

SHENZHEN TOASTMASTERS CLUB · #594537

I'm Fine

Tao · VC Level 3 · 1034th Meeting · August 11, 2026

[Walk to the stage with camera sling bag. Place it on the table. Start pulling items out one by one, holding each up briefly before setting it down.]

Dear fellow toastmasters and distinguished guests, good evening.

[toothpaste] This is for my teeth. Cold water hurts.

[knee brace] This is for my knee. Badminton.

[spray] This... I'm not going to tell you.

[eye drops] This is for my eyes. Too much screen time.

[bottle of pills] This is for my nerves. Literally.

[Look at the lineup. Look at the audience.]

I'm 37.

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None of this was what I expected.

I thought getting old was something that happens... later. Not today.

But one day my knee hurts after a badminton. And the pain doesn't go away. Then my teeth. Then something else. And then one morning — my face stops working.

And suddenly, this bag — is just part of my life.

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March this year. I was taking a shower, and I noticed water kept getting into my right eye. I tried to close it. It wouldn't. Not fully. This was my third time noticing this. Something was wrong.

I went to the hospital and told the doctor about my eye. She asked me to blow up my cheeks — like a balloon — and hold it. I tried. The air kept leaking out from the right

side.

She told me I had something called Hunt Syndrome. A virus that had been hiding in my body woke up and attacked my facial nerve. Half my face stopped working. Whenever I tried to smile. The left side smiled. The right side — nothing.

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I tried everything I could.

Every morning, I woke up, the first thing I did was look at my face in the mirror — any change? No. Then I dragged myself to the hospital like a zombie. Nerve growth injections — the kind they normally give to children who can't speak yet. And Chinese medicine I used to laugh at. Now I was the guy lying there with a dozen needles in my face, electrified. Hands, feet, everywhere. It felt like walking to the execution ground. And all I could tell myself was: this is going to be worth it. And sometimes I told myself, god let me buy a car, therefore I can drive to hospital.

And then there were the small things that crushed my dignity. My eye couldn't close. When I blinked, it only went halfway, and you could see the white of my eye. People would be horrified, I thought. So everytime I use my hand to help to close my eye lid. Drinking water or eating — things leaked from the corner of my mouth. And every time an app asked me to blink for face verification — I couldn't. I was locked out by my own face.

At work, between meetings, I kept asking AI the same question: what are the possibility for me to recovery? I asked maybe fifteen times. ChatGPT was calm and cold. The answer was always the same, 70%. I kept asking. DeepSeek was the opposite — too optimistic, almost too eager to make me feel better. I didn't want to believe either of them.

And I wrote in my notebook: everything from here depends on my choices. Every night, I prayed: if I get better, I will take care of this body. I will sleep on time. I will slow down.

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One day, I was staring at my own face, as I did every day. The right side was perfectly smooth. The nerves underneath were dead. I couldn't even make a wrinkle. Wrinkles

are not just a sign of aging. They are proof that something is alive under there.

I have never wanted wrinkles so much in my life.

Until day 17. I saw the tiniest movement at the corner of my mouth. I told my doctor. She said: that's probably just your imagination. It wasn't.

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So why did this happen?

Before March, I spent seven days in Europe for work. Jet lag. Six hours of sleep a night. Then ten days in Spain with my family. Lack of sleep. I landed in Shenzhen, went straight to the office, and on day three, played two hours of hard badminton.

The virus had been waiting. For years. For the moment my body couldn't fight back. And I gave it that moment.

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After I recovered, I kept my promise. Eleven thirty, lights off. Every night. For one month.

[Start putting items back into the bag, one by one.]

One month. That's how long it lasted.

Then it was midnight. Then twelve thirty. Then one.

[Last item goes into the bag.]

You want to know what I was doing last night at 1 a.m.? Writing this speech.

[Pause.]

[Pick up the bag.]

We never learn.

Thank you.