

Staying Strong

There is a Burmese saying “Devise a plan if necessary, a method will be found.” This saying essentially means that when there’s a will, there’s a way. Paw, my domestic helper, lives by this saying. Growing up in a family with 5 siblings and being the oldest with the most responsibility, Paw’s motto is to be filial as well as to persevere on in times of difficulties. As her eyes glistened with tears of reminiscence, she started to share about her life from a few years back...

Born in a village in the Eastern part of Myanmar, Paw was the first child of a poverty-stricken couple as they struggled to make ends meet. Many of the people in this village farmed for a living, including Paw’s parents, but as the village was small and the market was far away, many of the villagers were unable to sell their crops because there were too little buyers. Hence, many of the villagers were poor and lived in dire conditions. With shaky hands running through her hair and a wavering voice, Paw told me what her situation was like. She spoke of skipping meals, tattered clothes, unclean water, worn-out blankets, and more. She talked about having to help her parents out on the farm at the meagre age of 4, and about her frequent backaches whenever she worked on the farm for the whole day. She spoke about how she worked tirelessly on the farm day and night, cropping beans and rice non-stop like a machine. However, despite all the hardships she had to face, she had a fiery desire to help her parents which kept her going. She was determined to overcome poverty and give her parents a good life, so she did whatever she could to help earn money for her family. Even though working on the farm was tough and draining, Paw pushed through it all in hopes of a

better future for her family. At the tender age of 4, Paw had already learnt about and understood perseverance and filiality. Her strong spirit and maturity really is remarkable and admirable.

As the years went by, Paw's family got bigger and bigger and soon, they were a family of 8. Having to juggle between working on the farm and taking care of her siblings, Paw had to work twice as hard.. Apart from that, she had to attend school now that she was older.. As Paw talked about her dilemma of going to school or staying at home, her eyes lit up in fond memories of her past self as she chuckled, teasingly reprimanding herself for having been so silly. In the end, Paw decided to go to school, but she promised herself that she would run home as soon as the dismissal bell rang. Keeping to her promise every day for 6 years, Paw would dash home as soon as the dismissal bell rang. However, being the responsible and filial child she was, Paw failed to realize that with school came friends. Paw was a joyous, fun-loving girl, so it was no surprise that she made a lot of friends in school. Every day after school, her friends never failed to invite her out to eat lunch and play together, but because of her responsibilities and duties, she always had to turn their invitation down. Never realising that she had neglected her friend's feelings, Paw got a shock when her friends turned against her and started to bully her. "It started out small, mainly calling me mean things," Paw recalled. However, as time went by, her 'friends' started to get more vicious and even started to hit her, pull her hair, and even resorted to playing pranks on her. Paw was lost; she didn't know what to do. No one could help her. Her parents were burdened

with the job of raising a large family; her siblings were still young and could not help her; no one in school wanted to be her friend anymore. She was all alone. With tears welling in her eyes, threatening to fall, Paw recounted with a sad smile on her face that it was the lowest point of her life. "I was so tired of everything... I really didn't know what to do," Paw choked out, tears steadily flowing down her face. Her eyes filled with sorrow and pain, she recalled another horrific incident where her cousin's friend had burnt her on the leg with a scalding hot knife. She still had the scar, and whenever she looked at it, it would remind her of her darkest times as a child. Nevertheless, despite the trauma and fear of getting bullied at school, Paw was determined to stay strong and fight on. With a steely edge in her voice, she spoke of her determination to push through those tough times, as she knew she had to stay strong for her family. After all, the only thing she could do was to press on and overcome her hardships. With a renewed sense of morale, Paw pushed through and was determined to not let the bullies demoralize her as she constantly reminded herself she would get through it. She might not have friends to help her, but she had her family, and that mentality kept her going. That experience has definitely shaped Paw into the person she is today - persevering.

Today, Paw is a remarkable young lady with strength and determination driving her forward. Coming to Singapore as a domestic helper, she hopes to give her parents an enjoyable retirement and sends them money every month. Although Paw might seem delicate, almost like a flower, on the inside, she is as tough as leather with the tenacity

of a lion. Paw has had many life experiences that taught her many things, but one thing that she will always believe in is to stay strong and persevere on.