



## Hsiou-Hua Yang,

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# Taroko Aboriginal Angel from Chiyakan Tribe

The Third Top  
Ten Nightingale  
Award Winner  
in Taiwan

From a little girl from the Truku aboriginal tribe to a third top-ten Nightingale Award winner, how did Hsiou-Hua Yang find her way to a nursing career?

### **Father’s Hospitalization Showed Her the Beauty of Nursing**

One day in the summer vacation before entering the second grade at the age of 8, she heard, “WEEO-WEEO-WEEO...” The ambulance siren broke the quietness of the tribe. Her alcoholic father while drunk driving, collided with a crane and was seriously injured but miraculously survived. “Dad stayed in the Mennonite Christian Hospital for two months. I slept in the lounge chair for two months. I fell out of the chair when I fell asleep. Dad could not help me because of his fracture, so he rang the bell to ask the nurse to put me back on bed.” When she stayed with her father in the hospital, Hsiou-Hua observed how the nurses took care of her father and the other patients. She vowed to become a nurse when she grew up.

Having graduated from junior high, Hsiou-Hua was admitted to Tzu Chi and Notre Dame Nursing colleges at the same time. But Hsiou-Hua did not want to stay in her hometown; she wanted to go further away in Yilan. After graduating from nursing college, she was admitted to study in the Chang Gung Memorial Hospital for Level 2, and moved to Taipei to continue her study.

### **Childhood Hardship Brought Her Energy to Battle in the City**

Her father strongly opposed when she wanted to study nursing. He thought nursing involved too much hard work. But Hsiou-Hua said frankly that behind her decision was her protest to her parents. “My mother had wished I went to Hualien Girls High School. But my parents divorced when I graduated from junior high. They disappointed me, so I did not want to go easy on my mother.”

Hsiou-Hua comes from the Truku aboriginal tribe from Hsiling village in Hualien County Wanrong Township. “We are known as the Chiyakan Tribe, she said people might not know that we are located next





**Always with a smile on her face, Hsiou-Hua Yang says it is her secret weapon for nursing.**

to the tourist attraction, Erh-Tzu Shan hot springs.” Starting from the time Hsiou-Hua could remember, her father had always been an alcoholic. He was never without a job, but his jobs were always temporary; sometimes he would work, and sometimes he did not. Hsiou-Hua said, “In order to raise five kids, my mother had to spend the whole day up in the mountain picking *Asplenium nidus*, *Diplazium esculentum*, and Yellow Rattan Palm so she could sell the following day.” Therefore, Hsiou-Hua started helping her mother at the age of five.

Entering elementary school, Hsiou-Hua did not know what the exam was for. Her mother transferred her to Hualien City and lodged at her aunt’s house when she was in second or third grade. Hsiou-Hua still remembers her mother’s disappointment when she received her scorecard. “Why can none of the five children study well?” Then she realized that her mother hope on education for their future. Since then, Hsiou-Hua studied hard and was always among the few to be the top in the class. She knew her mother’ struggle and pain, she wanted to make her mother happy. She realized that as long as she put effort into her studies, it was not hard to accomplish good grades.

During fifth grade, she transferred back to the tribal village and lived in her married elder brother’s house. Because her mom went to Japan in search of work, Hsiou-Hua had to take the responsibilities of all the housework, cooking, and taking care of her young nieces besides her school time. Basically, she had no time and not a great

environment for studying. Hsiou-Hua worked hard every day and hoped to get father's love and care and reunite the family. But her mother eventually lost hope in her father and decided to divorce him. Hsiou-Hua could not accept the fact; her response was "not to get admitted to Hualien Girls High." In fact, she did not do her best for the entrance exam. She barely passed to test to get into the first choice girls high school in Hualien district. The rebellious response led her toward to her childhood ambition. With her strong mind and independence, she moved to the bustling city and worked hard with no fear.

### **The Mind's Test Before Entering Clinical Care**

After she graduated from junior high, Hsiou-Hua was on her own, especially in finances. She had to earn her own tuition before she started a nursing college, and spent a year after graduating from nursing college to earn enough money to continue her study. The first case in her nursing career was to take care of an elderly gentleman with a brain hemorrhage during winter vacation in the nursing college. The elderly gentleman was in coma, with respiratory problems, and had the thick sound of phlegm in his throat. Hsiou-Hua worried that he might die suddenly, so she stayed up three days and three nights without closing her eyes. But it did not help his fate. She cried like he was her family or even more. The face of the deceased senior has been imprinted in her mind for a long time. She vowed to be a good nurse.

But with more and more practice, she understood more about clinical care. Hsiou-Hua withdrew herself and lost her passion. Very soon she was going to finish her studies at Chang Gung nursing skills II and her classmates were cramming for their Nursing license. Only Hsiou-Hua did nothing. "Nursing is too heavy; it may cause someone to lose his or her life if the job is not done well. So, I had the thought of not pursuing nursing, and was thinking about studying language." While still wondering what to do, she received a mad call from her crying elder sister. Her dream was to become a nurse but her family was not able to afford her studies. Now, Hsiou-Hua called a halt when the dream almost came true. Hsiou-Hua said, "At that time, my sister did not know that I did not pass the nursing license exam, and I did not care about the outcome."

A big brother from the same rental apartment who taught in the cram school called the aimlessly Hsiou-Hua and said, "You should go to cram school. Your classmates are all cramming in preparation." Those names he mentioned were all her good classmates. Hsiou-Hua seemed to wake up, started vigorously preparing for the exam, and then went into the clinic nursing career. "This big brother supposedly was one of the angels of my nursing career."



## **Seeing the Suffering of the Aborigines, Nursing Care Persistence Cultivated**

Her first job was serving in the chest medicine wards at Linkou Chang-Gung Memorial Hospital for almost three years. The frustration of being a novice is inevitable. Hsiou-Hua often encouraged herself: “Everything starts with difficulties.” Not only facing heavy work load every day, she also had to deal with the patients’ emotions and their worried families, and to adapt to the stressful environments. These difficulties did not bother her because the sense of achievement from taking care of patients and the trust gained from the patients’ families were the best medicine. “Choose what you love, love what you choose,” seems to be a simple truth. It is Hsiou-Hua’s admirable belief in nursing care and it came from her continuous experience of frustration.

With her away from home to study and work in Taipei, it had been twelve years in the blink of an eye. Hsiou-Hua decided to go back to her hometown. She started to work at the gastroenterology ward in Tzu Chi Hospital.

“Arriving at the gastroenterology ward, I suddenly felt how relaxed it was working in Taipei!” In the early years, the gastroenterology wards were full of alcoholics and liver cirrhosis patients. Most of them were aborigines, and there was a high ratio of the lack of caring people. Besides regularly scheduled work load, nurses had to help patients change their diapers, soiled linens, and responsible for the feeding. Hsiou-Hua once mentioned her elder classmate teasing her: “Hsiou-Hua, how come they all are aborigines!” Although the words were careless and people from her tribe did not care much about their own health, young Hsiou-Hua felt very ashamed.

At that time, there was a troublesome patient. She constantly rang the bell for attention. A minute before you just returned to the nurse’s station, she rang again the next minute. It was a headache for everyone. One day, someone called out Hsiou-Hua’s aboriginal name from behind. Then she realized it was her younger cousin. Her colleagues were all surprised: “She is your younger cousin!” At the time Hsiou-Hua was about 27. She could not recognize this younger cousin, since she had left the tribe for more than a decade. This younger cousin looked totally different from when she was a child. This young cousin passed away at age twenty-something. She survived with a child and left the burden to the family. The thought of helping her aboriginal compatriots was emerging unconsciously in Hsiou-Hua’s mind.

Has nursing been always so smooth? Hsiou-Hua said, “I thought about leaving nursing career. But I think it was a problem of my mind. The perspective of looking at things was not the same when my thoughts changed. Be grateful for each setback and hardship and face it bravely. The result is unimaginable.”

## Father's Special Angel - the Pride of His Life

Serving in the gastroenterology ward for three years, she transferred to the Intensive Care Unit after her father passed away. Hsiou-Hua was caught between love and hate for her father. She could not understand why he had to be an alcoholic. "Until one day, my aunt told me that my father must have had something in his mind that could not be resolved, that made him this way." It calmed Hsiou-Hua down, and then she was willing to feel and accept her father's suffering. Regardless of how unhappy she was with her father, when he was not feeling well, she became his special nurse right away and provided the appropriate care.

Her father was against her pursuing a nursing job from the very beginning. But later he left her these words before he died: "Thank you for sticking with your choice of a nursing career. If not for you, I would have died with that illness four years ago. Thank you for giving me the best care in these four years. Dad will always think of your kindness. You are my savior. You are the angel of my life. From now on, you take care of patients like you were taking care of me. I will be proud of you in heaven."

## Entering the Community, Facing Broad Diversity

"After I became familiar with all the equipment in the Intensive Care Unit for serious diseases, I began to feel a missing element in the life of nursing care. In the



While paying a home visit to a patient's family, Hsiou-Hua Yang would observe what other things beside medicine are in need and then try to help.



cases of caring for the body, the mind and the spirit, I felt I could only provide the body portion.” Hsiou-Hua felt she had hit an obstacle in her career. She decided to end her decade’s work in the Intensive Care Unit. She became a home care registered nurse in 2010. Entering the community for in-home care, she was therefore able to care for more aboriginal friends and people in her own tribe.

Hsiou-Hua found not only she could provide nursing consultations for in-home cases, she could even provide care for the body and the mind. She not only went to patients’ houses, but also went to community care stations to take care of the elderly. She visited in-home cases, helping in-bed patients with haircuts and shaving. It touched their families. She found most of the in-home care patients had oral care issues. So, she designed an oral care aspirator especially for in-bed patients. She produced CDs with short movies on health education, so the families could learn from them. Recorded in the Truku-language, these health educational materials could teach others about betel nut addiction and mammogram; they promoted quit smoking, and the use betel nut or alcohol.

A few years later, Hsiou-Hua became more adapted to this job. She said: “Society is much diversified. It is not limited to Intensive Care Units. It is much broader. It is very consistent with my character. I like to interact with people. My job brings me joy. At the same time, I found the value of life’s existence and the value of life.”

### **Paying Back to Taroko Society and Activities beyond Nursing**

This is the third year Hsiou-Hua has initiated aid distribution activities to help the aboriginal tribe. Each activity has gone smoothly and successfully. Also, she has gained friendships with many kind people. This even brought her closer to the tribe. She and her husband often go back to the tribe with their two kids. “We all like to go back to the mountains.” She also let the kids learn to help others.

Knowing that she wanted to give away supplies, colleagues and friends all helped pass on messages and collected the supplies. Some even signed up to participate in the aid distribution activities. Even people she does not know also respond to the call. “Whenever the activities are finished, we see the tribal residents smiling happily. At the same time as we deliver aid with love, we feel at ease and satisfied.”

The action of donating aid to the tribes came from a free clinic hosted by the Eastern Tzu Chi Medical Association in Xilin where Hsiou-Hua participated when she first began in-home care. It was just near her tribe. “We went to the free clinic. Some of the tribal elders had hearing loss; some were able to understand Mandarin but were less likely to speak it. They heard I could speak their language and were very happy, as



Hsiou-Hua Yang, her mother, and their family members go uphill to pick sword bamboo shoots.

if a barrier had been broken.” Seeing the demand on supplies by many tribal families, she thought about it and started the annual fundraising for the materials.

Devoted to nursing for 17 years, she was rewarded with the Nightingale Award. Hsiou-Hua said it was so unexpected, “I am just extending my nursing job to serving the tribe. Thanks to my family and my tribal people. “Thanks to all for your help, including my teachers, hospital colleagues, and the most importantly, the patients and their families.”

“The length of life cannot be controlled, but the magnitude of life can be broadened; giving makes life more profound and rejoiceful in spirit.” This is her motto, and her present and future goal. She also encourages her aboriginal friends, “Regarding environmental suffering, we can also bravely face all the hardships because the intelligence of aboriginal people is not less than other people.”

“I know God wants to me to be a vessel. When I am tired, weak, and want to give up, He grants me the power.” Finally, Hsiou-Hua said thankfully, “As an aboriginal nursing professional, I am able to serve the tribal people in the rural land; it is a glorious and joyful matter.”