
ABOUT MY FAMILY

By Yang Tianjiao

The 10-year-old daughter of Guo Feixiong, an imprisoned human rights activist, writes about her family and her feelings for her father.

1. I love my family

My family is warm and loving. There's me, mama, papa and my little brother.

Papa: My papa has a square face and wears glasses. His hair is thick and curly. He is a loyal patriot: He looked forward to the 2004 Olympics for a long time and every time a Chinese won a gold medal, he would shout, "[We] Chinese are really amazing!" He loves math too and often discusses math problems with me, but he's constantly reading the numbers wrong and makes it so you can't understand the problem.

Mama: Mama's face is shaped like a melon seed. There are a few spots on it, but they're not very noticeable and she has black hair, long black hair, very thick. She says her hair is her treasure, and she is always telling me how I should take care of mine.

Me: I'm a girl who really loves math and because I do, I always get over 95 percent in math. On my mid-term or final exams I always get 99 percent. And not only that, I'm very good at drawing. I'm young but I can already do sketches! I always draw in my notebooks, people . . . animals . . . I think I'm pretty good and my classmates do too.

Little brother: My little brother is really naughty. He's always touching things and peeking here and there. He's smart too. He's only a little over five, but he can do addition, like $79 + 38$ really fast, and that's doing it in his head. He likes Ultraman,¹ Ultraman Air. He does all the Ultraman movements! And he always sings the Ultraman song at home. He likes the color blue. Doesn't matter whether it's a girl or a boy, as long as someone is wearing blue or has blue hair, he likes them.

That's my family—a warm, loving family.

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2. I love my papa

My papa is not tall, not very handsome and not often home, but I think of him every minute of every hour.

He is very concerned about my studies. He watches over everything: homework, piano, exercise, playing computer games, but he's not too strict about it. During summer vacation, he has me practice characters, memorize some classical texts, copy English words, do math problems . . . but after I finish my "tasks," he lets me play 20 or 30 minutes of computer games—Intergalactic Three Kingdoms. Papa likes to play games too: when we first bought Intergalactic Three Kingdoms, he sat there playing and telling me how to form the soldiers for battle. He'd say, Zhao Zilong should go in the middle, Zhu Geliang at the back And he said he wanted to help me get to the next level. Actually he just wanted to play himself! But he's not as good at games as I am. I was the one who got us to the next level! Studying was full of happiness then. I really miss it!

He really takes good care of me. If I don't do so well on a test, 80 percent or so, he doesn't scold me, but just says gently, "Not so good this time. You have to try harder next time!" Now if it was my mama, she would have some harsh criticism for me. Sometimes when I do things wrong, rather than scold me, he tries to teach me and reason with me.

When school starts in September, we get new books! I'm so happy holding these little treasures. I look at them again and again, so afraid they'll get damaged. I put all my new books on papa's bed. I ask him to help me figure out how much they're worth altogether and to help me put pretty covers on them. Just like before, he takes great care in helping me put covers on them. He tells me: study hard.

But this year, in mid-September, he was gone! I don't know where. Did he go to work, or out of town on business? Mama says he will be back at the Spring Festival. Now there's only me, little brother and mama at home. Without him, without my papa, the house is cold, there's no laughter in it. That's how we spend our days. I asked my mama, "What day this year will you be happiest?" She says it will be the day papa comes home. Me too. I want him home too. I think of him every minute of every hour

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Translated by J. Latourelle

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Note

1. Ultraman is a fictional Japanese character and main superhero, featured in television programs.