

***“What a huge shovel for such slender arms.”***

That’s what we all thought as we walked into Kissena Park. It was a hot summer day and most of us would’ve rather wasted the day away in our air conditioned homes and apartments. But not Ms. Chou; there she was, wiping sweat from her brow with a towel around her neck and pushing a shovel into the hard dirt to make space to plant a young sapling.

Looking at her, you would see a woman with her hair in a tangle, wearing a pair of denim jeans, workman’s gloves, and a worn out gray t-shirt. But that was just today. Sometimes it’s an oven mitten in one hand, a ladle in the other, stirring tofu and boiled beef in a healthy yet delicious stew. Other days, she’s speaking before an excited audience in her red suit and white button shirt, a golden flag pin on her lapel. But regardless of what she was wearing, underneath the suit and the shirt, the oven mittens and the denim jeans, is a mom. A beautiful and hard working mother who loves her children and her community.

When we reached her, she had her knees in dirt, with her hand held out, cupping the young tree sapling. She looked up, as happy as a cherry tree on the first day of spring, with a great wide smile blossoming on her face. Gently placing the sapling into the dirt, you can see the care and intensity in her eyes and actions. She patted the dirt around the sapling, and put her hands on her thighs, admiring her work.

“1 down, 24 to go...and then afterwards, we have to make sure they are well watered and well taken care of”

And with that we rolled up our sleeves and joined her. For the rest of the day we dug, planted, we sweated, we horsed around, we joked, and we laughed. And after we were done, for weeks we would go back to there to see the fruits of our work, and making sure they would grow to become strong, healthy trees.

That’s why we love her. She’s always nurturing, kind and patient. With the care she placed in planting that first sapling and every other sapling that day, Ms. Chou has nurtured many of us from little, young, care-free, reckless boys and girls to mature, responsible adults of the community. She has invested so much time just for our benefit, we never know how to thank her enough. But then again she has never asked for anything in return because that’s the kind of woman she is – selfless and dedicated.

In public, we call her Ms. Chou. But in our hearts, she’s always “mom”. And the most amazing thing about mom is not how she manages to carry such a huge shovel with such slender arms, it is what a big heart such a small woman can have.

**We love you mom!**

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