

I'm Raymond Zhang, Cecilia's father. I was born in China and my family immigrated to Canada in 1998, when Cecilia was 4 years old.

Cecilia was our only daughter, and she was such an angel who brought us endless joy throughout her all-too-short life. She was our greatest treasure and no one could ever understand our loss.

She had a very kind, caring and loving nature ever since she was very little. When she was a very young baby, she laughed much more than she cried. When she grew up, she had developed great love for nature, animals and life. We loved to walk in nature, and she loved to make friends with animals. She was able to identify so many different plants and animals even when she was very young. She loved her best cat friends "Happy" and "Lucy", whom she took care of so well. One day, we asked her, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" She said to us firmly, "Become a vet". One of her great wishes was "I also wish that I have all the animals in the world to be my friends and all of my friends could visit them." And her other wish is "My other wish is that meat can be produced without the killing

of animals, but the world won't be over filling with animals". I couldn't hold my tears when I found her wish list on her assignment after she left us. It was so cruel that her life was taken away by the accused at such a young age, yet she had so much passion for life.

She had a great sense of humour. She loved to make jokes. I still remember at one of my birthday parties, she played an anchor from CTV news and pretended to hold a microphone to interview my guests.

She was smart, intelligent and innovative. She demonstrated it by qualifying for the gifted program. We loved to play some computer games together. One of our favourite games is called "Age of Mythology", which is very complicated. She didn't need me to teach her much, and she was able to quickly figure out the solutions and discover some new methods. However, she only built her kingdom in the game, and never attacked her opponent. After she finished building, she would say, "Well, Dad, it's your turn". I then realized that she cherished life and did not like killing.

She also loved music, art and handcraft. She loved playing the piano. In the silence of our home, the songs she used to play are still lingering in my ears. The image of her vivid piano playing is very much in my mind. However, only the heart-shaped clay treasure box she made is left sitting on her desk.

Oct. 20, 2003, is the darkest day in my life. My beloved Cecilia was kidnapped from our home. After the day, my whole world collapsed.

Shock, despair, anxiety, anger--- no word could ever possibly express my feelings. Life has become an endless nightmare since then. After the initial aimless search in panic, we reported to the police. Then, an amber alert was issued and our street was packed with media. I was desperate to watch the news and hope there could be some leads. But every picture and every mention of my beloved Cecilia struck my heart so that I couldn't watch.

I still feel breathless and my mind is frozen whenever I recall those days. The crucial 24 hours passed; nothing happened; my heart felt seized and twisted. The greatest fear came into my mind: Cecilia might never come back. Then, during the

following sleepless 72 hours, I was mentally and physically devastated and exhausted, I remember I couldn't stop coughing and vomiting. I would rather die than live like this.

However, as parents, in this situation, we would try anything even though there might just be a millionth of a chance. We decided to go to news conferences and call upon the public for help. It was so hard for me to do, no one would ever want to experience these: facing the public; facing the camera; tell my heart-broken story; appeal to the kidnapper; desperately hope the perpetrator could have a little compassion to release my daughter; appeal to whoever had some leads could possibly come forward to the police.

At the same time, we had to cope with the police investigation and went through the endless interviews. In the beginning, the suspicion and speculations hurt us very much. Not only did we have to endure the disappearance of our beloved Cecilia, but also to withstand the stress on us as a result of the investigation and endless rumours.

After launching our web site specially designed for finding

Cecilia, we got lots of leads from the public, although most of them were from psychics. We had no choice but to drive to those places they described in their messages. The place could be in the woods in north Ontario, a river in Oshawa, or a remote lake in Quebec. Each time, we returned with increased helplessness and exhaustion.

Thinking that the greatest motive behind kidnapping was for ransom, we then refinanced our home for \$200,000. With this amount of money, we set up the trust fund with our lawyer. We just wished that the money would be ready when the ransom demand came. However, we heard nothing. In our desperation, we thought Cecilia might be transferred to the States. We rushed to Detroit and Buffalo to put up the flyers. We went from shop to shop, lamp post to lamp post to paste the flyers. Some "positive news" finally came to us. Our lawyer was contacted by someone who claimed to possess Cecilia and have her recent photo. They wanted an "exchange". Of course, it turned out to be a scam. This is just one example of the many "ups and downs" or roller coaster ride that really at times drove us crazy and other times utterly tormented us.

Despite all these frequent turmoils and endless frustrations, we still had to cope with the reality of daily life. In addition, we were left to spend holidays lonely, empty and feeling scared. For Halloween, Cecilia liked to play “Cinderella” or “Snow White”; her costumes were left unworn in her closet. Christmas, which Cecilia loved most, and then Chinese New Year, which she would wear her Chinese traditional costume passed by without our sweet Cecilia. Instead, we had to spend those holidays alone in tears. We desperately wish that a miracle could happen and she would suddenly show up, so that our anguish could end. But, time after time, the wish vanished. That was a terrible, terrible experience. Ever since, every holiday pierced my heart.

Minute and minute, day and day, I questioned myself, I blamed myself, what if I had locked the window, what if I had set up the alarm, what if I hadn't reported to the police and what if the police had done the investigation quietly. Every question and every thought was like a sharp, burning arrow that pierced through my heart. My mind was so tortured that, from time to time, I had to rely on medicines to pull me out of the deep depression and devastation.

Cecelia's birthday was March 30, which we celebrated every year. But in 2004, I feared that it could become the saddest day we had to face. It was so cruel for us to imagine how we could spend the day without her. However, the case seemed to have gotten nowhere, and we were hoping to appeal to the public again to get more leads. We reluctantly decided to open our home to celebrate her birthday in order to refresh the public's memory. But while we were preparing for the celebration, the horrible news came, just 3 days before her birthday. When the tragic news came, we were totally devastated, mentally and physically. I can't recall how I actually survived that day. I just remember everything seemed to be frozen, I couldn't hear, couldn't say a word, couldn't even weep until eventually I realized we have lost her in this world. Both of us did not want to live. We really wanted to retreat from life. Our love and our hope in life vanished instantly. I will never see my beloved Cecilia again in this life. I will not be able to hear her laughter again, and I will not get another hug or kiss from her. No words can express the pain, the loss and the anger in my heart.

The news hit my parents as hard as it did to me. The tragedy has become a scar permanently carved on hearts of everyone in our

whole family. And the scar has been reopened too many times-
by many places and by many events, such as the investigation,
pre-trial, and the trial, or related news. Even now, under
seemingly innocent circumstances such as visits to great
universities, the pain still hit me very hard, because I realize that
Cecilia would never have a chance to fulfill her dreams.

Raymond Zhang

May 3, 2006