

TWELVE STRANDS

Journeys with Asian Authors

Edited by Bernice Lee

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Twelve Strands
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22 Sin Ming Lane
#04-76 Midview City
Singapore 573969
Email: enquiries@graceworks.com.sg
Website: www.graceworks.com.sg

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PREFACE

It was more than 20 years ago that the first collection of author journeys was commissioned by Media Associates International (MAI) in Latin America. Shortly after, African and Asian compilations were also published. The latter, *An Asian Palette* (Singapore: Armour Publishing, 1998), has inspired many budding writers in their journeys. The heartfelt stories in that volume also encouraged many who were struggling in their craft. Knowing that one is not alone in the solitary journey of writing is often part of the battle won.

Since then, both MAI-Asia and MAI-Africa have come into being, to consolidate and grow the work of MAI in Asia and Africa, respectively. In this tenth year of MAI-Asia's existence, we thought it timely to hear from a fresh set of voices, some of whom have actually benefited from the combined wisdom captured in the first Asian volume.

Twelve Strands, as the name suggests, pulls together the writing journeys of 12 Asian authors from countries as diverse as South Korea and Pakistan. Some write poetry and songs, while others write children's books. Some are able to share the deepest pains and highest joys of those whose testimonies they give voice to. All feel an almost compulsive need to write so that the knowledge of the love of Christ can reach the farthest corners of their country, if not the world. They share a calling.

In recounting her journey after finding herself voiceless because of a rare disease, Emily Lim said that "Like Dorothy and her friends, the Cowardly Lion, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man, in L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, my journey similarly took me in search of voice, courage, clarity of thought and a new heart. It led me on a deeper search for meaning in life and discovery of a new and different kind of voice. A voice that emerged from the written word."

Abu Taher Chowdhury was one of those you would call an unlikely writer. His great desire to save the lost impelled him to find a way to reach them and, when he saw the life-transforming impact of a tract, he knew this was the way to go: “I didn’t know the ABCs of writing. Basically, I was not a bright student, and it was difficult for me to even spell more difficult words. I could not speak well as I had problems with proper pronunciation. But that booklet gave me new courage through its simple unspoken message— ‘Books can change lives.’”

Andrew Yuan, who grappled with the irony of writing books about marriage even as his own was foundering learnt precious lessons from God during the process. In the end, he concluded that “Writing is like having a fishbone in your throat. You have to get it out.”

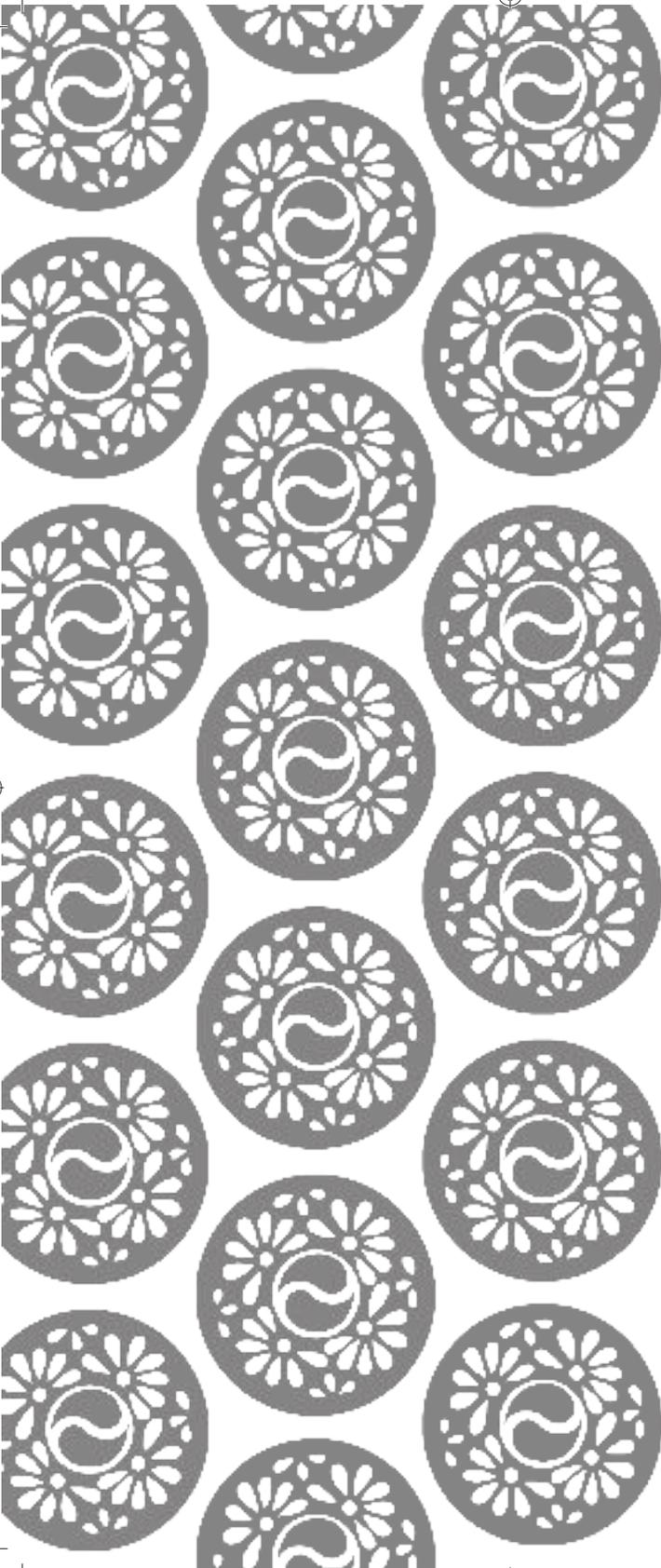
This book in your hand is our small offering to those who have fishbones that need to come out. May you be inspired to hone your craft so that:

Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

Psalm 22:30, 31

BERNICE LEE

November 2015



MY LEGACY OF WRITING

TINA CHO is the author of *The Girl's Guide to Manners* (Legacy Press Kids, 2014) and a coloring book, *God Is So Good* (Warner Press, 2013). *Seasons of the Asian Pear Tree* is forthcoming from Schoolwide along with two nonfiction books from Legacy Press Kids, and *Korean Celebrations* from Tuttle. Tina writes for the educational and children's markets from South Korea. She is a wife, mom to two kids, and a 1st grade teacher. You can find Tina at her blog, tinamcho.com.

How It All Started

The summer of 2008, my career changed course. Previously, I had taught elementary grades for 11 years in the United States. My husband, two kids, and I had moved from Arizona to California, but for the first time, I was unable to get a teaching job. The economy wasn't doing well, and I didn't have any contacts in these school districts. Painfully, I told God if He didn't want me to teach anymore, I would obey Him. It was when I surrendered to God's leading that He led me into another dream of mine — writing for children.

I had wanted to leave a Christian legacy for my own children. And since I had loved children's picture books from my days of teaching, I decided to learn how to write them. I searched the Internet and found an organization, the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). They gave me the name of a lady who headed up children's writing critique groups in my area. I discovered she was a Christian writer of over 75 books. I couldn't believe how God was leading! She invited me to her writing group that met once a month. I was so nervous yet excited to meet them. Before my first meeting, I told God, "If this is what you might have for me, then please let them like my story." After reading them my very first manuscript, they said they couldn't believe I had just started writing. They thought I was joking. Unbelievable! Me — a writer? I hated writing papers in college.

This Christian author, Nancy I. Sanders, took me under her wing. I studied all about writing and was in her local writing group and her online picture book critique group, Pens and Brushes, which had seven other members from around the nation.

First Sale

The wonderful ladies in my local group encouraged me to submit a story to a private Christian school's developing reading program. Some of the others in my group were part of the cadre of freelance writers. So I prepared a story according to a set theme and sub-

mitted it. About three weeks later, I received a check in the mail. I remember my husband bounding down the stairs as I showed it to him. He was amazed that I had received money for something I had written. That acceptance began a string of acceptances with the Christian school's reading program. It was great practice for what God had in store later.

Write What You Know

As I studied the craft of writing, I read many books, such as *Yes! You Can Learn How to Write Children's Books, Get Them Published, and Build a Successful Writing Career* by Nancy Sanders. I read writing blogs and freelance writing sites to find my niche. Nancy taught me how to query publishers with ideas before writing the manuscript.

Once I found interesting publishers to query, I studied their publications or websites and then emailed them a list of ideas. One of the places I sent a query to was an e-zine called *Grands*, an online magazine for grandparents. The ironic thing is that I wasn't even

... it's amazing how
God prepares us
little by little, step
by step, for the
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to us.



a grandparent. I was a mother of two kids, aged six and three! But I sent them a query anyway, and the editor emailed that she wanted a story about a family with a set of close grandparents and a set of long-distance grandparents and how they kept the balance. I emailed the editor back and told her that in our case both sets of grandparents were long-distance, one set in Iowa, and the other in South Korea. Well, she came up with the idea of my writing an article on how my kids kept up a relationship with their overseas grandparents in Korea. This led to a contract sale! The editor was great to work with and helped me hone my writing skills. I even supplied them with photographs of my kids and my in-laws, plus a Korean recipe. Better yet, they sent a photographer to my house to do a photo shoot with my kids! It was so much fun. My

kids ended up on the cover of the e-zine! I felt like a real writer. That article was published in July 2009.

I think it's amazing how God prepares us little by little, step by step, for the tasks He entrusts to us. One evening my husband brought home a free hamster, cage and all, from a coworker. We knew nothing about taking care of hamsters. During this time, God had led me to start writing book reviews for the *Christian Library Journal* (CLJ). I received free books, and all I had to do was write the reviews and submit them to the editor. God has a sense of humor. My first assignment for them was to review books about small pets, such as *Caring for Your Hamster* and *Hamsters and Gerbils*. So that's why we had a hamster! For the next year I continued writing book reviews.

Aside from writing for the Christian school's reading program and book reviews for CLJ, my first children's story published was a rebus (a story with some pictures that stand for words) for the now defunct children's e-zine *Stories for Children*. My mentor, Nancy Sanders, encouraged us to also write for the low-pay/no-pay markets like *Stories for Children*, because they are hungry for submissions and will also take first-time writers, like myself. My husband and I had taken our kids miniature golfing, and that led to another story idea. I turned our outing into a rebus story that sold as "Golf Ball Mystery." That rebus started my joy of writing more rebuses.

My writing friends told me about Focus on the Family's Christian magazine for children called *Clubhouse Jr*. My first story to them was rejected. Then I sent them a rebus about another place my kids loved to go to — the beach. It sold. Since then I've had three other rebus stories published by them. The stars of these stories are my children because I use their names and experiences. It's always a thrill for them to see their names in print.

Having a good relationship with the *Clubhouse Jr* editor has helped me sell two nonfiction animal articles to them too. It's fun to write