

My One-Year-Old Grandfather

A Full English translation is available.

一歲的外公

Author: Xia Xia **Illustrator:** Jian-Xin Zhou **Publisher:** China Times Publishing

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Every Sunday is the day we visit Grandpa. The place where Grandpa lives is also home to many other people's grandpas. And every time we visit, he can't remember who we are. Mom says that as long as we don't forget him, that's what matters.

Poet and author Xia Xia and Golden Tripod Award-winning illustrator Jian-Xin Zhou join forces to share personal experiences and open conversations with children about long-term care. As the impact of a super-aged society approaches, how do we talk to children about illness, aging, and death? What does it mean to "grow old"? And what does it mean to "grow up"?



Author **Xia Xia**

Xia Xia is passionate about writing and life, and she is a mother of two sons. Inspired by her children's endless curiosity, she began writing children's poetry, not only to document their growth but also to answer their questions. Her published poetry collections include *Little Daughter*, and *Tantrum*. Her novels include *Beer Before the End of the World*, *Dog Says*, and *Millennium Zoo*. Her essay collections include *Sugar for Tomorrow* and *At 5:15 PM*.



Illustrator **Jian-Xin Zhou**

A picture book and comic creator, Jian-Xin Zhou has received the Hsin-Yi Children's Literature Award for picture books, the Golden Comics Awards for Best New Talent, and the Golden Tripod Award. His published works include the picture books *Puppy and I* and *Missing Cat Posters*, as well as the graphic novels *The Boy from Clearwater* and *The Drifting Chronicles*.

A Rare Children's Book That Portrays Aging Grandparents with Honesty and Grace

by Yen-Lin Kuo

(originally published on OKAPI.BOOKS.COM.TW)

My One-Year-Old Grandfather movingly observes how older adults resemble children; there exists a point when their paths briefly intersect. Diapers and dentures, bathing and learning to walk—the elderly are, in a sense, children wearing wrinkled skin. Yet after that brief meeting point, the two head in opposite directions. Children move forward and grow; older adults gradually decline. Grandparents and grandchildren pass each other like travelers riding opposite escalators; they meet only for a fleeting moment.

People with dementia appear even more childlike. Their decline affects not only memory but also judgment, planning, thinking, language, emotional regulation, and impulse control—the very abilities children develop slowly as they grow. Dementia begins with cognitive decline, followed by emotional volatility and poor impulse control, echoing the turbulence

of early adolescence. The regression then quickens—first into the dependence of grade-schoolers, and finally into the total vulnerability of infancy, requiring constant care.

During this final stage—portrayed with care and sensitivity by Xia Xia—older adults may become irritable, loud, hard to care for, and sometimes experience hallucinations or delusions. Their stubbornness, agitation, and inarticulateness torment both themselves and their families—a heartbreaking inversion of the “Terrible Twos,” where dusk brings sorrow mixed with anger and resentment, and each day stretches unbearably long.

Nearly every family caring for a loved one with dementia eventually walks through this nightmare. One no longer recognizes the person before them; the once-familiar soul seems hollowed out and occupied by something

unrecognizable. Yet in losing and searching, we gradually understand how fragile and resilient life can be. The end of a life's journey is not always marked by the stopping of a heartbeat. When we should say goodbye—and to which version of the person—often depends on how we choose to remember and hold them.

My One-Year-Old Grandfather takes on the challenging task of portraying “aging” through a child's eyes. It pairs consummate author Xia Xia's poignant text with Jian-Xin Zhou's warm illustrations. Drawing from her own experiences, Xia Xia simultaneously depicts the decline of the elderly and the growth of children, creating a profound meditation on human frailty.

“My only hope is that we never forget him.” This line from the picture book is the one I hold most dear. In dementia care, we often find ourselves caring as much for families and caregivers as for the patients themselves. By making the long-term care journey gentler and safer—as the book so thoughtfully depicts—we can improve the patient's quality of life, easing the pains they can no longer express. It steadies their fear and helplessness, allowing unspoken goodbyes to be quietly completed through presence and companionship.

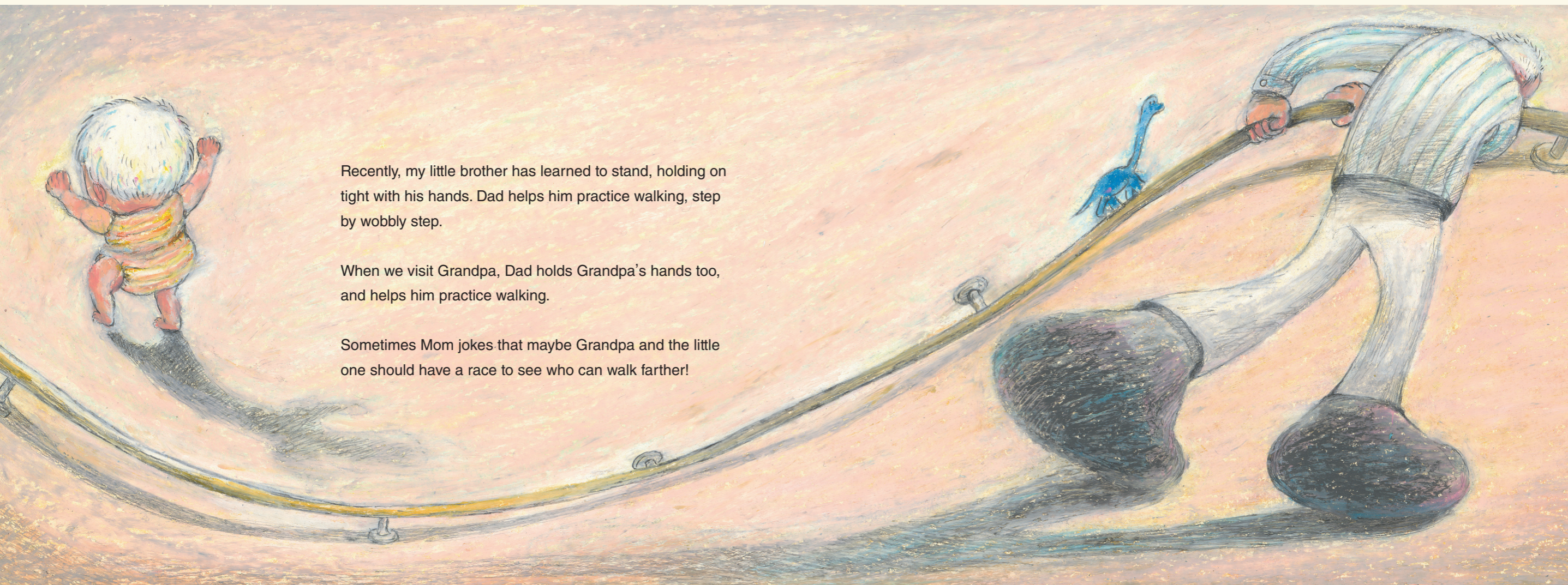
Psychiatry is a medical field that deals with the human mind and brain—two of the most intricate and unfathomable parts of human existence. Because people are complex, and their inner worlds even more so, psychiatric training cultivates wide-ranging

awareness and delicate attentiveness. Taiwan first established child and adolescent psychiatry as a subspecialty dedicated solely to understanding young minds. Because a child's mental world is so difficult to grasp, only focused immersion allows us to truly understand what children are doing and feeling. Yet as the population ages and life's journey slopes downward, the need for psychiatric care for older adults has surged. In 2005, the Taiwanese Society of Geriatric Psychiatry was founded. It sought to train a new group of specialists who could address the challenges facing the aging population. Xia Xia's picture book unfolds effortlessly for readers of both groups.

My One-Year-Old Grandfather portrays the fragile tenderness of the human brain and, more deeply, the vulnerable inner self. When a mind becomes dull, blank, or confused—unable to tell sunrise from sunset, names from faces, or dreams from reality—we must ask ourselves: how do we say farewell, and to whom?

This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.

*Yen-Lin Kuo is a board-certified psychiatrist and graduate of National Taiwan University's College of Medicine. He previously worked at National Cheng Kung University Hospital and is also a certified geriatric psychiatrist. He co-created the picture book *Hedgehog* with his sister.*



Recently, my little brother has learned to stand, holding on tight with his hands. Dad helps him practice walking, step by wobbly step.

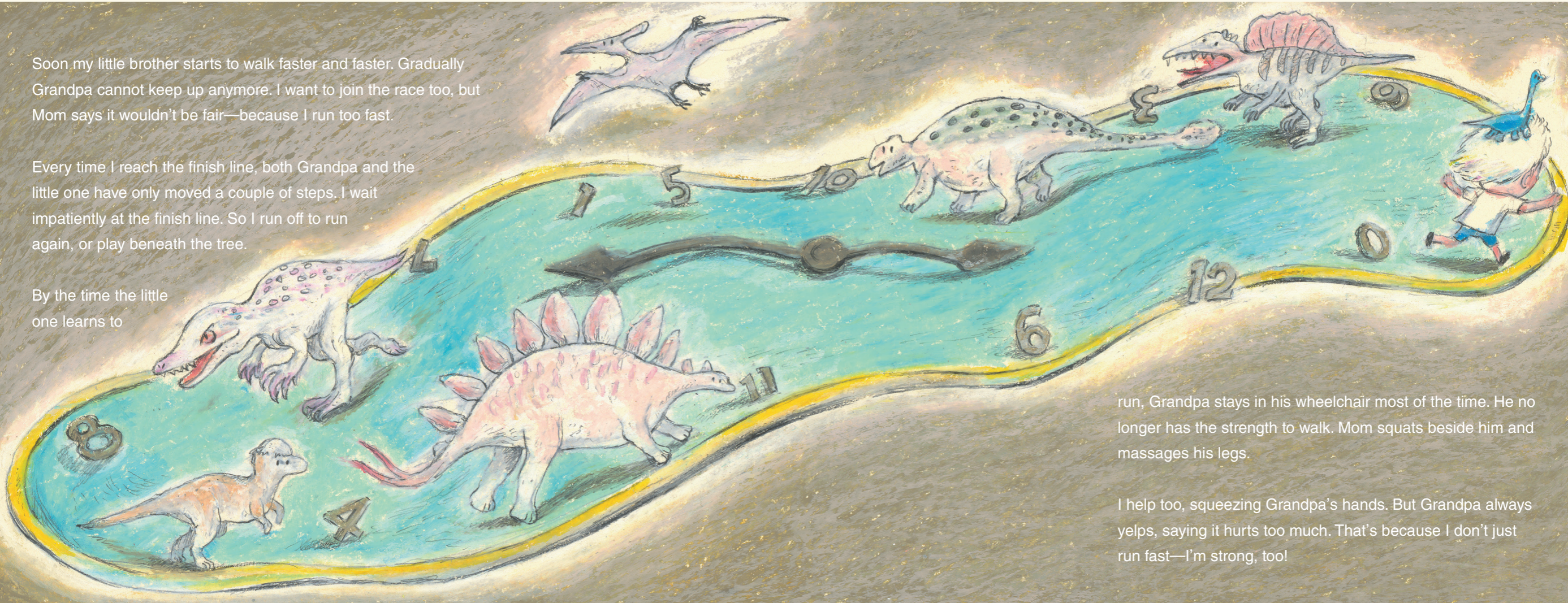
When we visit Grandpa, Dad holds Grandpa's hands too, and helps him practice walking.

Sometimes Mom jokes that maybe Grandpa and the little one should have a race to see who can walk farther!

Soon my little brother starts to walk faster and faster. Gradually Grandpa cannot keep up anymore. I want to join the race too, but Mom says it wouldn't be fair—because I run too fast.

Every time I reach the finish line, both Grandpa and the little one have only moved a couple of steps. I wait impatiently at the finish line. So I run off to run again, or play beneath the tree.

By the time the little one learns to



run, Grandpa stays in his wheelchair most of the time. He no longer has the strength to walk. Mom squats beside him and massages his legs.

I help too, squeezing Grandpa's hands. But Grandpa always yelps, saying it hurts too much. That's because I don't just run fast—I'm strong, too!

Every Sunday is the day
we visit Grandpa.

