



LIVING IN LIBERTY

I ENDED UP LEADING A HUNGER STRIKE, AND THEY ELECTED ME COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF!

by Elisabeth Handley

Growing up in a small fishing village in Northeast China, Chai Ling was often a lonely girl, whose physician parents seemed to spend more time with patients than their daughter.

Left to her own devices, by 17 she had become a typical type-A overachiever. She became one of China's few national honour students and realized the fulfillment of her parents' and ancestors' dream to enter the country's greatest institute of higher education, Beijing University.

That's where Ling's life took some very different turns from where her parents — or even she — could have planned. "I found myself ending up at Tiananmen Square in 1989, leading the student protest and hunger strike for a better, freer, more loving China," she says.

Tiananmen Square, in the centre of Beijing, became the site of the bloody Tiananmen Massacre on June 4, 1989, when after six weeks of peaceful protest, government troops opened fire on students in the square who were calling for economic reform, freedom of the press, accountability from officials, and political change.

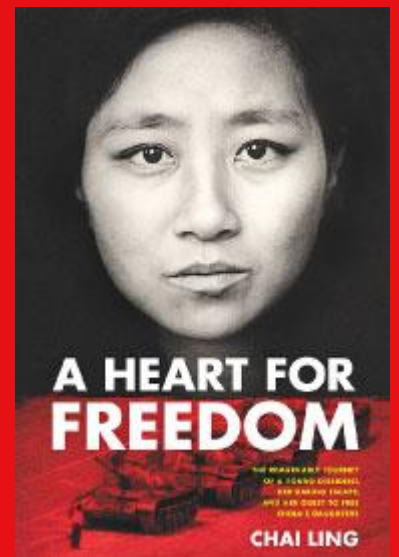
"I didn't begin with the intention of leading a protest movement," Ling recalls. "I was actually just bringing food to students. But later, I ended up leading a hunger strike, and they elected me 'Commander-in-Chief.' The atmosphere was remarkable — we felt so full of love and hope for China. We thought we could obtain a dialogue with the government and seek greater openness."

Instead, Ling barely escaped with her life.

She was smuggled out of the country through Hong Kong, then Paris, and eventually to the United States. She was deeply troubled by her survival when so many others died. She endured four days and five nights in complete darkness and isolation packed in a wooden crate on a boat clinging to the simple faith that, "My work in this life is not done yet."

This led her to a life committed to fighting for freedom and ending the injustices in her home country. First she earned a degree from Princeton University, then a graduate degree from Harvard University, with the intention of starting a software company whose profits she could use to fund her mission. She started Jenzabar, Inc. — currently with over 280 employees — but by this time 20 years had passed since Tiananmen and her plan was progressing too slowly.

It was at this time Ling attended a testimony at the U.S. Congress' Human Right Committee's where she heard the story of Wujian, a woman in



China who became pregnant before receiving a “birth permit” to have a child.

She tried to hide her pregnancy, but told of family planning officials who beat and tortured her father forcing her to choose between her father’s life and her baby’s. Wujian said she was forced to endure a horrifying abortion, and when Ling heard the story it “brought back all the memories of helplessness and pain we experienced on the night of the June 4 massacre in 1989.”

Wujian’s story is just one of the thousands occurring in China annually. In the past three decades, an estimated 400 million lives have been brutally taken by abortion in China; many reportedly use cruel and inhumane operations, which not only end the babies’ lives, but also deeply traumatize and endanger the surviving mothers, many of whom commit suicide.

After her forced abortion experience, Wujian struggled on the edge of life and death. She blamed herself for not protecting her child. She was only saved through her faith in Jesus Christ.

Wujian’s experience prompted two major changes in Ling’s life. One was founding her organization, All Girls Allowed, fighting to end China’s One Child policy and rescue girls and mothers from gendercide. “China has many needs, but gendercide and forced abortion are deeply avoidable problems that violently destroy lives and families,” Ling, who has been nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize, tells Living Light News. “These problems are directly linked to the One Child Policy — something that the nation could end today. The loss of 37 million girls to gendercide in China is horrific.”

The other transformation for Ling, who tells her story in her memoir, *A Heart For Freedom*, was becoming a Christian. Wujian had shared that she had only found complete healing and restoration through Jesus Christ, and Ling says she knew she had to find out more about the Jesus Wujian described.

One Friday afternoon in her office, with tears pouring down her face, Ling knelt in a corner and prayed that Jesus would enter her heart and be her Saviour. “Before I knew Jesus, I felt weighed down by the oppression in China — I had a deep desire to see China become free, but didn’t think I had a way to help,” she says.

“But when I came to know Jesus, I realized that He is saving China. He has promised to bring justice and restore the earth. He has already conquered death. The burden was no longer on my shoulders. Instead, it is now my privilege to serve Jesus by answering His calling upon my life: to share His love with the women of China.”

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