



My Story

GRACE CHEN



Campaign to Free Religious Prisoners of Conscience in China

IRF SUMMIT - YOUTH TRACK

My name is Grace Chen and I am 17 years old. I was born in mainland China and now I live in New York.

You may have heard different things about China, but I can share with you what it was like to live there as a practitioner of Falun Gong, a spiritual practice in the Buddhist tradition currently persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). My family practices Falun Gong, along with millions of others in China.

Before I was born, Falun Gong was very popular due to its health benefits and core principles of “Truthfulness, Compassion, and Forbearance”. After it was introduced in 1992, parks in China used to be filled with people doing Falun Gong exercises and meditation every day. This changed in 1999, when the head of the CCP, Jiang Zemin, felt threatened by the independence and popularity of Falun Gong and ordered the CCP to “eradicate” Falun Gong.

After this persecution started, millions of practitioners throughout China were kidnapped and tortured, including my mom and dad many times. I remember one morning when I was walking to kindergarten with my mom, several policemen suddenly appeared and grabbed us. I remember screaming and crying “No! I don’t want to get in!” as they forced us into a car. They pushed me out of the car at my school, but took my mom away. She did not come home for several weeks.

When I was in primary and middle school, many people did not know what the heart of Falun Gong truly is. The CCP was always spreading lies, even putting anti-Falun Gong content in elementary school textbooks.

One time, my principal called the entire school to the gym and gave a long speech in front of everyone, saying that people who practice Falun Gong are evil people and many other terrible lies. As I sat there listening, my shoulders started to shake and tremble with fear and rage.

It was obvious that my principal was reading off CCP propaganda, and he had never read the Falun Gong book or met any practitioners. But I felt so helpless and didn’t know how to help them realize the truth.

I also remember our school bulletin boards often had posters with insulting cartoons of Buddhas and Falun Gong. My mom and I used to tear those down when we could, but someone would put new ones up.

Most of my classmates or teachers did not know I was a Falun Gong practitioner and I was always scared they would find out. One big reason was because I refused to wear the red scarf of the CCP Youth League. This scarf is dress code for all Chinese students to show they are loyal to the Chinese Communist Party. If anyone did find out I practiced Falun Gong: I could be harassed, expelled from school, or worse—they could report my parents and put us in danger.

I lived in fear every day until I left China, when I breathed my first fresh air of freedom.

Three years ago, I came to America to chase my dream of studying music. I play the erhu, which is like a Chinese violin. I love the erhu so much because its sound is so beautiful and touching. To support my dream, my parents stayed in China and continued to work.

My first year alone in New York was lonely, but I called my parents often so it felt like they were right next to me and not on the other side of the world. I remember the most common questions my parents asked me were, “Are you getting good grades? Did you practice your erhu?” I knew this was their way to express: “I love you.” Even though they cannot be there for my erhu performances, my birthday, or Chinese New Year like other families, I found comfort in their words and I was glad they were healthy and safe.

In the fall of 2020, my parents were arrested with 8 other Falun Gong practitioners. When I found out, it was so sudden and shocking, but I wasn’t that worried. I just called my mom and dad a few days ago, so I thought they would be okay and call me again soon.

One week passed and I still had hope. Then two weeks, three weeks, four weeks went by. Every time I heard the phone ring, I hoped it was my mom and dad. But they never called. I felt so miserable. Every night, I cried in bed. I became quiet at school. I bookmarked every single article about my parents’ arrest on my laptop. I felt like now I was all alone in the world.

I have not heard my mom and dad’s voices for over two years. My teachers and classmates wrote lots of letters to them in prison. Even though I know the letters may not reach them, I hoped that the CCP police would know that Yang Chen and Zhimin Cao’s daughter was waiting for them. If I could talk to my mom and dad right now, I would apologize. I want to say how sorry I am. If my words can reach my mom and dad, I want to take a moment to say it now.

Mama, I heard the police eavesdropped on your phone for one year. Did they find your location because I called you so often? I’m sorry for not being more careful. If I called you less, would you still be safe at home now? I’m sorry for not taking care of you enough. Don’t worry, my grades are improving. I’m also graduating this summer. I wish you could be there. I love you, mama.

Papa, I heard that before I was born, CCP police found out you practiced Falun Gong and beat you until your teeth fell out. Even after that, you never ever gave up your faith. You are my hero, papa. But I hope this time, you are not hurt. I’m sorry for not helping enough to save you from your sentence. I will do my best to help you find freedom again. I hope we can be together soon.

Today, although I am far away from persecution in China, however, I am also the closest now to the persecution that I have ever been because my parents are in prison for practicing Falun Gong. In China, several million Falun Gong practitioners have been tortured or arrested over the past 23 years and many thousand have been killed by the CCP. But I know, for sure, there will be one day when China can be free and I can finally be together again with my mom and dad.

Learn more about my parents and
the persecution of Falun Gong:

