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CHINESE YOUTH REACT TO THE 25th ANNIVERSARY OF TIANANMEN SQUARE



MY TURN

■ Dmae Roberts



Dear Marie

I feel so bad right now. A letter was returned to me stamped "Return to sender. Not deliverable as addressed. Unable to forward." It was a letter I should have written a long time ago, but didn't until last month. And now I have no clue how to send this letter to the correct address. I don't even know if the recipient is in the Portland area anymore.

Nearly two years ago, I received a beautiful, heartfelt, handwritten letter in the mail from a woman named Marie who responded to my "Hazing is bullying" column (*AR*, August 20, 2012). Her letter began with "I am a 74-year-old bully victim."

The column was about the bullying and racism that escalated to the hazing death of Pvt. Danny Chen. I had written in the column that I felt a personal connection to this horrible tragedy from witnessing my younger brother being bullied while growing up.

Marie wrote quite eloquently of her own personal struggles as a survivor of domestic violence and bullying and I made a promise in my heart to write her back. Now please understand that writing something by hand is an arduous process for me these days. Although my hands are used to typing and daily computer use for my work, holding a pen and trying to write legibly is a bit painful due to carpal tunnel and mild arthritis.

The irony is I can easily answer dozens and dozens of e-mails, Facebook posts, and Twitter messages each day, but taking time to write something by hand that can be read, well, that presents a challenge for me. Unfortunately, I had no e-mail address or other way to communicate with Marie except by handwriting a letter. So I waited for a time that I could spend an hour to write a response that was not only deserving of her personal letter to me, but one she would be able to read. That was my mistake.

In the course of my daily work and the hundreds of e-mails I receive each day, I lost track of Marie's letter. I filed her two pages in my inbox, meanwhile piling other correspondence, bills, and more papers on top of her dear letter. This by no means excuses my negligence. I felt I had a duty to reply to her not only because she responded to my column, but because she took the time to tell me her personal story.

Yet I didn't until last month, when I was cleaning

up my office and found Marie's letter once again. So I cleared off my desk, found a pretty notecard, and took an hour to write, without mistakes, a hopefully legible reply while apologizing for the delay. Though it would have taken me a quarter of the time to write this letter had I been able to use my computer and e-mail her, I tried, really tried, to print and script each word as clearly as I could. Then I addressed the envelope as legibly as possible, attached a colorful "forever" stamp to it, and mailed it. I hoped upon hope that she would receive it after these years.

The letter was returned to me three days later. Previously, I had done an internet search for Marie's name, but found no trace of her online. She would now be 76 years old. So I'm writing about her in this column, and I'm including the letter I wrote in case she still picks up the newspaper and will finally see my reply. If you are reading this, Marie, please accept my sincerest apologies. Thank you again for sharing your personal story with me.

Dear Marie,

I'm sorry it took so long to reply to your eloquent, heartfelt, and very personal letter. Please know that I was moved by your response to my essay on the hazing and bullying of Pvt. Danny Chen. I appreciated so much your connection also to my brother's experiences being bullied by classmates when he was growing up.

Thank you for sharing your personal struggles of trying to get out of an abusive marriage and how it nearly cost you your life several times and how you didn't have contact with your adult children. That kind of abandonment can only debilitate the spirit, yet you have survived and been able to share your story with others.

I apologize with all my heart for not writing you a letter by hand immediately after receiving your beautifully penned handwritten letter. It meant a great deal to me, but it also became lost in other piles of paper and only in cleaning up my office today did I find it once more.

It's been nearly two years and I hope upon hope you will receive this apology and note of gratitude. I also hope you are telling people your story or writing it down. I would love to hear more.

With the best wishes possible,
Dmae

P.S.: Please excuse my terrible handwriting.

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