

For the Carl Hsu Memorial – Remembering Jiunn Carl Hsu

Hoong-Chien Lee
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Carl Hsu first caught my attention with his biggish head when we started junior high school (7th grade) in the same class. There were two other bigheads in the class. It seems that BH's cannot do the front roll. For most people, you bend your head down and push with your legs and that's it. I noticed that for a BH the forward motion was, perhaps through the tumbler effect momentarily taking hold, stopped in midstream, when the top of the head stood motionless on the cushion. Then the torso may or may not continue forward; it could also go left, or right, or even back to the starting position.

Big heads hold big brains, and the three BHs in our class were clever. This was however not Carl's claim to fame. He did so by, rather suddenly, emerging in Grade 11-12 as the number one basketball shot in our class. He probably liked the taste of being *numero uno*. Later in life he attained that status many times.

We didn't meet often in university, except during our four-month military boot camp over the 1961 summer break, when we were in the same squad and slept only a few bunks apart. In this sometimes high-pressure environment Carl impressed me as being a cautious, swift, and efficient fellow. Unlike me, he never gave the hawk-eyed sergeants any chances.

During our military service after graduation I was frequently in Taipei AWOL and would find Carl there, too. By that time the last of my kin had emigrated, and I had joined the ranks of the homeless, which Carl had long belonged. That made us closer friends. We crashed in Chungming An's room at his parents'. There was a bunk bed; the guy who got home first took the lower bunk and the last one slept on the floor. We never tired of retelling silly stories from our high school days. Carl would comment on my being a sprinter by saying: "He churned his short legs real fast".

Carl introduced me to the art of coffee drinking. One evening we meandered on the side streets of Taipei and he brought the subject up, which was foreign to me then. He said one must not put cream in coffee, but adding a bit of sugar brings out its aroma nicely. Or maybe it was the other way round. I was deeply impressed by this piece of secret, exotic information. Even today, I would always add sugar, or cream, in my coffee, but never both.

[Photo at right: Carl Hsu (left) with HC Lee, September 1964, Taipei Songshan Airport]



In the 25 years when I lived in the freezing "Northern" Ontario I saw little of my classmates. I visited Carl in Los Angeles in 1970 when he had just graduated from UCLA. For some long forgotten stupid reason I turned down his invitation to camp in Yosemite and see the mighty giant sequoias. Soon afterwards Carl joined the Bell Labs. He did his bighead full justice there, acquiring many *numero*

unos as an Asian-American rising in the American corporate ladder and becoming President of Asia Pacific and China in 1999.

After my return to Taiwan in 1993 and through the first decade of the new millennium I visited Beijing often. When Carl became head of the region for Bell we met there occasionally, and more frequently after his retirement from



Bell in 2005. Bailing and I had our first tour of Shichahai when we spent a splendid evening with Teh-Chao and Carl at a café by the lakeside. Carl also took Bailing and I to our first visit to the flea market Panjiayuan. In later years Carl and I often met when he came to Taiwan to attend the quarterly Taiwan Mobile board meetings. He always stayed at the Howard Plaza Hotel so we would have a meal there, a couple of times with Teh-Chao and Bailing.

Carl liked using the public transport system in Taiwan. In the fall of 2010, with another friend, we went to the Yangmingshan Park by bus, whence we took a 3-hour leisurely sightseeing walk down to Xinbeitou, then by subway to the 228 Park in city center, and had an excellent meal at a nearby restaurant. In October the following year Carl had another free day and we took a 2-hour slow-train to Pingxi, a small town famed for its annual sky-lantern festival.

It was warm, and there were few tourists. We walked around the rural part of town aimlessly for a couple of hours, filled our lung with fresh air, had a bowl of iced tofu gelatin each at a roadside stall, then took the train back. [Photo above: October 2011, at the Pingxi station]

Carl had always liked to read the classics, in particular I Ching (The Book of Change), and into these he delved in retirement. Although recorded as oracles, Carl thought the 64 “gua” (hexagrams) of I Ching should not be used for divination, but instead be viewed as guides, depending on one’s station in life and the circumstance one faces, for action. He thought the best gua was “Qian/Chien” 謙: modesty, humility, humbling. I like this gua because the character Chien is part of my name. Carl adhered to the gua faithfully. His career achievements were beyond my imagination, yet in our innumerable conversations he seldom mentioned his achievements, never boastfully. He must have met and made acquaintances with many important people in the corporate and political world; never did he once drop a name on me.

We didn’t meet again after the Pingxi trip. I wrote him a few times after mid 2012, receiving a reply in the fall of 2013 saying that he looked forward to a get together later that year. Then on October 21st 2014 came the sudden news that Carl had died of ventricular fibrillation at the Tri-Service General Hospital. Woe is the friend of the fallen! Yet Carl exceeded the historic ripe old age of 70, he lived a fabulous life and had a brilliant career, and he left lasting fond memories to his loved ones and friends. We are grieved, but surely he has no regrets.