

In memory of a true Taiwanese, Ruth Lin

Written by Chang Chao-hsuan 張朝煥

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Ruth Lin, a medical missionary who came to Taiwan half a century ago and settled here, passed away on Monday at the age of 95.

Lin was born Ruth Duncan in Lubbock, Texas, in 1921. After graduating with a nursing degree, she went to Qinghai Province in China, where she helped establish a hospital that provided medical services to Tibetan people and trained nurses.

Unexpectedly, she and other nurses working on the Tibetan Plateau — “the roof of the world” — were confined to the hospital for seven months by the Chinese Communists, after which she left China in a dejected mood and came to Taiwan.

Thanks to her faith, she firmly believed that God would set out a path for her to follow.

In 1952, she went to the Happy Mount sanatorium in what is now New Taipei City’s Bali District (巴里) to care for leprosy patients. As fate would have it, she met Frank Lin (林國強), the son of a wealthy family in Tainan, and, after overcoming numerous difficulties, they became husband and wife.

In those days, most people were terrified of leprosy. One day in what is today Tainan’s Jiali District (嘉里), Ruth Lin saw a leprosy sufferer in his 40s who was shut away in a little room with bars on the windows, like an animal, and could never set foot outside.

In 1956, the Lins established a special dermatological clinic in Tainan that was devoted to treating leprosy patients. For more than a decade, Ruth Lin took in and treated more than 1,000 leprosy patients in Tainan, while patiently spreading healthcare education in the hope of removing the stigma attached to the disease.

The Lins met each other, fell in love and lived together as husband and wife for half a century. Having no children, they depended on each other in their old age. In 2005, they selflessly donated their home and NT\$60 million (US\$1.8 million at current exchange rates) in savings to

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turn the building into a care center, and in 2011 they again donated land valued at more than NT\$200 million, and NT\$130 million in property, to build a center to provide elderly people with high-quality care.

Someone once asked Ruth Lin where she was from, to which she, with her high-profile nose, fair hair and blue eyes, replied in fluent Hoklo (also known as Taiwanese) that she was Taiwanese through and through.

The Lins were industrious and frugal all throughout their lives, using their medical expertise to help people and care for the most needy patients, and they gave all their wealth to the nation.

In 2007, then-president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) presented the Lins with the Order of Brilliant Star with Violet Grand Cordon in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the development of the nation and Ruth Lin was given an award for her contributions to medicine.

There is only thing that can really heal physical and mental illnesses and pain, and that is selfless love. Taiwan, luckily, has never been lacking in loving people. Now Ruth Lin has left this world and gone to her home in heaven. Having traveled from the US to China and then to Taiwan, she devoted the golden years of her life to Taiwan and married a Taiwanese.

She was indeed a true Taiwanese — and perhaps she loved Taiwan even more than some Taiwanese do. She devoted her life to caring for the old, the weak, the sick and disabled people.

Taiwanese are proud of Ruth Lin and grateful for her life-long contributions to the nation.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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