My Earth science educator story – Chun-Yen Chang (‘Jim’ to his friends)
What I did, why I did it and what happened

“What Happened? No Choice.”
Scene 1
(It all starts on a country road, on a summer day in 1981. Two normal
Taiwanese boys from an all-boys senior
high-school, wearing school uniforms, are
walking home after school. Discussing
their lives and futures.)

Little Jim: Three years in an all-boys
high-school. I can’t wait to
choose a program with co-ed
classes! Education. That’s
what I want to get into. I heard
the classes are all girls!

Little Tom: I’m sure you scored better
than me anyway. So I’m gunna
to try and get into Earth
science.

Little Jim: What’s that? Never heard of it.
Why Earth science? Are there
girls?

Little Tom: I don’t know; I just can’t take
the pressure from my parents
anymore. My Dad said that:
(imitating a deep father’s
voice) “After senior high-
school, you are gone. I don’t
want to support you anymore.”

Little Jim (walking but turning his face
sideways to Tom). Our scores
are pretty close. I’m not that
much above the class
average. Why not apply for
some subject that someone’s
heard of? Or, something that
makes money?

Little Tom: (smiles) That’s just it. I
checked everywhere to see
what I can get into with my
marks – like science, or
engineering or math. Nothing
with my score. (pulls out a
paper) Wanna see what we
can choose from? (points
index finger to the sheet) This
is the only one we can get into.

Little Jim: (Looks at paper and stops
walking) So, we have no
choice?

Little Tom: Look at our marks on the
chart. We do have a choice:
National Taiwan Normal
University, department of
Earth Science. Don’t worry. I’m
sure there are some girls there
too.

Little Jim: (jokingly, pushes Tom) Maybe
there will be girls there thinking
“No choice,” when they see you.
“Why I Did It. A Lucky Guy”

Scene 2

(Present day, near the end of 2016. Jim, now an NTNU Chair Professor as well as the Director of the Science Education Center within National Taiwan Normal University, and a journalist, sit together relaxed in a bright and simply furnished office. The two are comfortably seated facing one another, across the corner of a medium-sized white meeting table, with some Chinese tea on the side, the interview begins.)

Interviewer: I’m going to record this, if you don’t mind. (fiddles with a small black rectangular device) Testing...Dr. Chun-Yen Chang, Biography...Take 1...

Jim: (With a warm smile) No problem. Go ahead. And, you can call me, Jim.

Interviewer: Great. Let’s start. Jim, your biography has been included in many editions of ‘Who’s Who in the World’, ‘Who’s Who in America’, and even in the upcoming 2016-2017 ‘Who’s Who in Science and Engineering’. These honors are not simply for your work in Earth Science are they?

Jim: These are the results of teams of international researchers, from all areas of learning, not simply one person’s achievements in Earth Science. My dream is that we can all collaborate within and beyond our own fields. We’re working together towards general scientific literacy. In simple terms, we hope everyone can learn, as well as share what they know.

Interviewer: I remember hearing somewhere, that you didn’t even choose the field of science on your own.

Jim: In Asia, the educational system is, for the most part, focused on student testing and university entrance exams. I am a lucky guy, so I was placed into Earth Science at NTNU. But, I want my son Austin’s life to be more than just about tests. The freedom to learn is a right that future generations should have.

Interviewer: So you want to change the system, so to speak. But, how can we do that just through Earth Science?

Jim: The way I see it, Earth Science is very much an Interdisciplinary Science: which means it touches upon many areas of science education, including the fields of mathematics, physics, chemistry, as well as all the people in these fields.

Interviewer: So do you have a vision for changing the education system?

Jim: I believe that if we can connect with each other, as individuals from different fields, and find ways of working together, that connection will change the system. It will change your world, my world and our world for the better.

Interviewer: Wow. So, you want to change the world?

Jim: Our world is changing. But we can help each other to learn how to change it for the better.

Interviewer: So how do we all connect with each other to start this off? I mean really changing the world, what can we do? How can I really start?

Jim: I like to make things simple. If you’re interested, let’s start by clicking on the links below.
Chun-Yen Chang, aged 49, Taipei City, Taiwan, December 2016, changcy@ntnu.edu.tw

References


