message on Messenger from Jake Redway. I was very surprised for we hadn' t connected for years even though we' re FB friends.

Jake is a retired American lawyer. He used to teach in the Department of Western Languages and Literature at Tunghai while I was a student there. In our senior year, he taught us a seminar - 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Fiction. We called him Mr. Redway. He just graduated from Princeton University, majoring in English<sup>ii</sup>. A married man, he had an attractive appearance. The eyes behind the gold-rimmed glasses were open and intelligent. Apart from being tall and handsome, he was friendly. Most importantly, he taught very well. We all liked him and never cut classes. After I graduated, I worked as an assistant at the Department and we became colleagues. I started to call him Jake and volunteered to be his assistant for his course *Introduction to Fiction*. Soon he, his pretty, easy-going wife Mary, who also taught English there, and I made friends. Once in a while, we would discuss some interesting topics and had a good laugh together. After teaching at Tunghai for two years, the couple went back to the States. Jake went to law school and became a lawyer. While I was studying in the States, I visited them in New York once. Later they moved to Taipei for a short period of time because of Jake' s legal work. I also visited them there once. We kept in touch by exchanging letters for a few more years and then stopped. Six years ago, we became FB friends. We chatted a bit and never connected again.

Today, out of the blue, Jake texted me. He wrote, "Do you remember the production of *Fiddler on the Roof* at Tunghai in 1975? Did you ever see the pictures and archive file that Scott Seligman compiled?" We hadn' t texted to each other for so long. All of a sudden he wrote and asked me such strange questions. I just couldn' t understand.

Nevertheless, I replied immediately, “Hi. Of course I remember! It was such a phenomenal production! No, I have never seen the pix and archive file. Do you have them? Could I have a look?” “I can send you a link to a Dropbox file. Is there an e mail address that works for you?” “Great! Thanks!” I gave him my email address. Then he added, “Hopefully you will find an e mail with the link and maybe some e mail addresses of some old friends. I am sure they would love to hear from you!” I had to admit that I’ ve been a slow person. I still couldn’ t figure out why Jake would like me to look at the documents about *Fiddler on the Roof*. In addition, who were the old friends he was talking about? There was not just one but some! It was very odd.

Not until a few moments later did I realize what Jake meant! He must have read on my FB page the essay *My Dramatic Life* I had posted two days earlier! After reading it, Jake might have remembered *Fiddler on the Roof*, a great hit at Tunghai at that time, and thought that I, a drama maniac, might have enjoyed it, too. However, why did he mention “some old friends” ? Who were they?

What words of wisdom can I give them?  
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After I came home that evening, I checked my Gmail and read Jake’ s message. It confirmed my speculation that he had read that essay of mine, remembered the time when he was teaching at Tunghai, and thought that I might have been interested in the archive file of the musical. In Jake’ s email, after the link to the Dropbox file, there was a long list of email addresses, more than 20 of them. At a closer look, I couldn’ t help crying out with joy! Aside from Jake and Scott Seligman’ s email addresses, there were the email addresses of Ed Ahnert, the Freshman English teacher I mentioned in *My Dramatic Life*, and Jeff Schultz, the director of the Shakespearian plays! Moreover, there were email addresses of some American teachers I worked with as an assistant - **Hank Levine, Martha Nace, and Dan Tom!** It was really amazing! It was unbelievable that they had formed an email address group and got connected even though they had left Tunghai for decades! At the end of the email address list, there was a message written by Scott Seligman.

“Folks,

The fact that we had to cancel the group 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party because of the zombie apocalypse doesn't mean we can't get together virtually. I think most of us have learned how to use Zoom in the past few weeks if we didn't already know how. So how about an online Tunghai group grope?

Tim and Ping have a Zoom account and can moderate a get-together. I'm going to suggest this Friday, April 24, at 2pm EST. If we do it at midday EST, it means folks in Europe can participate, as can people on the West Coast and even Daniel in Hawaii if he likes. I don't think any of us is in Asia at present.

I'll follow this email up as soon as I get the log-in specifics and password. I don't see a need for people to RSVP; just log on if you've got the time and the inclination. You can use either your browser or, if you have it, the Zoom app.

Cheers,  
Scott"

The message was so impressive and touching! This group of teachers is not just connected. Like students getting a reunion after graduation, they were going to have a virtual reunion on Zoom to celebrate the birthday of one of them! 46 years ago, they graduated from university, sharing the same curiosity about the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, and one by one from all over the States flew to the Department of Western Languages and Literature at Tunghai, a place far from Taipei, a place they hardly knew. Then they met there. The respectable department chair Ivor Shepherd and his wife, Joan, who treated them as their children or friends, threw a high tea party at their campus house every Friday afternoon and invited them to come over to relieve their homesickness, exchange teaching ideas, and get to know one another. At Tunghai these new teachers learned English teaching, the Chinese language, Taiwanese culture, and became friends very quickly. Together, they celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas, which they usually honored with their families at home. They also made friends with their students, who were only a few years younger than them. Some of these teachers even met their future wives on the campus! One day, Scott Seligman produced and directed an unprecedented musical with a cast of students and teachers, including Ivor Shepherd. Some colleague friends of his, who enjoyed singing and acting, participated in the production. The remaining ones supported him by helping behind the scenes or watching the performance under the stage. After teaching two or three years, they went back to the States to pursue their own dreams. Some became lawyers, some professors, some writers, and some the CEO of a company. Today they have been away for more than 40 years and are living in different places, but they still keep in touch and their love for Tunghai remains. They still insist on spelling Tunghai the way it has been spelt. On April 21, 45 years after the production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, Scott Seligman thought of another awesome idea, compiled everyone's email address, and called for an unparalleled birthday party and reunion online on April 24!

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It is said that the virtual reunion did take place on the 24<sup>th</sup>. A total of 16 people participated and it lasted one hour and a half. Everyone was excited. The party was a big success.

On the evening of hearing from Jake, I wrote to Ed Ahnert and Jeff Schultz. I introduced myself first, afraid that they might have forgotten me, and then attached the essay *My Dramatic Life* and the 1972 weather-worn script *The Catbird Seat* to the message. Besides, I sent to Jeff Schultz a photo with him and me in it, taken on the night after our plays. I thought he might be thrilled when he saw it. After that, I wrote to Hank Levine, Martha Nace, and Dan Tom.

Ed Ahnert answered my email with a short note almost instantly, saying that he would write back after reading my essay.

Jeff Schultz also replied very quickly. It might have been telepathy at work. He expressed that just a few days earlier he thought of my performance in *The Taming of the Shrew* and stressed that it was a wonderful one. He also pointed out that during rehearsals, he asked a teacher to coach me with my lines intensively. However, I was sorry that I had no recollection of that. I wrote back and thanked him for the time and effort he had put in directing the plays. I also gave him my esteem of his friendship with those Tunghai people.

After Jeff Schultz, Hank Levine wrote to me. He said that he was glad I emailed him, and just as Jeff Schultz, he mentioned he had kept in touch with many friends from Tunghai. After Hank Levine, Martha Nace wrote back. She used to write, but now she spends time in gardening. I don't know what she looks like now, but I still remember her brief but powerful performance in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Though I watched *Fiddler on the Roof* before and was impressed by Scott Seligman's directing, we had never met as I was a student then. After I read his email message to the Tunghai people and browsed through the well-kept historical records of the play, my appreciation of him increased. Therefore, I took the initiative and wrote a letter to him, showing my admiration and respect.

Due to the fact that I wrote and posted online the essay *My Dramatic Life*, a series of dramatic events followed, which made me amazed at first, then greatly touched. In the essay, I narrated several dramatic activities that had taken place at Tunghai four decades before, which brought back Jake's memories of the school. In the link to the Dropbox file and email he sent me, not only did I learn the long precious friendship among the Tunghai teachers, but I also made contact with my university teacher, director, and colleagues. What was more, I was able to express my belated admiration and gratitude to the two directors – Jeff Schultz and Scott Seligman. I, though an outsider, deeply felt that to those former Tunghai teachers, now aged 70 or reaching 70, their days at Tunghai had long become an important part of their lives. Way before they left Tunghai for home, the school had made an unforgettable imprint at the bottom of their hearts. That was the reason why they still remember the magic place – Tunghai. As a former student, former assistant, and current teacher at the university, I would like to say thank-you to and salute them.

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Just like two newlyweds should be.  
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<sup>i</sup> **Source:** Musixmatch, *Sunrise, Sunset* from *Fiddler on the Roof*, lyric by Jerry Bock, music by Sheldon Harnick@Trio Music Company, Jerry Bock Enterprises, Bock Ip LLC, Times Square Music Publications Company, Trio Music Co., Inc., R & H Music Co Obo Mayerling Productions, Ltd.

<sup>ii</sup> At that time Taiwan's Ministry of Education did not stipulate that college graduates could not teach at universities.