

## **Life Span**

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When God said to Moses: “Lead my people out of Egypt”, Moses first response to God was: “ Who am I that I shall go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” Exodus 3:11. I have read this verse many times, but not until today did it dawn on me that no one else was more suitable than Moses for God to choose to talk to Pharaoh? After all, Moses grew up in the Egyptian palace. Understanding “who am I?” explores my personal lifespan development from the beginning to my current life stage, highlighting the developmental milestones I have met and developmental tasks I have accomplished or missed. I pray that I will understand “who am I” and His ultimate development goal for me at the end of this assignment.

I know that I maybe should start describing my lifespan from age 0 to 3. However, I would like to start from the very beginning – that is from God’s creation. The reason why I know that this is really when “I” started is because Psalm 139:16 says “ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” I am thankful that God revealed this unseen part of my life to me, so I know my life is planned by God all the way from the beginning, and that every day I would live was written in his book before I actually lived out one day. It was eye-opening and at the same time comforting to know I am not an accident, that my life is planned by God from the beginning and that he planned every one of my days ahead of my existence.

I was born into a middle-class Chinese family in Taiwan. My father was a pharmacist, and my mother was a nurse. I am the fifth of six children. My parents were born in Mainland China. In 1948, when the communist took over mainland China, they fled from Shandong to Taiwan. So, I was born in Taiwan and grew up there until I was 17 years old. I have no memory whatsoever of the 0-3 years period of my life except for some old, yellowed black and white pictures. In the picture I was either holding a doll or surrounded by several kittens. From the pictures, I always looked happy and secure. Therefore, I surmise that I was a happy and normal little girl.

From ages 3 to 6, I was in kindergarten. I was told by my mom that I would often put up a talk show in our back yard right by the bamboo fence. I would pretend I was three different people. This one person show - little actress plus the director, attracted some of my mom’s friends as my faithful audience. I remember that I always enjoyed make-believe plays. Up to this point, I was happy, content, secure, creative and innocent.

From ages 6 to 12, was the period of my life when I had the most painful experience of being sexually molested by a janitor in my elementary school when I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Though this was a one-time incident, it had put a dark cloud in my life for a long time because I did not know how to handle this painful experience. I did not tell any soul about this incident because I felt ashamed and embarrassed until I was 16 years old (10<sup>th</sup> grade). Because of my ignorance and for hiding the molestation away from everyone, I thought I was inferior to my peers. A certain level of happiness and innocence were taken away from me. It affected my performance in school and relationship with peers. If there is anything positive about this period of my life, it would be about my heightened alertness towards strangers. I was always conscious of my surroundings and kept a good distance from any stranger.

Ages 12 to 14 was a relatively happy stage of my life. After I graduated from the private elementary school, my father sent me to a prestigious Catholic boarding middle school which was run by priests and nuns from a Belgium Catholic church. I loved going away from home and living in school. I had a chance to make good friends and be disciplined by the nuns. I studied hard and did well in school. I would say the ups and downs of becoming an adolescent were shielded and calmed down by the warmth of peers' interaction and highly individualized attention from the teachers and nuns. I also learned to be persistent at the goals I set for my study. I would not leave my seat until I had finished my study goals. At this stage in my life development, I grew in my ability to be persistent and developed my critical thinking skill. I consider this a major developmental milestone. The fact that I was able to be educated in such a prestigious and expensive private middle school was because my family could afford it. I

consider it a privilege. From the education I obtained from this school at such an impressionable time of my life, not only did I make some life-long friends, but also obtain major foundational learning skills which I use in my life all the time.

From ages 14 to 18, I went to the best girl's high school in Taipei because I aced the high school entrance exam. However, once I started the public high school, I became so lost due to the high student teacher ratio and the "unstructured" studying environment. I lost the individualized attention and the friends I had in junior high school. I did not know how to function in such a different environment. The goal of the three years of high school is to ace the university entrance exam and I am sure that is also the developmental task in Taiwanese culture. I failed the task of this developmental stage because I did not pass the university entrance exam. This experience of failure followed me all my life as I always felt that I was trying to catch up with what I missed during high school.

One important thing I did in this period was that I finally broke down and told my parents about my being sexually molested in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. My father was outraged, I was sure that my mom was sad and troubled too. However, she comforted me by the truth in the Bible where Paul said in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come!" The power of God's word did renew me from within and I felt released from a heavy burden which I bore since age 7. The power of God's truth was liberating to me. I truly was set free from my sense of inferiority and was able to live out the truth that God loves me. The identity of being God's child has become clearer to me at the end of this stage.

Then I emigrated to the United States after I graduated from High school at age 18. From 18 to 23 years old was a big milestone in my development. As I had to adjust from the homogeneous culture of my home country to this melting pot culture in the big apple. I needed to learn English and to understand the new social norm in the USA. I also needed to adapt to the new economic status of my family from a middle-class family in Taiwan to a low-income struggling immigrant family in the United States. This all happened while I was transitioning from a dependent teenager to an independent young adult. There were many different socioeconomic, psychological, physiological changes hitting me all at once. I am really surprised as I look back on how I walked out of this tumultuous period of my development stage in one piece. This is nothing short of grace and the mercy of God. Few highlights in this development stage:

At age 21, when I was in my sophomore year, my father passed away due to an accident in the house. After his passing, I felt that I needed to quickly graduate from college and find a job and get married. The urge to quickly meet all these goals was so great. I think it was due to the passing of my father. I wanted to be independent to lessen my mother's burden. In other words, I wanted to grow up fast. By age 23, I adjusted to life in the USA; I graduated from college, landed a good job as a computer software engineer, and I even got married. On the surface, it looks like I had met the goals of this development stage from the social/culture standpoint. But now as I look back, I was on a fast train of goals and tasks set up by other people and society instead of by my own level of maturity and personal ambition. As a result, from age 23 to 31 years old, relationship wise I reap the result of a failed marriage by not having a solid foundation for an intimate relationship. Out of this short marriage I gave birth to a lovely

daughter when I was 25. Having a daughter made me work even harder in order to support her and me. This awareness has made me become a responsible, hard worker. While enjoying being a mother, I also excelled at my career. I am thankful for my mother's help in raising my daughter.

From age 31 – 35-year-old, I changed my job from working as a computer software consultant for the private sector to being a civil servant working for the various agencies for the city of New York. I also met my second husband on a project in which we worked together. Working as a private consultant, I had to put in a lot of long working hours. Though I learned a lot from working as a private consultant, my heart desired to have a balanced life between my work and my family. Especially when I found out that I was pregnant with my first son. After I started working for the city of New York, my working hours became normal so my family life became better. I had more energy and time for my ever-growing family. In this stage of my life, I felt that I was relatively stable financially, work wise and family wise. I also learned that if I work hard I will be rewarded.

From 35 to 65 years old, the rhythm of life was working and taking care of the children. Since I worked for the city I had a little more time to tend to my family. But I remembered life was still very busy as I always had to juggle different balls - children, work, the family. At Age 40, my whole family moved to Europe due to my husband's job. We lived in Belgium for a year and Germany for a year. I spent 6 months in intensive German language class. Learning the language helped me to understand German culture and better interact with my German neighbors and teachers. This living experience in Europe had expanded my horizon of how people in other cultures live, their different value systems and priorities set in life. I also enjoyed being a full-time homemaker in Europe so I was able to bond with my children more.

When I was 42 years old, I experienced reverse culture shock when we had to move back to New York because my husband's work was done in Europe. The anxiety of reverse culture shock culminated when I needed to return to work. As the world of computers has changed dramatically in the 2 years during my stay in Europe as a stay home mom. It moved from the big machines to the world of the internet. I would have to learn a whole new technical concept, software languages and brand new architectures. At age 42, it took me about a year to learn all this new knowledge and involve myself in continuous learning programs to work in the computer field. Thank God for granting me courage and determination so I was able to familiarize myself with the new paradigm of the world of computers and started working again for the city. I learned that life is always filled with surprises and new challenges. However, they are never a surprise to God. Holding onto God's sovereignty, knowing that every surprise and challenge are measured by Him is a crucial understanding for me. But if I can humbly accept them with a learning attitude makes life interesting and never has a dull moment.

At age 50, I was asked by the CIO in the Department of Education of New York City to head up the application group of Information Technology. The responsibility of this position entailed managing 200 software engineers; maintaining the computer systems and design/implementation of necessary new computer systems for 2000 public schools in New York city. This new job proposal for me was really nerve-racking and out of my comfort zone. I prayed about it and decided to take on this challenge. I have worked at this position for three years. As a result, I grew tremendously as an professional IT manager from this position and I

had a higher level of self-efficacy. I learned that the more I am open to taking risks, the higher level of self-efficacy I obtain.

Then at age 60, my children had grown, I was about to retire from my job. I started seriously searching for God's calling in my life. I realized my whole life to this point was in a survival mode - Are my children warm and well fed? Do they have a good education? I was dedicated to working in order to put a roof over them and bread on the table for my family. I seldom have time to stop, and think - am I walking in the path of the Lord? Now, at 60 years of age, I seriously thought about why I am on this earth? What is the meaning of my life? I realized that it was largely a matter of survival that led me to become a computer software engineer. I had never consulted God if this was what He wanted me to be. So, I asked Him if it is possible for Him to reveal His calling for my life at the old age of 60. I searched for God's answer for a whole year during my tenure as IT director for the Mental Hygiene Division of the Department of Health of New York City. Besides praying, I also took a course called "Excavate your Gold Mine" with a private career coach. The purpose of this course was to evaluate one's temperament, life, and work experiences through different homework assignments from the coach. The purpose of this course was to decipher if one is working in the right field or if one is getting optimal monetary reward. When I was doing one of the homework - writing a 10 minutes long self-introduction article then airing it in a studio so people could know who you are. In that exercise, I realized that my oldest uncle died in the insane asylum in mainland China; my father had undiagnosed schizoaffective disorder and my oldest sister has clinically diagnosed schizoaffective disorder. God was showing me that I have been doing exactly what he calls me to do - serving mentally disturbed people. Though I was not a clinician nor a counselor, I was working as IT director for the Mental Hygiene Division of the Department of Health of New York City. I was indirectly serving the people with mental illness in the city by designing and maintaining computer systems with which they can be served more efficiently and effectively. That was an "Ah Ha" moment in my life. He graciously let me know that I am to serve the mentally disturbed people. I was ecstatic.

At this stage of my life, I realize how important it is to know God's purpose for my life and how vital it is to make every minute count. I guess this sense of urgency is caused by my walking in the last stage of my earthly journey. Though I was clear about God's calling for my life, I was not clear about exactly how I was going to live it out. After my retirement, at age 64, in the summer, 2021, from the Mental Hygiene Division of the Department of Health of New York City, I started volunteering in Garden of Hope (GOH). It is a domestic violence and human trafficking prevention center in the community I live in. I partnered with the resident pastor in GOH to host the online worship session every week. This was the first time I ever interacted with domestic violence victims. Through an online domestic violence conference, I realized that I myself am a victim of domestic violence. Due to my father's undiagnosed mental illness (my diagnosis for him is a high functioning person with schizoaffective disorder), my family of origin in which I grew up in, was always filled with his anger, yelling and shouting. I actually don't know how to handle this new realization. However, I learned that when I am willing to love and serve people in need, God rewards me with a peace of mind and illumination of the part of me that needs to be healed.

Thanks be to God, He spoke to me through my pastor. In one of his Sunday services last November, my pastor said that when Daniel was thrown into the Lion's den he was already

eighty some years old. Pastor also pointed out that God can use us no matter how old we are. Then I realized that God was telling me to get educated in mental health counseling. It is never too late. So, I mustered my courage to go back to school for mental health counseling and this is why I am writing this life span paper now.

As you can see, when one yields to God's will, human development is never stagnant, it is always going forward with excitement and purpose. What a glorious anticipation that is - when we are face to face with our Lord Jesus Christ, then we will be like him – ultimate task of human development.