

Do you know how much I love you?

Jeanne Wun

[The following is a daily conversation between Auntie and her niece, her primary caregiver. Auntie has short term memory. They are sitting together in a love seat. Auntie is watching a television program.]

Niece: Auntie, do you know that I love you?

Auntie: *(laughs)* Do you? If you don't I will just hit the road.

Auntie: Whether you love me or not, you're stuck with me.

Niece: *(humoring her)* Yes, I suppose you're right. We're stuck with each other.

Niece: Auntie, do you know how much I love you?

Auntie: No, I don't.

Niece: Auntie, I love you so much that my heart hurts and my insides ache.

Auntie: *(smiles and laughs)* You don't have to love me that much.

Niece: *(wrapping her arms around Auntie, she kisses her forehead)* Auntie, you don't have to love me back. I have enough love for the both of us.

Auntie: *(laughs)* Okay, okay! I need to go outside and check the garden. Don't you have to go to work?

Niece: Auntie, it's raining and the ground is wet. I don't want you out in the garden in the rain. I've already locked the back door.

Auntie: Now why did you do that?

Niece: Because I know you. The moment I leave, you'll be out the back door.

Auntie: *(a mischievous chuckle)* I know how to open the back door, anyway.

Niece: *(laughs)* Ah, yes, Auntie; that you do.

Auntie: *(laughs)* You can't trick me.

Niece: Yes, you're right Auntie. Nothing gets past you. Why don't you wait until I get home?

Auntie: I can't wait around and have you do everything. If I can move, I can do it.

Niece: *(reluctantly)* Okay, but don't forget your cane and don't stay out there too long.

Auntie: *(changing the subject)* I want to go back to China. I'm becoming a burden to you.

Niece: Auntie, I want you to be a burden. I'm a burden. You're a burden. We can both be burdens. Okay?

Auntie: If I stay, you'll have to take care of me.

Niece: Auntie, why don't we take care of each other? We can go to China together. I've never been to Nanking.

Auntie: No, I can travel on my own. I came over by myself. I can go back on my own.

Niece: Auntie, you were 65 when you came to America. You're going to be 93 soon. Besides, I told the airlines not to let you board.

Auntie: Hah, you can't trick me. All I have to do is purchase a ticket.

Niece: Yes, that's true; Auntie, but I have your passport. They won't board you without one.

Auntie: How long is the flight?

Niece: Auntie, it's over 17 hours. We'd take a direct flight from Los Angeles to Nanking.

Auntie: It's going to take that long? Maybe you can drive me. We can load up your car and go.

Niece: *(smiling)* Auntie, driving to China isn't possible. There's this ocean and there isn't a bridge or road we can take. We could travel by ship, but either way, it would take a lot longer than 17 hours.

Auntie: I suppose we'll fly then.

Niece: Yes, I'll go with you and I'll carry your shoes.

Auntie: Oh, you won't have to carry my shoes; I'll be wearing them.

Niece: *(laughs)* Alright, you got me there.

[The following is a conversation between Auntie and her niece in late fall of 2015.]

Auntie: You know it's getting colder. If we slept in the same bed it will be warmer and we won't have so many lights on at night.

Niece: So what are you saying Auntie?

Auntie: I was thinking. We can conserve heat and electricity by sleeping in the same bed. I used to do this with Di-poh and Ah-jing when I visited them. We would chat all night until morning.

Niece: *(tries to have Auntie reconsider)* Well, my snoring might keep you up, Auntie.

Auntie: I won't mind. I don't sleep that much anyway.

Niece: Are you sure?

Auntie: Yes, and when summer comes, I will go back to my own room.

Niece: Right.

[Summer came and went. Auntie still sleeps with her niece and on occasion, they chat in the middle of the night. Auntie sleeps on the side of the bed that is closest to the bathroom. She has three dresser drawers in her niece's bedroom.]

[The following is a reoccurring conversation between Auntie and her niece.]

Auntie: I can't seem to remember things anymore. How come I haven't died yet?

Niece: Auntie, I can't remember things either. I'll remember for the both of us. And you're still here because I have more lessons to learn.

Auntie: Do you know how old I am?

Niece: Yes, Auntie, you'll be 93 soon.

Auntie: Oh, I just might reach 100.

Niece: Yes, Auntie, you just might.

Auntie: Are you afraid of me dying in your home?

Niece: Auntie, this is your home, too. I'm not afraid of you dying at home. I'm honored to care for you. I would be very upset if something happened to you or you went home (died) and I wasn't here for you. If that should happen, it was meant to be and I'll have to accept that.

Auntie: *(holding back her tears)* You're like a daughter to me.

Niece: *(hugging Auntie)* You're like a mother and a father to me.

Niece: *(poignantly)* Auntie, I love you as big as the sky.

Remember to live, laugh and love without regret as if it was your last day. Be in the moment. Be present. Be authentic. Be grateful. Make each day matter. Make memories with tears, laughter and joy in your heart and soul with your loved ones.

These vignettes are dedicated to Auntie, my parents, siblings, those who have touched my life and to all the Aunties and nieces who give of themselves compassionately and unconditionally everyday because it's the right thing to do.