

EPILOGUE FOR

THE 2011 EDITION

by Brett Douglas,
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WHEN I FIRST MET my wife, Iris Chang, in October of 1988, she was a beautiful, brilliant, charming girl who was full of life. I wouldn't have been surprised if someone had told me she would someday write a best-selling book that would be translated into 15 languages. What does surprise me is that I am now writing an epilogue to *The Rape of Nanking* seven years after her death. With the energy, passion, and drive that Iris showed at age thirty, I thought it was likely she would be writing great books well in her eighties and nineties.

When we met, neither of us had dated more than a few times, but we soon both knew we were a perfect match. We were blessed to have sixteen very happy years together. At the time of this writing, two books have been published about Iris's life: *Finding Iris Chang* by Paula Kamen and *The Woman Who Could Not Forget* by her mother, Ying-Ying Chang. These are both good works, and I encourage those

who want to learn more about Iris to read them. Iris's life ended far too soon, and because she was a private person, much of her life and death has been shrouded in some mystery. I'm grateful to Basic Books for giving me the opportunity to fill in some of the holes and to remove some of the mystery associated with Iris's life so her legacy and the legacy of her book can endure.

Ying-Ying Chang's *The Woman Who Could Not Forget* provides a detailed description of Iris's entire life, and I have no desire to try to improve upon that work. Instead, I'll focus on a few key factors I believe led to her success. Both of her parents were Harvard PhDs who spent their careers doing scientific research. Thus, Iris learned to value intellectual achievement at a very early age. She spent thousands of hours as a youth at the University of Illinois library and other local libraries learning to read and process information quickly. Iris compiled an exhaustive list of all Nobel Prize- and Pulitzer Prize-winning books and Academy Award-winning films, and she proceeded to read and watch each and every one. Her days off consisted of methodically working her way through these books and films.

Iris attended the University of Illinois's University High School, a tiny academic pressure cooker populated primarily by academically driven professors' children who had all passed a rigorous entrance exam. The high school has produced several Nobel Prize winners and many other graduates who went on to achieve extraordinary success. In 1985, Iris was one of the few women who entered the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's competitive Math and Computer Science program. She was on track to graduate in just over three years, but she changed her major to journalism when she was a few hours short of a degree. At the time, it was relatively rare for a girl to study Math and Computer Science, it was rare for someone to complete the program that quickly, and it was extremely rare for someone who had completed the program so easily to change majors at the very end.

Most would expect someone who changed majors after almost three years to be significantly behind her peers, but Iris

soon made up the difference and won internships at *Newsweek*, the *Associated Press*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. While at the *Tribune*, she discovered her real passion was writing lengthy feature stories, so she applied and was admitted to the prestigious Writing Seminars program at Johns Hopkins University. While she was there, at the age of only twenty-two, she met her editor and later her agent, Susan Rabiner. Susan gave her a topic, and Iris started research on her first book, *The Thread of the Silkworm*.

When Iris completed her degree from Johns Hopkins, she moved to Santa Barbara, California, to live with me. Iris was always interested in film, so she took a portfolio of photos to a talent agency and was soon selected to be a dancer in an MC Hammer video. However, Iris had a MacArthur Foundation grant proposal due the very next day, so she declined their offer. We thought it was probably the first time anyone had ever turned down MC Hammer and his production company for that reason. Iris made the right decision. She won the MacArthur Foundation grant.

Iris later went on to win a National Science Foundation grant to continue her research on *The Thread of the Silkworm*. What was truly amazing was that Iris never completed a science degree, and she had no formal affiliation with any university or research institution.

Along with her beauty, her intelligence, and her education, two other factors contributed greatly to Iris's success. She was never shy about asking someone, no matter how famous, for help or advice, and she was always trying to improve herself. For instance, in 1991 Iris was very nervous about the prospect of giving a short toast in front of two hundred people at our wedding reception. Yet she consciously worked at public speaking so that by the time *The Rape of Nanking* was published in 1997, she could hold the attention of a thousand people for an hour or longer while she talked about her research and her books.

During the first ten years of our relationship, it was a true pleasure to watch Iris build herself from a sometimes shy and introverted person into "Super Iris," the famous author and historian who could write best-selling books, keep audiences

enthralled with her speeches, and win debates on national television. It was much sadder to see "Super Iris" rapidly succumb to mental illness during the summer of 2004.

There remain a number of myths and misunderstandings about the life and career of Iris Chang. Even I still have a few questions of my own. I can, however, offer information that I think will offer clarity to readers of this book. The first misunderstanding has to do with whether there was a "Eureka! Moment." Iris attended a conference in Cupertino, California, late in 1994 where she saw photos from the Rape of Nanking. There is a common myth that Iris saw the photos and decided then and there that she had to write a book on the atrocity. This is a nice story, but it is entirely contrary to the way Iris did her work. Iris maintained a meticulous file of book ideas, which grew to 400 potential projects by 2004. Iris had heard stories about the Rape of Nanking as a child from her parents and grandparents. She told me shortly after we started dating in October 1988 of her desire to write a book about the Nanking massacre. As soon as she completed the final draft of her first book *The Thread of the Silkworm*, she determined that Japan's assault on Nanking was the most promising topic for her second book, and so she started research. A month later, in the fall of 1994, she attended the conference in Cupertino where she met with the group of activists who sponsored it. She saw many photographs of victims, and she became acquainted with many people who were to become extremely helpful to her in her research. Yet, somehow the idea got started that looking at the photographs at the conference gave her the inspiration to write the book, and that myth has continued to grow. Iris never made an impulsive career decision like that. Writing *The Rape of Nanking* was something she had planned for years, and she was researching the book already when she attended the conference.

Another myth is that the subject matter of *The Rape of Nanking* and the Bataan Death March led to her breakdown and her death. Iris completed *The Rape of Nanking* in early

1997 but never showed any real signs of mental illness until 2004. While she was researching *The Rape of Nanking* and the Bataan Death March, she read through an enormous amount of information. She provided almost daily updates of her progress to me, and she also discussed the material with her parents and several close friends. My impression was that rather than upsetting her, seeing the photos and reading the material energized her and drove her to do the best job she could to tell the stories. She expressed sadness that the people of Nanking who suffered so much in 1937 and 1938 were still living in severe poverty sixty years later. She developed a close attachment to many Bataan Death March veterans who suffered at the hands of the Japanese from 1942 through 1945. Many of those Bataan veterans were small-town Midwestern boys like me and many of her childhood friends, so she identified closely with them. Most were in their mid-eighties by that time, and by 2004, many had passed away or were diagnosed with terminal illnesses. The only time I saw Iris break down and cry on a work-related issue was when she heard that one of the Bataan veterans she befriended had passed away.

There is another myth that the demands of being a working mother contributed to her mental illness. During the two years between our son's birth and her breakdown, a full-time nanny cared for Christopher and did all the household cooking, cleaning, laundry, and grocery shopping. I spent a great deal of time caring for Christopher, and both my parents and Iris's parents helped care for him. It's difficult to conceive anyone having a better support system for childcare and domestic work than Iris had.

Another myth is that the CIA and the US government were responsible for her breakdown and her death. Iris herself believed this because she was forcefully apprehended and confined against her will in a psychiatric ward in Louisville. It was a terrifying experience for her, and after going several days with very little food, water, or sleep, she believed that the US government was behind it. She related this belief to several people during the last three months of her life, but I never saw any evidence to support her belief.

The final myth is that the Japanese government was somehow responsible for Iris's eventual suicide. Iris's life experiences gave her plenty of reason to be fearful of the Japanese. Iris's parents and their families all experienced the Japanese invasion and occupation of China from 1937 to 1945, so Iris heard terrifying stories about Japanese atrocities growing up. While she researched *The Rape of Nanking*, many of the people she worked with had lived through the Japanese invasion of China. When she was on tour promoting her books many former US servicemen, as well as people from Korea, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines would seek her out to tell her their horror stories of the Japanese occupation and their fears about the Japanese government. The Japanese press and Japanese activists attacked her in every verbal way they could. She received a good deal of hate mail during 1998 and 1999 while she was actively promoting *The Rape of Nanking*. During that time, almost everything in Iris's life was giving her reason to fear the Japanese and providing positive feedback for that fear. However, the hate mail decreased and then stopped almost entirely after she focused her attention on her next book *The Chinese in America*. During the entire thirteen years I lived with Iris, I never saw any evidence of someone from Japan threatening her physical safety or doing anything to contribute to Iris's breakdown or her suicide.

Many have speculated that Iris was mentally ill prior to 2004. Part of this perception may be due to her background, and part of it may come from her career and lifestyle choices. Iris's parents lived through the Japanese invasion of China and the civil war between Mao's Communist forces and Chiang's Nationalist forces. They told Iris many of the horrific stories that they had seen and heard. During her writing career, she researched the Armenian Genocide, the rise of the Nazis and their persecution of the Jews, multiple World War II atrocities, the Chinese Civil War, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. During the last few years of her life, the US government took several actions that disturbed Iris, most notably the Bush Administration's attack on Iraq in 2003. She was also disturbed by the attack and killing of the Branch

Davidians, the Clinton Administration's bombing of multiple Middle Eastern nations during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, the "Humanitarian Bombing" in Kosovo, the Bush Administration's hostility towards China in 2001, the loss of privacy and personal liberties from the Patriot Act, and the indefinite detention of suspected terrorists without charging them with a crime. Iris saw these as a progression of changes leading the United States towards becoming a society capable of atrocities similar to those she had studied. She would often engage people in lengthy discussions on these and similar subjects and on the potentially disastrous consequences should the current trends continue. In public, Iris always kept a tight hold on emotions, but in private conversations she would often get emotional discussing a topic that was important to her. Someone who engaged in occasional private conversations with Iris might have concluded that this was manic behavior. I think it was due to the fact that she had a great deal of passion on a variety of topics, and she had the energy and intellect to aggressively discuss her point of view. I didn't see a change in that aspect of her behavior from 1988 through 2004.

Iris was a goal-oriented person rather than a relationship-oriented person, so many times she was more focused on achieving her goals than on how she would be perceived by others. This created some problems early in her career when she was expected to ingratiate herself to employers, co-workers, editors, and publishers. After *The Rape of Nanking* was published, however, she knew she would never have to work for anyone else because her writing and speaking skills would be in demand. Very few people experience that kind of freedom at the age of thirty. Working for a company or organization does a great deal to make people conform. While workers get almost constant feedback from their supervisors and co-workers, Iris got none for the last thirteen years of her life. I think what some may have perceived to be unusual behavior was not a result of any mental illness but a reflection of the fact that she had the good fortune to behave as she wished.

Book tours took a heavy toll on her. The closest analogy I can make to Iris's book tours is a rock star on tour. Most

mornings, Iris would wake up, head to the airport, fly to a new city, do the event, attend parties afterward, and then get to her hotel room late at night. At the events, people often told her their horror stories about what had happened to the Japanese's Prisoners of War and the civilians who lived in areas occupied by the Japanese during World War II. She would often repeat that same routine many days in a row. Iris lived that life for most of 1998, the first half of 1999, six weeks in 2003, and five weeks in 2004. Most of the people who met with her during the last seven years of her life did so when she was living this chaotic lifestyle.

Many have speculated about what caused Iris's breakdown. I don't know myself. Several different factors could have contributed to it. She *may* have had a genetic predisposition towards mental illness. Like Iris, one of her relatives had had a successful career until her mid-thirties when it abruptly fell apart, and she never worked again. During the first minute I met her, I thought she was a very charming lady, but she soon shifted the conversation to the people who hated her and wanted to kill her. She was tormented by the same thoughts that would plague Iris during the last three months of her life.

Iris finally stopped her one and a half years of promoting *The Rape of Nanking* in the summer of 1999. She intended to spend time at home resting and recuperating, and we tried to start a family. During the next months, Iris went through several miscarriages, causing wild hormonal swings that we later learned could hasten the onset of bipolar disorder. She was more volatile and excitable than at any other time prior to 2004. Someone meeting her then—who didn't understand her exhaustion from the travel and the hormonal swings—might have concluded she was mentally ill.

Iris also had unusual work habits. She went directly from being a college student to being a self-employed writer, so she never fell into the nine-to-five routine of most Americans. Throughout her career, she pulled frequent all-nighters to meet mostly self-imposed deadlines. Iris used a Franklin Planner to help squeeze in as much productivity as she possibly could

each day. When she would receive a request to write a blurb for a soon to be published book, she always read the book cover to cover, then produced a carefully written endorsement for the book. As a result, she would work late into the night to avoid falling behind on her own projects. These work habits undoubtedly put her under more physical and mental stress as she entered her thirties and may have contributed to her breakdown.

Iris had other medical issues such as thrombophilia and a thyroid condition that accelerated her metabolism. She once told me the thyroid condition could cause mental illness if not treated properly with medication. When Iris had her breakdown, one doctor asked me to write down all the vitamins and supplements she was taking because the overuse of unregulated herbal supplements is a frequent cause of mental illness. When I opened up the cabinet where she kept them, I couldn't believe my eyes. Along with her multivitamins, I found many different bottles full of the following ingredients:

Hymenaea Courbaril Bark, Tabebuia Impiginosa barb, Schinus Molle bark, Peiveria Alliacea whole herb, and Cassia Occidentalis leaf, Cat's Claw vine bark, Physalis Angulata whole herb, Boerhaavia Diffusa whole herb, Petiveria Alliacea whole herb, Cassia Occidentalis leaf, Smilaxsp. root, Physalis Angulata leaf and stem, Schinus Molle bark, Petiveria Alliacea leaf and stem, Mirabilis Jalapa leaf, Achyrocline Satureoides leaf, Urva Usi leaf, Jatoba bark, Hymenaea Courbaril, Chlorella, Garlic, Carageenan, L-Methionine, L-Cysteine, L-Lysine Hcl, Activated Attapulgit (clay), Sodium Alginate, EDTA Calcium Disodium, Alpha Lipic Acid, Betaine Vanadyl, Sulfate Choline, Inositol, Para-Amino-Benzoic Acid, Rutin, Lemon Bioflavonoid Complex, Hesperidin Complex, Quercetin, Milk Thistle Extract, Coenzyme Q-10, L-Glutathione, Grape Seed Extract, L-Carnitine, Artichoke Powder, Beet Juice Powder, Ginkgo Bilboa Extract, Lycopene, Chondroitin Sulfate A, Cilantro, Methyl Sulfonyl Methane, Taurine, L-Proline Hawthorne Berry Extract, Green Tea Extract, Aphanizomenon, Fresh Water Algae, Acacia Amylase, Glucomylase, Lipase, Protease, Invertase, Malt Diastase, Celulase, Bromelain, Lactase, Papain, Green Papaya, Apple Pectin, Ginger, Turmeric, Fennel, Bladderwrack, Nori, Wakeme, Peppermint,

Beets, Habanero Peppers, Jalapeno Peppers, African Peppers, Chinese Peppers, Thai Peppers, Korean Peppers, Japanese Peppers, Pumpkin Seed Oil, Burdock, PeachTree Leaves, Chamomile, Jaborandi, Sage Leaves, SD Alcohol and Methyl Salicylate Iodine from Kelp, Alfalfa, Dicalcium Phosphate, Stearic Acid, Magnesium Stearate, and Bilberry Extract.

Iris started promoting *The Rape of Nanking* at age twenty-nine, and she finished at age thirty-one. During her tour, she visited at least sixty-five cities, many of them multiple times. At that age, she seemed to be able to bounce back from the stresses of travel. However, she was thirty-five and thirty-six when she was promoting *The Chinese in America*. Her travel schedule was shorter but even more intense, and she wasn't able to recover like she had six years earlier. The Iris Chang who went on book tour in March 2004 was a very different person than the Iris Chang who returned five weeks later.

I believe Iris's prolonged fear and apprehension about Japanese right-wing extremists, her genetics, her multiple miscarriages, her countless all-nighters, her strenuous book tours, and her herbal supplements all may have contributed to her breakdown in Louisville in August of 2004. Paula Kamen wrote that one form of mental illness is the inability to control one's fears. This is how Iris's fears escalated:

When our son Christopher started showing signs of autism, she discovered that many believed vaccines were the cause. She dug deeper and found that vaccines and drugs given to Gulf War veterans caused various illnesses. Around the same time, we went to see the 2004 version of *The Manchurian Candidate*, in which the government used mind control on Gulf War soldiers. The movie heightened her anxiety. She spent the next few days preparing for an upcoming business trip to Louisville to meet with Colonel Arthur Kelly and interview survivors of the Bataan Death March. Instead of sleeping, she spent the next few nights visiting web sites on autism, Gulf War Syndrome, and many conspiracy theories. We were all quite concerned about her at the time she left for Louisville, but we thought if she went on the research trip she would focus on her work and not on all the conspiracies. However, her mind

began to play tricks on her due to the lack of sleep. She believed that the government was trying to poison her, so she refused to eat or drink anything after she left our home. Her condition deteriorated rapidly due to the deprivation of food, water, and sleep. She called her mother in terrible condition, and her mother contacted Colonel Kelly. When Colonel Kelly and his wife, a retired nurse, saw her condition, they called for an ambulance. Iris had never met Colonel Kelly in person; she became convinced they were part of a conspiracy to do harm to her, so she tried to flee. Police and paramedics forced her to go to the Louisville Hospital for extensive tests. She was placed in the psychiatric ward, where, according to Iris, she was repeatedly threatened by the orderlies. By this time she was firmly convinced that they were trying to drug her or poison her, so she once again refused to eat, drink anything, or sleep while she was there. If Iris had her breakdown at home surrounded by people she loved and trusted, it would not have been nearly as traumatic for her. Instead, she concluded that the people who had tried to help her in Louisville were all part of a Bush Administration conspiracy to harm her. During the last three months of her life, we could never get her to let go of that belief.

After her parents brought her home from the Louisville hospital, we had trouble finding a good psychiatrist to treat her. To compound the problem, Iris was not a cooperative mental health patient. Iris's experience solving our fertility problems caused her to lose respect for most medical doctors. Iris would so thoroughly research the topic that she would overwhelm the doctors she met. After that experience, she had very little faith in most medical doctors. This was a time when we desperately needed to find a good psychiatrist. We even more desperately needed Iris to follow the treatment plan, but she fought it every step of the way.

Iris's parents and I thought it would be a good idea to bring her to a bipolar personality support group, so they brought her to a meeting at Stanford University. The people she saw there were not winning the battle with bipolar disorder. Almost none of them were working, and many were on five or six

medications. Iris described them as zombies, and she said she would never allow herself to be medicated like that. Shortly afterwards, her psychiatrist formally diagnosed her with bipolar personality disorder, meaning she should be treated with mood-stabilizing drugs rather than antidepressant and antipsychotic drugs. The suicide risk for mental health patients goes up during changes in medication.

After Iris's death, her mother did a lot of research on the drugs prescribed to Iris, and she discovered that Asians may be more sensitive to many of the commonly prescribed drugs. These drugs have been tested on very few Asians because they make up such a small portion of the US population, so the medications pose more risk of side effects to Asian patients. This was likely the case with Iris. The powerful antipsychotic and mood-altering drugs she took seemed to cause many side effects on her.

Two days after the diagnosis and change in medication her mother found a gun safety course brochure from Reed's Gun Shop in Iris's purse. This was the first indication we had that she had any plans to buy a gun. When we questioned her, she told us she believed the US government was out to get her, and she needed a gun to protect herself. The combination of meeting the heavily medicated bipolar personality disorder patients, Iris's formal diagnosis of bipolar personality disorder, her change of medications, and the resulting side effects all put Iris in a very unstable state. Iris's parents, her psychiatrist, and I tried to find people who were successfully coping with bipolar personality disorder to talk to Iris and to give her encouragement, but we ran out of time.

After her experience in Louisville, Iris firmly believed the Bush Administration meant to do harm to her. She was hopeful that John Kerry would defeat George Bush in the November 2004 election, but Bush's victory was announced on November 3. Her thoughts of four more years of persecution were too much for her. The police investigation after her death concluded that she purchased the first handgun on the very next day.

The last factor that I believe led to Iris's suicide was something that no one else has mentioned: Pride. In her suicide note, she wrote:

"It is far better that you remember me as I was—in my heyday as a best-selling author—than the wild-eyed wreck who returned from Louisville."

On a personal level, Iris was completely unpretentious. She drove a Geo Metro for five years. If someone had stopped by our home unannounced, they would likely find Iris wearing glasses, no makeup, a t-shirt, and a baggy pair of sweats. However if Iris made a public appearance, her hair and makeup were always perfect, she wore her contacts and a conservative business suit, and she always had a speech prepared and rehearsed. She invested a tremendous amount of time and effort into building up and maintaining her public persona. I don't believe she felt like she could maintain that after her breakdown.

Iris wrote three books in her short life. Her first book, *The Thread of the Silkworm*, was a topic chosen by her editor at Basic Books, Susan Rabiner. Her last book, *The Chinese in America*, was a topic chosen by her publisher at Viking Penguin. *The Rape of Nanking* was the only book chosen by Iris. The one book she intended to write from a very young age spent several weeks on the best-seller list and was translated into 15 languages. She was in a position where she had the financial resources and the influence in the publishing industry to write whatever she wanted for the rest of her life. It is difficult to say what she would have been able to accomplish if she had continued writing for another fifty years.

Since Iris has passed away, many people have said that she has inspired them to carry on her work. I've guided people to visit the Iris Chang collections in the Hoover Archives at Stanford University, at the University of California Santa Barbara, and at the University of Illinois. That's the only way to fully appreciate the tremendous amount of original research that went into all three of her books. The Hoover Archives contains a list

of other books she had planned to write. I encourage anyone who wants to carry on her legacy to complete one of these projects.

Iris's dream was to have her books made into documentaries and feature films. Many claim to have done films based on *The Rape of Nanking*; however as of this writing, no producer has done a documentary film or a feature film on any one of her three books. Iris was not a religious person, but if she is looking down on us, nothing would make her happier than to see this happen.

There are many unsung heroes who are truly carrying on the work of Iris Chang. When our son Christopher started to show the first signs of autism in the summer of 2004, he could have had no better mother than the Iris Chang who researched and wrote three books from 1991 through 2002. That Iris Chang would have done the research necessary to put the best possible program in place to help Christopher achieve his potential. However, the Iris Chang of 2004 was already well on her way towards a mental breakdown. When Iris committed suicide, she left Christopher as a motherless two-year-old autistic child. Several women stepped in and partially filled the void left by Iris's mental illness and death. Our neighbor, Sun-Mi Cabral, and her sister, Sunny Park, cared for Christopher like he was their own child for most of the next year. Iris's mother, Ying-Ying Chang, cooked nutritious dinners for him for the next two years. After Christopher was diagnosed with autism, my girlfriend, Jiebing Shui, quit her job, moved in with us, became his step-mother, and focused full-time on getting him to his therapy sessions. His first adaptive behavioral analysis therapist, Hanna Almeda, made tremendous progress getting Christopher to communicate verbally with other people. However after Jiebing Shui became busy with our newborn son and Hanna Almeda accepted a position with the Palo Alto public schools, Christopher started to regress.

It was then that my parents, Ken and Luann Douglas, sold their retirement home and moved to Normal, Illinois, to be near Illinois State University because it had one of the best special education programs in the United States. I moved my fam-

ily from San Jose, California, to the same community. My parents have spent their retirement years devoted to giving Christopher a chance to develop to his full potential. Melissa Watson has been Christopher's adaptive behavioral analysis therapist since 2007. Melissa has done more to help Christopher develop than any other person. Many other therapists have also worked with Christopher: Hannah Gomez, Monica Bozek, Tricia Ferguson, Susan Konkak, Sarah Conklen, Megan Watson, Grace Watson, Angela Watson, Rachael Wrage, Kristin Hunsburger, Bethany Ingram, Gavin Meador, many therapists at Easter Seals in Bloomington, Illinois, and many therapists at The Autism Place in Normal, Illinois.

Iris was a hero for telling the story of the people who had suffered so much in Nanking during the winter of 1937 and 1938. She may have been a tragic hero because the same extraordinary motivation and drive that led her to achieve so much by age twenty-nine probably contributed to her breakdown and early death at age thirty-six. Iris influenced hundreds of thousands of people through her writing and on her books tours. I've met only a small fraction of the people she knew, and I'm still learning more about her seven years after her death.