

THE FIRST TIME I MET LUCIE

Sue Fan

I first met Lucie at a friend's house. We sat in a circle after dinner, listening to her talk about her travels to China. It was 1977. Few had set foot behind the iron curtain. Since the Nixon visit, the door to China had not opened up yet. By then Lucie had traveled there before Nixon, had one-on-one meetings with Zhou En-lai and Madame Deng Yingchao (Zhou's wife), and had organized the first UCLA delegation to China. She told us, "Educational and cultural exchanges will be the door openers, and I want to see UCLA be one of the first to do so." Then she looked around the room and said, "I need someone who is bilingual, able to organize, and help me with this work." I nervously hesitated but eventually handed her my phone number.

When we met a few days later, she said, "I have to level with you. UCLA had not committed any funding, and I can give no guarantees about anything but a 3 month part-time job to develop the proposal." I told her about my career at the UCLA library and the graduate degree in Information Science I was about to finish. But told her, what she described about the work with China sounded like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Even though it would mean a total switch of gear for me, I'd like to give it a try. " Her eyes lit up, "Maybe together we could build something that has never been done before." We sealed our pact at that moment, and worked together for the next 10 years. My life was never the same ever since.

I soon found out, DOING SOMETHING THAT HAS NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE was part of what drove Lucie. And that was what drew me to her. It was exciting working for Lucie. Her passion was contagious, but her unbounded drive and relentless energy could also be exhausting. I remember going home after a 12-hour day and ran into Lucie down the hall. She'd have just walked in from some meeting to start her 3rd shift. She worked as if there were 36 hours a day, and that she would live to at least 100. Indeed she was the hardest working person, and the most productive person I have ever met. There was always a new project on the horizon. In recent years when we got together, the best conversation starter to her was, "What's new, Lucie?" That was a sure way to lead hours of animated discussion. Lucie's sister Chia-ling told me, "Now that Lucie is gone, I have to scramble to find 5-6 people to take over her various projects."

But I would not call her a work-a-holic: She played her baby grand like a concert pianist. Indeed she was trained to be one. We were both big fans of Miyasaki animé – We went to see "Princess Mononoke" together and that remained our mutual favorite. We traded paperback murder mysteries. She loved dancing. At one time, she was checking out schedules for the international ballroom dance contest in Prague. If she had made it, no doubt she would have walked away with some trophies. And she loved to travel. In the last two years of her life, she had circled the globe three times.

Some people say, "Lucie never looked back." It is true that she never dwelt on her past glories or failings but she made time for her high school buddies and had reunions with her grade school classmates. A favorite meal she cooked for me was spaghetti sauce over white rice. I knew that's what she often had as a special treat while working 5 jobs to support herself as music major in the University of Hawaii. A couple years ago, she pulled out a beautiful ukulele: mahogany with a beautiful sheen, clear and lovely sound. Recalling softly, "Eddie [her first husband] and I used to play duet together. He was such a good musician." She gave it to me, because she knew I had my own special connection with Hawaii. We rarely exchanged gifts over our thirty years of friendship. This instrument will remain my most treasured possession.

Lucie was a strategist and visionary, yet there is something disarmingly childlike about her. She was trusting of the best in people, and had a way of drawing out the best in you. She was direct and honest. Sometimes TOO honest. "I can't say things I don't mean." When she looked at you straight in the eye, it is also hard for you to hide the truth from her. She was always curious about anything that is new. I remember her showing off that KINDLE pad like a kid with a new toy. If there is something she did not know, her famous line was, " I will learn how to do it. " That could mean figuring out a new gadget, or building a new institution, or running a publishing enterprise. Her incessant curiosity and eagerness to learn never faded.

How do you describe Lucie in one sentence? This is the best I could come up: Lucie is someone who took pride in blazing new trails, but never left her family and old friends behind; who spoke in a firm voice loud and clear, while always listened for the silenced few; who was a visionary strategist but had a heart that was loving and open like a child. That is how I would remember Lucie.

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