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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

“TO MY VIETNAMESE MOGUL GRANDMOTHER” BY TIFFANY PHAM

CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.



Dear Grandmother,

I wanted you to know that wishing to follow in your footsteps—in my generation—has led me to create a mobile app and a platform for women worldwide.

Let me tell you about it: it's a virtual place where millions of us can exchange insights from our lives and careers.

We help democratize information for women worldwide by enabling users to connect, share conversations, and access knowledge from each other. Today, we are an award-winning technology company reaching 18 million women every week across 196 countries and 34,470 cities, with headquarters in NYC and offices in San Francisco and Paris.

The platform is named Mogul, after you. (Definition of mogul: noun. An important or powerful person.)

I grew up listening to family stories about your accomplishments back when you lived in Asia. Anecdotes about your courage, your kindness, and an endless generosity, shining like sun rays through everything you did. **And of course, you were among the first women to drive a car in Vietnam. At a time when other young women around the world were forced to stay home, you owned and managed businesses across industries providing jobs to many. A mogul.**



Staying true to my roots—our family history and values, always.

My parents dreamt of a future without a glass ceiling for their children and decided to rebuild their lives in America. We moved from Paris, France, to Plano, Texas which allowed us to become close as you had just moved to the United States yourself. **You were no longer a legend then, but a flesh-and-blood person, a loving matriarch who would do anything for her family.** In my young and impressionable mind, it made sense that having had you in his life, my father had grown to be such a strong, kind, and giving man. I so wanted to be like you, too. I wanted to provide opportunities to those in need, and I wanted to break down barriers.

Sadly, within several years, you passed away. I remember vividly the moment when my father told me the news. After initial moments of silence, I went into a small closet and curled up on the floor in the darkness. And as sadness washed over me, I remember speaking aloud, hoping you would hear me from above: "Grandmother: I promise I will make you proud. I promise I will make my parents proud. I promise. I promise."

From that moment on, I have dedicated every waking moment to achieving this goal. I grew up speaking a combination of French and Vietnamese, and when we moved, **I didn't know a word of English. So I watched movies, black-and-white American films. I read books and listened to the radio.** And as I learned the language, I also came to realize how the media is an all-powerful tool.

I was just a teenager when you passed, and I had no idea how to proceed. I applied to Yale and Harvard Business School and was admitted in both on scholarship. After graduating, I set forth working across the media industry to learn every facet inside and out. I took on simultaneous roles at CBS, handling TV and radio station websites, and mobile properties; I also collaborated as Global Head of Marketing with the Vice Mayor of Beijing, China, producing feature films and documentaries, highlighting social issues that needed more global awareness.



Looking incredibly photogenic in this school portrait.

You would be pleased to know that I woke up one day to find my name on Forbes Magazine's "30 Under 30" List. This is what ultimately allowed me to give shape to my promise to you. Following the publication, I began to receive hundreds of letters from young women who had read about me and were asking for advice. As I answered each letter, I envisioned millions of us exchanging insights from the ground level—gaining access to knowledge from each other and becoming that much better together.

Then one day, I was sitting on my bed with my laptop, now in New York City, and decided right there to begin creating a digital platform for women across the world. **I was a twenty-seven-year-old business school graduate, now working three jobs at once. I also studied day in, day out. But this idea was inspired by my childhood hero, you, so I worked on it in the hours I had to myself after my jobs were finished each night.**

Every day from that point onward, I would work at my three jobs, and then late at night, or rather early in the morning, around 3 a.m., I would clear the kitchen table and sit down to work. **I didn't have money to hire a team of engineers so I determined to teach myself how to code using Ruby on Rails.**

After several weeks—the first version of Mogul was born. The design was very simple, but it had all the basic functionalities that I thought could make a real difference in women's lives. I then sent it off to the now-thousands of young women following me online. And the platform exploded, reaching a million people within its first week, becoming the fastest-growing platform for women worldwide.

Grandmother, would you be surprised to learn that in 2018 women only represent 10-20% of top leadership positions in the U.S and that it will take us until 2085 to reach parity with men? And that only 15% of voices on Op-Eds and Advisory Boards belong to women? But the good news is this is the time for real and effective change.

For example, one of the reasons I began Mogul is to increase access to information for our generation. To help women to have the courage and confidence to speak up and share their voices at the earliest stages of their lives. We also encourage those in hiring positions to seek top talent, beyond what they may sometimes be used to or comfortable with. Fortune 1000 companies, along with other top tech startups, post jobs and internships with us to accelerate the rate at which women are placed into their workforces.

Things are also difficult for girls. There are 62 million girls around the world who do not have access to an education. Hence, I have partnered with the United Nations and other international entities worldwide so that, for every \$1 earned by Mogul, we provide free educational resources to one girl in need.

Throughout this journey of building Mogul, recollections of your unending determination encouraged me to foster resilience, no matter how challenging the circumstances. **Stories of your ever-growing desire to learn, to become more, made me understand that, if we take it step-by-step, we can do anything we want to do and be anything we want to be.**

With your example, I've learned to step up to the moment, and to not let self-doubts hold me back. **Your life has inspired me to march to the beat of my own drum, and not be afraid or intimidated when I'm the youngest in the room, the only female in the room, or the only Asian in the room**—just as you never were. Your life has motivated me to figure out how to not let anything keep me from accomplishing what I set my mind to, even if others disagree. Your life has given me the courage and confidence to become a pioneer myself, to use my voice to help others, and develop innovative solutions to problems in a way that can truly impact our societies.

I honor you today and every day, Grandmother, for the life you led, the example you set, and the sacrifices you and my parents made.

I love you, always..

*Forever your granddaughter,
Tiffany*



