

Remembering Guanghua – A Reflection by Hong Song

(Eulogy at Guanghua Zhu's Memorial Service)

Three years ago, the day before Thanksgiving, I received a call from Guanghua from a hospital. He said, “I cannot drive now, please come to pick me up.” From the sound of his voice, I knew something serious had happened. When I arrived at the hospital, Guanghua told me he had cancer. I felt so fearful that I could not even stand. I sat on a bench with Guanghua for a long time without saying a word. Before this, I always said that I was not afraid of death. Now, I suddenly realized what this fear was when the deadly disease came to my closest friend.

The next day was Thanksgiving. As a tradition, we always had Thanksgiving dinner at my home. At that time, only Yuxing and I knew the bad news. Guanghua asked me not to tell anyone. He was so thoughtful to let friends enjoy the holiday. Guanghua was always a hungry person, and he always had the first bite at every dinner or party at my home, no matter how hard I tried to stop him. This year, I let him sit first, and gave him his favorite piece of the turkey.



To everyone else, it seemed that we had a joyful party. Only Guanghua, Yuxing, and I knew what had happened. Everyone enjoyed the food and good time that day, just as Guanghua had wished. I knew a difficult journey would be ahead for Guanghua, Yuxing, his parents, his brother and sisters, me, and everyone who loved him.

I first met Guanhua at the Beijing Botanical Garden 17 years ago. He was a popular, handsome, young man. He was a student of my supervisor. I met him again at the Missouri Botanical Garden two years later. He was a Ph.D. student at UMSL. At the same time, I was a student at the same school. From then on, we were close friends.

Guanhua and I were actually more like brothers. He always came to my home for dinner when he was alone. I always ate at his home when his parents were here. We shared good times and bad times. We shared good beer and beer that was not so tasteful. We shared good foods and foods that were very, very bad. We helped each other just like real brothers. We fought sometimes too, just like real brothers. Of course, I could not fight him physically. I could only fight him with my words. I had a powerful weapon, which was that he need my help with the computer all of the time. I always “won” in the end.

Guanhua was the brightest young botanist I ever knew. He always amazed me by telling what plant it was, no matter in the field, in the herbarium, or at the dinning table. He had contributed so much for the Flora of China project. He had helped me a lot on my job at the garden. I can never forget we spent numerous nights on his projects and my projects, in office and at home

Guanhua was a very enjoyable person. He was always the center of any gathering (maybe because he was taller than other people). He was a great story teller, and everyone liked his life stories as a botanist. No one could forget him once they met him.



Guanhua always fed me with fresh ideas and unique knowledge of history, culture, and the world. He had an amazing memory. He could recite so many classic Chinese poems

he had learned from his father when he was a child. He had opinions on everything. Even I did not agree with him sometimes, but I admired his sharp thinking all of the time.

Guanghua was always there whenever I needed help. He was my hand when I was not strong enough to lift things. He was my dedicated driver when I was unable to move forward. He was my brain when I was in difficult times and lost my mind.

Guanghua married Yuxing in 1999. That was the happiest time of his life. Yifu came to the family the next year. I never saw Guanghua so excited as when he was holding his newborn son. I know he will worry about Yuxing and Yifu even though he is far from here. I will be there for them just as Guanghua was for me.



Guanghua and I had the longest friendship in his life and my life. We still have so many things that need to be done together. We still have so many plans waiting for us to finish. We still have many arguments that need to be settled.

Another Thanksgiving is coming. To keep our tradition, we will have a party at my home. I will invite Yuxing and our common friends. We will have a space for Guanghua too. He will be served first, just like we always did.

Guanghua, my dear brother, please go well. And drive carefully.

(Hong Song, Nov. 17, 2005)