

Father's path from pain to acceptance of gay son

Sun Dehua (孫德華) did not know his only son, Sun Mu, was gay until the end of 2001, by which time the young man was 30 and had been living with his boyfriend for almost three years.

The realisation came as a great shock to the 58-year-old farmer from rural Dalian (大連) in Liaoning province (遼寧省) – and ignited murderous impulses in him.

Nevertheless, he admits he had plenty of chances to find the door to his son's closet. Sun Mu owned the most popular gay bar in Dalian and his father often worked there. Mr Sun said he noticed that most of the patrons were male, but did not think much about it.

"I could tell that most patrons were male. I saw them come and go, but never had any suspicions about them. I once made a decoration ribbon for a gay couple getting married in the bar without even knowing what it was for," he said, laughing at himself.

"I may be a slow learner. After all, what was there to know? Weren't a man and a woman naturally meant to be together?"

Sun Mu had been trying to hide his sexual orientation from his parents for years. His home town is just a three-hour bus ride from Dalian but until his grandmother died in early 2001, Sun Mu had not returned home for the Spring Festival for several years. "His grandma loved him so much. She had always wished to see him get married," Mr Sun said.

In the first of a three-part series looking at the lives of homosexuals on the mainland, Vivien Cui talks to a parent who at one stage wanted to kill his son after discovering his sexual orientation

The pressure on Sun Mu to marry and have children was particularly intense because for four generations, the Sun family had had only one male descendant, leaving Sun Mu the last of the male line.

The situation was compounded by a Confucian belief prevailing in rural China that "dereliction of filial duty comes in different forms, but the worst is to have no offspring".

That is partly why Mr Sun was outraged by his son's homosexuality and decided to kill Sun Mu and his boyfriend.

Mr Sun got along very well with his son's "best friend", but that did not stop him from taking a sharp knife to the couple's apartment.

His wife stopped him from breaking in.

"I was so mad. All I could think was how dare he deceive me after the toil and pain I went through to bring him up?" Mr Sun said.

He bought a can of petrol and stashed it in the bar's basement, with the intention of buying a fuse in his home town and blowing the place up. "I hated not only my son

for being gay, but also the whole gay population," he said. "I thought my son was corrupted only after he came to the city, and that must be the fault of the gay people around him, such as patrons of the bar."

Fortunately, Sun Mu's friends spoke to his father on his behalf and, after learning that the couple had fled the city during winter out of fear, Mr Sun's paternal instincts overcame his fury. He wept and asked his son to come back.

"After I regained my senses, I still worked in the bar. This time I observed the guests much more carefully," he said.

"As time went by, I came to know many of them and even made friends with them. I found that gay people are not bad people at all. Many of them are very nice. They are attentive, and some fall in love as deeply as we do."

The *People's Daily* reported last year that the gay community numbered somewhere between 5 and 10 million, although other estimates put it as high as 48 million.

In his spare time, Mr Sun read

some of the free material in the bar on homosexuality and HIV prevention. "I learned that my son is not mentally ill. It was my fault that I didn't know my own son well enough before."

Mr Sun said he was also pleased with his son's boyfriend. "I am really glad seeing them together, because Mu is so happy when he's with him. Now it feels like I have two sons. And I do hope the law will allow them to get married one day."

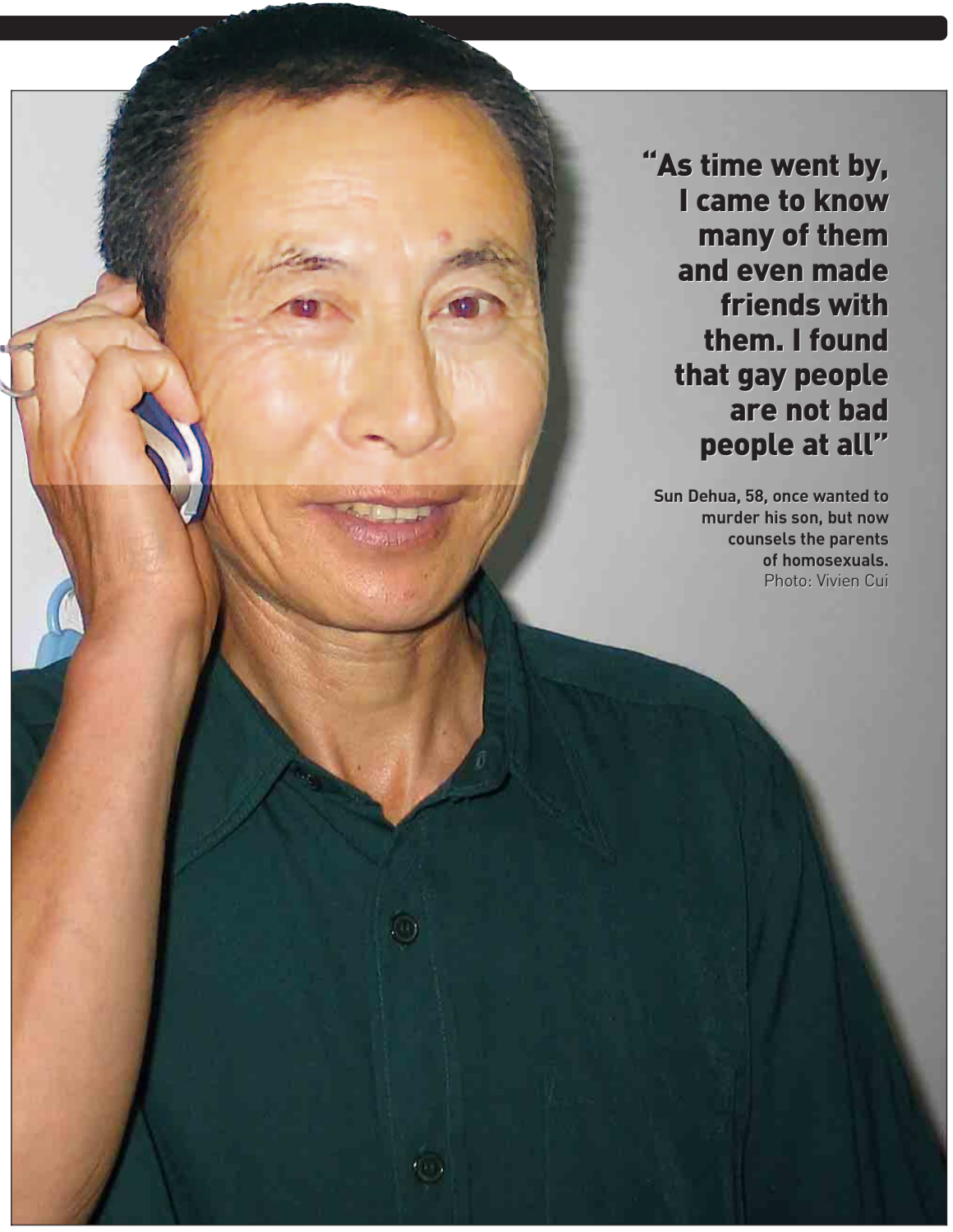
Sun Mu was forced to shut down the bar two years ago after repeated police harassment proved too much of a deterrent for his customers. Finding himself at a loose end, but with a new perspective, Mr Sun decided to do something to help other parents of homosexuals – he opened a hotline to give families the benefit of his experience.

The first such hotline on the mainland operates two hours a day every Sunday and Monday.

"I now understand it is hard for gay people to convince the parents of other gays to accept their children's sexuality, because the parents tend to blame the gay friends for the situation," Mr Sun said.

"With the hotline, I hope to help more parents to understand their children. They are already under immense pressure and have anxieties about being homosexual, so how can a parent have the heart to add frost on the top of snow?"

Next – life of a 'money boy'



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Sun Dehua, 58, once wanted to murder his son, but now counsels the parents of homosexuals.
Photo: Vivien Cui

AROUND THE NATION

BEIJING

Many married people admit to straying, survey finds

Almost half of all married men surveyed by the China Sexology Association admitted to having had an extramarital affair. Releasing the survey findings in Chongqing (重慶) on Sunday at the country's first sexology forum, the association said it polled 70,000 people and found that 42 per cent of married women also admitted having at least one affair, the *West China City Daily* reports.

Beijing unveils plan to rebuild Qing dynasty author's home

Work will start in Beijing next year on a project to rebuild the courtyard home of Qing dynasty novelist Cao Xueqin, the author of the celebrated *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the *China Youth Daily* reports.

Police apprehend sellers of venomous snakes

Police in Beijing's Chaoyang district detained two people on Sunday for selling more than 60 live poisonous snakes on the street, the *Legal Evening News* reports. The vendors, both from southern China, said they had bred the cobras, coral snakes and pit vipers at home and had also sold them in Shanghai and Ningbo (寧波). The snakes, all still small, were sent to the Beijing Zoo.

NORTH/NORTHEAST

Gold mahjong sets attract official interest

JILIN (吉林省) – Government officials and the very wealthy have been the main buyers of limited-edition gold mahjong sets retailing for 25,800 yuan in Changchun (長春), the *East Asia Economic and Trade News* reports. Each set contains 148 gold tiles and the manufacturer says only 3,000 sets have been produced. More than half of the 50 sets available in Jilin have been sold.

Accused bomber leaps off bridge to clear name

JILIN – A former nightclub dancer jumped off a 10-metre-high Changchun bridge on Sunday night to "prove" she did not plant bombs in two local dance clubs, the *Xinwenhuabao* reports. The woman survived the leap.

EAST/SOUTHEAST

Public offered look at Zhou Enlai's personal jet

ANHUI – The personal plane of late premier Zhou Enlai (周恩來) went on show in the grounds of an Anhui agricultural technology company in Feixi county on Sunday. The 40-metre Trident aircraft was one of the first non-military jet aircraft in the country and was imported from Britain in the 1960s. It was snapped up at auction two years ago for 1.27 million yuan, the *China News Service* reports.

Hefei seniors compete in inner-beauty pageant
ANHUI – An alternative "beauty" pageant organised by aged-care

CENTRAL/SOUTH

Shenzhou hero says no to lucrative offers

HUBEI (湖北省) – Shenzhou VI astronaut Nie Haisheng (聶海勝) has turned down a flood of donations and gifts from the government and individuals in his home town of Xiangfan (襄樊). Colonel Nie told the officials to spend the money on building elementary schools in poor, remote communities and improving conditions at a rest home, the *Chutian Metropolis Daily* reports.

WEST

Guangzhou fires up city's first rubbish power plant

GUANGDONG – Guangzhou's first rubbish-fired power station is up and running in the Baiyun district, 23km from the city centre. The *New Express* reports that each day the Likeng station burns through more than 1,000 tonnes of garbage and produces 360,000 kilowatt-hours of power. The station releases almost no pollutants into the atmosphere.

Massive renovation planned for Tang dynasty palace

SHAANXI – Billions of yuan will be spent on a five-year project to bring the glory of the Tang dynasty Daming Palace in Xian (西安) back to life. The Daming complex was built more than 1,300 years ago. Once complete, the project will cover a greater area than Beijing's old Summer Palace, *Xinhua* reports.

Phone firm offers free rental for 'unlucky' numbers

GANSU (甘肅省) – China Mobile's Lanzhou (蘭州) operation has scrapped a 20-yuan monthly rental fee for people with mobile numbers ending in 4 or 7 to try to encourage more people to adopt the sequences. *Xinhua* reports that 4 and 7 are considered unlucky and there is a huge stock of phone numbers ending in the two digits. Phone users who take up the offer will get free line rental as long as they spend at least 18 yuan each month.

Gas blast at licensed mine kills 15 workers, injures three

GUIZHOU (貴州省) – A gas blast at a licensed Qinglong county coal mine on Sunday afternoon killed 15 underground workers and injured three. *Xinhua* reports that 41 people were below the surface at the time and 23 escaped.

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