

A Tribute to Mary-Anne Friday

Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Jidong Zhang, and I now live in Vancouver. Many years ago, in the early 1990s, my family and I came to this town. Most people knew me as John at that time. We were newcomers to Maple Creek, to Canada, and, in many ways, to a completely different life.

In the beginning, I was working at B.C. Café, and that was where I first met Mary-Anne and Ted. They were regulars at the restaurant, and I got to know them a little through brief conversations, always exchanged with friendly smiles. Through them, I began to experience the kind of warmth that people in Maple Creek can give so naturally.

Very soon, our conversations became more than just casual greetings. We found it easy to talk to each other, and we seemed to share a similar way of looking at life — a belief in honesty, kindness, hard work, and trust. Because of that natural connection, our friendship was built in a surprisingly short time.

Not long after, I had the lucky chance to take over Cypress Pizza and Chicken. It was a very important opportunity for my family. But there was one serious problem: my application for Canadian permanent residency had not yet been approved.

When I applied for a small business loan, the Credit Union told me that I needed a Canadian with an established reputation in the community to co-sign for me.

This was a very big challenge.

We were fresh in a new place, with no relatives here. We did not have many friends we could call upon, since many were in similar situations to ours. We did not have a long history in this town. I asked myself: Who would trust me enough to take such a risk? Who would be willing to sign their name for a newcomer like me?

I thought and thought. Finally, the only people I felt I could possibly ask were Mary-Anne and Ted.

So, I picked up the phone and called them.

Mary-Anne answered.

I explained my situation and told her what kind of help I needed. I will never forget her answer. She simply said:

“That’s no problem. Tomorrow morning, we can go to the bank and sign.”

There was no hesitation.

There was no “Let me think about it,” or “Show me the financial statements first.”

There was no fear, doubt, or distance.

There was only trust.

To me, what seemed almost impossible suddenly became possible.

There is an old Chinese line of poetry that says:

“When mountains and rivers seem to block every road, suddenly, beyond the willows and flowers, another village appears.”

That was exactly how I felt.

Later, I asked Mary-Anne and Ted, “Why were you willing to do this for me?”

Their answer was simple:

“Because we thought you were a trustworthy man.”

That trust changed my life.

Their trust gave me a beginning. Their kindness gave me courage. And because of that single act of generosity, I was able to build my life in Canada on a much better path.

From that time on, we became close friends. Over the years, I came to understand that what they did for me was not only a hand, but also an expression of who they were.

They were kind.

They believed in people.

And they had the rare ability to make others feel seen, accepted, and valued.

In Mandarin, we have a word for people like Mary-Anne and Ted. We call them “guiren” — people who appear at a decisive moment in your life, offer trust, help, and encouragement. It quietly changes the course of your life.

Mary-Anne and Ted were such people in my life.

Today, as we remember Mary-Anne, I share this story not only because it is precious to me, but because I believe many of you may have your own stories of her kindness. My story is only one small part of a beautiful life that touched many hearts.

Mary-Anne, thank you for your trust.

Thank you for your generosity.

Thank you for opening a door for me at such a crossroads in my life.

You and Ted will always have a special place in my heart.

Rest in peace, dear Mary-Anne.

Your kindness, your warmth, and your spirit will be remembered, treasured, and carried in our hearts forever.

Thank you.