



Walks Before You
By Yanchen Liu

For my chair Jackie Bell, my committee members, and the Sinkler family.

“I am afraid that my life is too boring for you to capture.” This was what Shenghua told me when we first met in person. “I am not quite sure what you are doing, but it sounds like a fun plan. You know, like those real-life TV programs.” Shenghua smiled. Sitting in her living room, her floor was shining and clean; her daughter laid in her arms. My first impression was that she loves her family, and she loves her life.

I spent the past 3 and half months with Shenghua and her children. I wanted to know her as a true person. When I was trying my best to present her candid life, her characteristics started to show from all these fun details. It seemed that she was always surrounded by her children, and she was enjoying her role as a mother. I think that one of my main goals for this photo story was to show how lovely this family is, and how their distinguishable features crocheted a net of caring and kindness.

Shenghua is an independent mother. Moreover, she has a very optimistic soul, and she treats this world with love and patience. Her identity as a first-generation immigrant woman is traditional, but the ways she lives her life, educates her children, comprehends a different culture, manages her family relations, and is a good wife with a different nationality are quite unique compared to other immigrant mothers who do not have to experience the cultural differences in their own families. I think that this project also successfully introduced a nuclear family which has some ups and downs of the combination of two completely different cultures. Peeking through her life, people may only see a typical mother who is being responsible for her family and kids; however, a 21st-century immigrant mother with a different color skin and different tags other than a "mother," Shenghua has more words to say to this world.

Yanchen Liu
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Shenghua plays with her 6-year-old son Tobias Sinkler and her 1-year-old daughter Skylar Sinkler in their kitchen. Tobias is still in pre-school, so he does not go to school on Wednesdays. Shenghua has to stay home and take care of her kids. "I usually make Tobi do his homework and some math problems in the morning, so that he won't procrastinate till the afternoon, and he needs time to play with his daddy." After Tobi finishes his math homework, Shenghua lets him pick the game that he wants to play.



Shenghua works with Tobi on his homework while Skylar plays on her own. “If you give her a pencil, she mimics her brother. That is quite hilarious. Skylar is my angel baby because she can play by herself, and that just reduces my workload.” Shenghua says.



Tobi plays chess with his mother. Meanwhile, Shenghua focuses on indoor exercises. “Can you wait until your daddy is home and play with your daddy?” Shenghua asks. “No!” Tobi says. - “Can you play with Skylar?” - “No! She is a baby! She doesn’t know how to play!” Finally, she relents.



Shenghua gives Tobias a 20-minute math lesson on his iPad before taking them to the playground. While Shenghua dresses Skylar, Tobias lays on the stairs and focuses on the iPad.



Shenghua decorates her house with Skylar on Chinese New Year. Shenghua is going to prepare New Year's dinner on Feb. 11th, 2021. "To be honest, I might be the only one who cares about the festival in this house, but who cares! It has to be celebrated!" Shenghua says. "These decorations have been used year by year. I want my house to be merged in the vibe of celebration."



The day before Chinese New Year's Day, Shenghua takes Tobi grocery shopping at the local Asian food supermarket. She plans to make 10 dishes on New Year's Eve because there is an idiom in China called "Shi Quan Shi Mei", meaning that "ten is the representation of abundance and good fortune." Tobi helps his mother pack the food.



Shenghua looks for a new TV for their house. “I have seen one from an online shop. It is as big as these ones. I might just get one from here. I need to call my husband.” Shenghua says. Meanwhile, Tobi is attracted by the cartoons and colorful images on the screens.



Tobi sits in the shopping cart while Shenghua checks out. "Let me scan you first!" Shenghua laughs at her son.



February 18th, 2021. Columbia experienced a two-day period of heavy snow, and Shenghua takes Tobi and Skylar to play in the snow at Stephens Lake Park. “Skylar just woke up from a nap. She is a little grumpy right now.” Shenghua puts thick clothes on her kids.



Shenghua slides down a hill in a local park with Tobi and Skylar.



Shenghua plays in the sand while her daughter Skylar plays on the side. “I like to take my kids out,” Shenghua said. “When Tobi does not have to go to school, I’ll take them to all different places. I know which parks are good for kids and parents.”

Shenghua and Tobi play with a kite in early March. “There is no wind today! You have to follow me, and we have to run down the hill to get this thing fly!” Shenghua runs before Tobi and leads the way.





Shenghua gets off work and heads home. Sometimes she has to pick up Tobi from school, “but sometimes I’ll let my husband do it. It is okay. They like to spend time together.” Shenghua says.



Shenghua parks her car in the parking lot in front of Columbia Women's and Children's hospital. As a nurse, she has to get up early and arrive at to the hospital before 7 a.m. every Thursday. "I am used to this early morning schedule," Shenghua says. "We used to live somewhere closer, but now I feel like this ride is not that far."



Shenghua usually starts to cook dinner around 5:30 p.m. She says that her family, including her husband, likes to eat Chinese food. “Three entrees and one soup are enough. My husband likes to eat fish, so I always make sure that there is one dish of fish on the table.”



Skylar lays on the kitchen floor while Shenghua makes dinner.



Shenghua takes a photo of their Chinese New Year's dinner and plans to publish it on social media. "This morning my mother face chatted with me and asked what I had prepared for dinner. I could send this photo to her." Shenghua laughs. "I took almost two days for this moment, and it worth it."



Shenghua wants everyone to take a family photo in a traditional Chinese-style outfit after their New Year's dinner. "I bought those clothes a couple of years ago. We do this every year, and this becomes our family tradition." Shenghua says.



March 12th, 2021 is Shenghua's husband, Christopher Sinkler's birthday. Shenghua gives him a fitness game on their Nintendo switch. Shenghua laughs and takes photos when Christopher is playing the game. "He always complains that he needs to lose weight. I heard that this game is a good one." Shenghua explains.



Shenghua is ready to put her kids in bed, but they seem to be excited and want to enjoy the moment a bit longer. “It is hard to put them into sleep, and you can’t tell when they would truly go to bed. Some nights they would play until almost 11 p.m.” Shenghua says.



Shenghua helps Skylar brush her teeth.



Shenghua reads bedtime stories to her children.



Skylar wakes up around 10 p.m., Shenghua takes her downstairs and walks her around the house a bit before she gets fussy again.



Shenghua does her laundry after her kids fall asleep. “I can’t even tell how many clothes I have to wash every day. Tobi likes to wear clean clothes all the time. Even if there is a tiny bit of stain, he would take that off and make me wash again.” Shenghua smiles when she talks about her son.



Around 10:30 in the evening, Shenghua makes herself a bowl of warm soup, and finally, she can take a rest. “I still have to do a lot of housework after they fall asleep. I split those works with my husband, but you know, that is still a lot. When you have four people living together, you have to do all of these.”



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