

MY AUNT

“The ‘bright red sail’ (a famous Russian poem) symbolizes the vigorous love, desire and dream of the youth. The one who always brings a bright red sail in his heart is the one who never gives up, the one who reaches the peak of happiness and achievement.”

“Do you have a bright red sail of your own, my little niece?”

The brief conversation was so typical of a literature teacher, my aunt, Mrs. Ha. She asked me the question about the bright red sail before I left for America. She said that a full spirit is all what I need to win everything not only in America but anywhere. I nodded with her, just to show that I was a good kid. I was too eager for my journey to America to ponder what she said, to think of the bright red sail.

Three months later in America, I received a phone call from my parents:

“Lan, aunt Ha is in the hospital unconscious. She has had a tumor in her brain for a long time but she didn’t know. The doctors say... The doctors say... that she will not have much of a chance to live.”

“Lan, are you still there, Lan, are you ok? We will try our best to cure her. You have to be calm... your aunt always wishes the best for you...”

The bad news sent chills through my body. I did not know what to do but sink into lament. My tears burst out and I could not stop crying all night. A thousand... a thousand and one... I believed that if I prayed for her three thousand times that night, she would live. My aunt always longed to be a successful and free woman. She loved literature; she received

a full scholarship to a famous college in Russia with a major in literature. Loving to sing, she came to be a captivating singer at her school. She wanted to be independent; she worked nonstop assiduously, making her voice important in her family. Although life always made it hard for her, she lived it with her strong nature, her single-minded determination and her love to surprise the world around her. My aunt's eyesight was too poor to pass the physical test to go to Russia; she stayed home with the hope to instill all her energy in her students. Not being able to be a singer because of the one-inch glasses, she sang for her children, for her students and for people around her to make life more exciting. You should have come to the small alley on Kimma, Hanoi to see her and listen to the joy in her voice. If you dance with the rhythm of her song and if her poem flows in your mind with the meaning of precious life, I would not be astonished. My aunt's virtue was not to revenge life's bad luck, but to create miracles of the luck she received. I have never known and admired anyone with more love and ambition for life than her.

Many people cast doubt on my trip to America saying I was not mature enough. My aunt was the one who shook my shoulders so strongly, looked in my eyes and assured me "don't be afraid just because you are different. If you cannot do it, no one else can." She watched all my steps of struggle and success in life. When I spent all my first scholarship money in middle school helping poor orphans, she supported me wholeheartedly. When I cried because of being looked down upon initially at my gifted high school, she stroked my cheek saying that surpassing myself is much more reasonable than surpassing others. And when my name was on the pre-list of the math national team, she rewarded me with a lot of my favorite ice-creams. She laughed all day long with me, dreaming with me about a day I would become a mathematician. I was ecstatic to hear her say that I am like her who never gives up on life.

America is so far away for me to feel and share her pain, to hold her hand in my hand and heat it up with my spirit that has flourished from the very first lessons of life she gave me. How bad I want to tell her that the bright red sail has given me wings of hope through my days in America .Whenever I am burdened with the application process, with standardized tests or with every difficulty at school as well as at home, I imagine the bright red sail. At that time I think about her, about how happy she will be to see me consummate my goals. Just two weeks after the phone call, my aunt forever left me in this life. I know that if she had enough time to say something to me before she passed away, she would have reminded me to keep the bright red sail in my heart. Dear aunt, I do have a bright red sail for myself and also for you.