

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

In the short time that I have been alive on this planet, which we, all, call home, I have learned that one cannot be that which one is not. In the 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom', a book, written in 1926 by Mr Thomas Edward Lawrence, the somewhat enigmatic British soldier who coalesced the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, during World War I, it was made only too clear that to try to be that which one is not results in one being a nothing. One has seen that axiom come true in Hongkong. Prior to July 1, 1997, there was quite a number of Hongkong people who were jockeying for positions in the first government of Hongkong as a territory, legally owned by China. There were those who aspired to be the First Chief Executive of the territory, the name of which was changed from Hongkong to the Hongkong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Some of the aspirants were lawyers (of one calibre or another), judges, retired and serving, public relations people, businessmen, and, of course, sycophants galore. Beijing, however, was not fooled and hand-picked Mr Tung Chee Hwa () to be the first Chief Executive of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region. The choice of this man as the leader of nearly 7 million people was, as history has proved, a mistake. But the choices of people in the territory to lead the Hongkong Special Administrative Region, during the transition from a colony to being an integral part of China, must have appeared to Beijing to have been extremely limited. Perhaps, Mr Tung Chee Hwa, who owed a huge debt of gratitude to Beijing, was seen, in 1997, as a man who could be trusted to carry out the edicts, as handed down by the Capital City of the Middle Kingdom. Prior to the 'election' of the First Chief Executive, I recall seeing certain people, dressed in the then fashion of the plebeians of Beijing. One former lawyer, who died recently, stopped dressing in the usual garb of the day, resplendent in highly polished shoes, tailor-made suits of the finest material, name-brand ties, etc, and walked around in what he considered to be the fashion of the day in Beijing where the noble proletariat tried to outdo their neighbours by adopting a lowly patrician mien. I recall, seeing this particular lawyer, sitting in a fancy fine-dining restaurant in a certain 5-star hotel in the Hongkong Special Administrative Region, wearing only a wrinkled jacket over a white shirt and without a tie. It appeared to me that he had not brushed his teeth for some time. I wondered at the time: 'What is that man, trying to prove?' Then, there was that former, well-known public relations man, who has, since, vanished from the Hongkong scene, almost completely. He followed his lawyer-mentor in the way that he dressed and, actually, achieved a tiny honorary post in a provincial government of China. In a conversation that I had with this gentleman, in 1998, I heard him spout political statements in support of his 'beloved' country, statements which, only a few years earlier, he would have been scornful. He, as with his lawyer-mentor, was attempting to be that which he was not. And, today, these 2 people are nothing. It is more than likely that their names will not even be remembered by the year 2017 even though, actually, they are part of the history of the territory and, as such, should be remembered. Their error, like so many other people's: They tried to be that which they were not and could never have been. Lastly on this subject, there was that former Legislative Councillor who, after becoming a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, he bought a mansion in Beijing, having publicly thrown away his American passport and denouncing his citizenship to the United States of America. However, it was well known that his wife retained her US citizenship. He was fooling nobody. Today, he, as with all of the other would-bes of yesteryear, has faded into history and shall be, in due course, completely forgotten.

It is sad to note that many people fear to show their true side lest their pimples and warts be seen by others. We all have pimples and warts, here and there, but outward appearances are not as important as the purity

of one's soul. It is there, in one's soul, that the mettle of a man or woman may be judged by his peers. It is said that good work shines forth from he who advocates such work. If the eye is the window to one's health, then an examination of one's heart must be the window to one's soul. When I was in school, I read a little book, written by a man of very small stature – who was recognised as a giant among men. The book was called, 'My Experiments With The Truth.' The author of this little book was Mohandas K. Gandhi, later called Mahatma (Sanskrit for 'great soul'), the man who advocated passive resistance in order for India to doff the heavy yoke of the British Raj. He succeeded in leading India to independence in 1947 only to be assassinated by his own people on January 30, 1948. The simplicity of this little man, whose vast intelligence and purity captured the hearts of his countrymen, is a lesson for us, all. He left no baubles behind on his death, only a pair of well-used spectacles, a loin cloth, and some of his most-beloved books. But this man was invited by royalty in many parts of the world, that royalty, fully aware that they would be entertaining a man, dressed in the simplest of clothes, the cloth, likely to have been made on his personal spinning wheel out of fibres, grown in his country. He could have had a life of plenty and lived in splendour, but he chose poverty and simplicity: The influence of example. He was that which he was and proud to be that person. He could be nothing else than that which he was.

As I shall always be.

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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