

*A  
letter  
of  
Love*

**By Mom & Dad ~ Daughter ~ Friends**

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A letter of Love by Mom & Dad Daughter Friends

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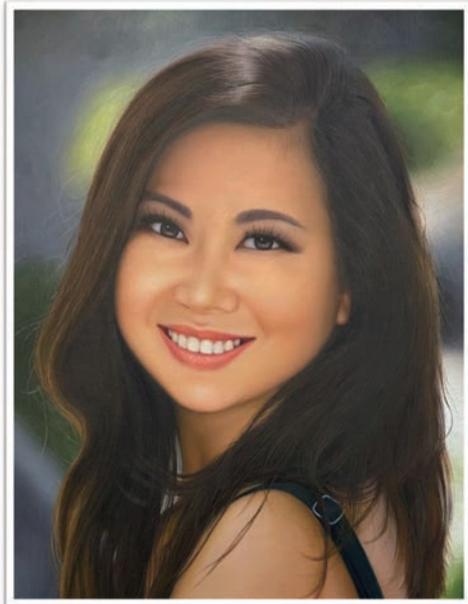
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## **In Loving Memory**



Lianne C. Zhang

Daughter, Friend, Wanderlust

June 9, 1984 – December 20, 2022

## **About the Main Author**

The main author, Keqing Chen, was born in Beijing and had been lived in China for 33 years, then had been worked and lived in the United States for 33 years. She has been retired for three years. While still able to move, she traveled extensively around the world. She now lives a life split in United States, like a snow bird, spending summers in Washington, D.C., and winters in Florida. When craving authentic Chinese food, she would fly back to Beijing. She fully enjoys the Creator's creation. As a representative of Jesus, she walks the earth, doing good everywhere. Living like Jesus Christ, may she bless others, and be a blessing unto them.

## Summary

This memoir tells the love story of a six-year-old girl who came to the United States from Beijing, China. Although her life on Earth was only 38 years, she has eternal life in God's Kingdom. Each of the forty letters in this book tells a story of being loved and giving love! Together, these forty letters form a symphony composed of love. The book has 40 chapters: 20 chapters wrote by her Mom-Keqing Chen and Dad-Qun Zhang, 6 chapters by herself (Liyang, Amy, Lianne, Li and LC), and 14 chapters by her best friends and alumnus. The appendix includes a comic strip drew when she was ten, as well as her autobiography, short novel, poem, stories, and various drawings.

Not only her memoir, it's also traced back to a remembrance of the blessings and grace God had bestowed upon six generations of her great grandmother - Lin's family.

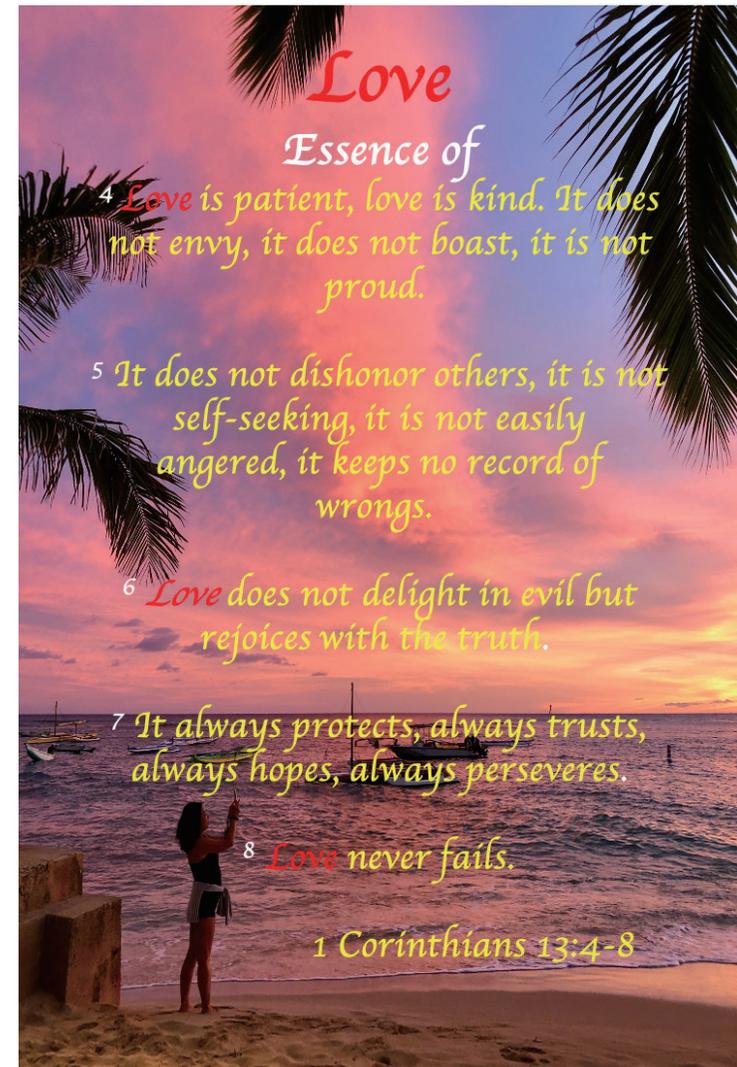
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## Preface

*By Mom and Dad*

There was a girl who was born in Beijing, China in 1984. She was the only child in the family.

Parents choose their children's names, but parents can't control how our children will be called by their friends or teachers any more than we can choose their direction. We can guide them. And as our children grow, they get to choose for themselves exactly how they will be called, even if that involves a formal, legal name change. The evolution of our child's name suggested the development of our child herself.

Our child was given a Chinese name – *Zhang, Li Yang* — a combination of the names of her grandparents on both sides of her family as well as her parents' names.

Throughout Lianne's life her name continued to evolve as she grew and embraced different elements of herself. We also had nicknames for her. When she was young, most of the family called her by the second word of her given name: *Yangyang*. Her grandparents also had pet names for her. And at home, when our daughter did something silly or embarrassing, we would laugh and call her a little fool melon. In response, she gave herself the name Smart Melon.

When our child was six years old, she traveled to the

United States with her father to reunite with her mother who was working at Northwestern Medical University in Chicago. Like many children of overseas students and visiting scholars from China, her parents moved frequently to study and work. She attended four elementary schools, and two middle schools before high school. She graduated from the University of Illinois and worked in 10 companies and continued to move on. She moved more than 20 times, and lived all over the United States, from Chicago to Maryland to New York City, San Francisco, Virginia, Miami, and Hawaii.

She loved traveling, and it became an important part of her life. She loved the adventure. She loved meeting people and eating different foods. Traveling became one of the ways she shared the joy of friendship.

One of Lianne's struggles as a young girl was typical of any immigrant. Her mother tongue was Chinese, and she spoke it in China for the first five years of her life. Then she started learning English in first grade in the United States. It was confusing to be thinking and communicating in two different worlds. By junior high, she had completely stopped and speaking Chinese (and eating Chinese food). She wanted to fit in with her American friends.

Lianne's names continued to evolve as she worked to figure out how to fit in with her American friends. In elementary school, she deliberately chose the English name Amy because it started with the letter A. She had grown tired of always coming last in any activity that used the alphabet to sort the class into groups. Zhang always came last.

*Amy Zhang* was her first pen name, and she used it when she wrote a novel of nearly 8,000 words at the age of

ten. She also illustrated the book with 20 pencil drawings. It was an ambitious work of art for such a young person, and the story was about a girl who died from blood cancer.

In her second year of junior high school, she returned to China during the summer vacation and participated in a program on CCTV and Beijing TV called “Overseas Children Learn Chinese.” Since then, she became passionate about learning Chinese, and in high school took Chinese as an elective course.

The issue of where she fit in the United States and in relation to her Chinese culture, was something she continuously negotiated, like all immigrants. Although, she enjoyed the spoken Chinese language, and it was important to her identify, after graduated from college and working in New York, she was a little surprised to discover that many non-Chinese people spoke Chinese more authentically than she did.

Before high school, Lianne chose for herself an American name: *Lianne Chenli Zhang*. It was a beautiful and complete English name, with a last name, a middle name, and a first name. Like her mother and grandmother, she spent a lot of time and effort thinking of what to call herself.

Another theme that returned at different times in Lianne’s life was her faith. She decided to believe in God when she was baptized at age 14. She read the Bible throughout her life and participated in different communities of faith as she grew up. She was open-minded to many ideas, but she always returned to her Christianity, and most fervently towards the end of her life.

In the last two weeks of her life on the earth, her spirituality allowed her to experience her faith in a different

realm, and she brought back a message of love from Jesus Christ.

On the screen background of her phone, she quoted Corinthians 13:4, “Love is patient and kind.” She carried her faith with her always.

Lianne always loved reading and writing, and she dreamed of becoming a writer one day. At the University of Illinois, she studied journalism, but shortly after college she determined it wasn’t the style of writing she enjoyed. Though she always wrote and journaled, writing did not become a major part of her career, but she always loved the activity, and she used writing as a way to explore her feelings.

As her friends will confirm, Lianne loved exploring her feelings, and she was very good at helping her friends explore their feelings, too. Whether it was in casual texts or lengthy letters, or long phone calls or vision boards, feeling, emotions, intimacy, and friendship were always on Lianne’s mind.

So many of her friends have expressed that Lianne was truly a sister to them, and an important and close, special friend, a friend who they described in many forms of the same idea: She was salt - she added flavor to others’ lives and helped nurture and preserve her friends over time; She was a light, not only illuminating the lives of those around her, but still bring a light so great to the world even after she has gone.

After her cancer diagnosis, Lianne began journaling more regularly again. It was a way to keep track of her emotional state as well as the nutrition, medical, and therapeutic regimes she was undergoing.

When it was clear her life would be shorter than she had expected, one of the last things she wanted to accomplish was to write an article to submit to the “Modern Love” of the *New York Times*.

The idea of writing a final important article was typical of Lianne’s ambition: when she got an idea, she pursued it with passion and focus. It may be that she felt the article was a way to show gratitude to a special oncologist who had been so supportive during her five years of cancer treatment. The specialist at the Johns Hopkins Cancer Center gave her hope when there was little left in her heart, and she wanted to share her experience of treatment. The pen name used for the essay was *LC Zimmers*, though we can only guess at why she made it so different than her other names.

At the end of her life, she was most often using “Li” from her Chinese given name and English middle name. Though all of the people throughout her life would call her by the name she was using when they met, in the end, she was just “Li,” short, simple, easy to say, but it stood for so much more.

## Foreword

### By Paul D. Pfeiffer

My collaborators in this project were the people who surrounded and supported Lianne during her life and her struggles with cancer. Each person’s contribution highlighted a unique element of Lianne’s compelling personality and contributed to a greater understanding of her life. In almost every interview, they described Lianne as a light.

This group of collaborators entrusted me with their personal and painful recollections of a dear friend and daughter. In sharing their grief, they have also helped me understand the joy, wonder, and complexity of their relationships with Lianne. We all believe this collaboration would have pleased Lianne.

Many times, during this project, I have looked up at the ceiling, as if Lianne were near at hand, and smiled. That may sound whimsical or artsy, but I have felt close to Lianne throughout the telling of her life’s stories. Though my connection to Lianne was brief, I understand why people described her as a light.

Close to the time I got the news that Lianne had passed; my mother died. I had been helping care for her during the last days of her life, and I was sitting up late in a dimly lit bedroom at my sister’s house where my mother had died that morning. I was working on her obituary, which I had