

An unforgettable experience

in the forefront battle of new coronavirus test

DIANA FEI MING TANG

I'm not by any means a workaholic! Actually this is the first time I've ever told anybody. I didn't dare tell my family, I indeed haven't told anyone!

God bless me! Three weeks I kept my mouth shut and had a two weeks self isolation only known to myself. Now there is good chance for me to sing safe and sound!

Thinking of all the 'diseases by profession' we belong to the clusters of having a passion for seeking an answer behind the story through further investigation. "Curiosity kills a cat"!

One morning, I noticed that Victorian Interpreting & Translation Service (VITS) suddenly had a series of repeated e-mails of job requests. Looking at the information provided it was from the Governor's Cabinet Department with an urgent need. According to my past work experiences, if several interpreters requested for the same place at the

same time it would be regarded as the 'barometer' involving special circumstances. Taking a closer look at the details I immediately had the gut feeling that the job was related to Covid -19 outbreak! The locations belongs to the Government housing. The description of the task was only a few words: "Covid- blitz testing"! My instinct led me to have the quick 'No' response - I didn't want to be involved in the potential danger at all!

Even though according to the State Government daily outbreak reports, public housing estates in the Southeast was not on the 'black list' for any danger yet.

Given that the residents living in the government housing come from different ethnic groups the chances of getting the virus are more, and it has become a potential danger in the public's eyes.

The need for interpreters increased, and the thought of "To be or not to be"(going or not going) lingered in my mind. Several times I tried to click the button and several times I hesitated to go further. My fingers kept dancing!

What will be the case? To go to the hospital for interpretation, or face - to -face informing the results of the test? May be just let the other party to be tested on the spot and show the result right away? Then what are the protective measures for us interpreters at the scene while doing the job? All sorts of different possibilities came out to my mind. Once even imagine myself just standing next to the virus-carrying person! With that in my mind, the hanging - in the air - thumb that was going to press 'YES' would be once again taken back.

Backwards and forwards... and I couldn't make up my mind!

It so happened that in interpreters 'WeChat' group, someone who had been there days ago sent out a message by saying "Wear warm Protective clothing will be provided for the interpreters'. Another one was even more specific about three Personal Protection Equipment's (PPEs), focusing on the precautions when taking off the protective clothing and then 'wishing you all the best. " It was indeed a heartwarming message! Besides, Fitzroy is not a hard-hit area, it could be a chance for the high-rise residents to have a test.

Looking back at the location, I realized that I was familiar with the place because I had been there before for work. There are a lot of Chinese residents, mostly from Mainland China.

After the slow process of 'hesitation cooking' including several times of warring I finally pressed the button and said to myself, "That's it! ". As the saying Goes "You'll never know the taste of a pear until you have a real bite!"

I will certainly be fully armed and be careful to protect myself so there shouldn't be any problem.

Wow! On arriving, I saw there were a lot of people at work, and exactly 20 interpreters with nine different languages including Mandarin & Cantonese, Vietnamese, Turkish, Spanish, even two African dialects. I felt so proud to be one of them, "a right decision" I said to myself.

Seemed to me the view that the State Government didn't handle the epidemic situation with enough effective effort was a bit unfair here. I went to the sight, and saw what had been organized there. The

Government was worried for its residents. They let the Covid -19 test be sent to their doors of those relevant apartments, asking people to take defensive measures to ensure that every resident of all public housing buildings to hear the news. We were asked to be patient and gentle enough when handling the tasks. A temporary clinic station had been set up in the entrance hall of the building.

Interpreters were first grouped according to the languages, The Chinese and Vietnamese speaking residents accounted for a large part of all. We separated across all the entrances of the building and dialed the phone on the building button board according to the specific room number. Then repeated the government's request, asking the 'old three sentences' questions, including all the members of each family, "Are you coughing?" "Do you have a fever in the past 14 days?" "Have you ever been abroad or have you had any contact with patients with the new coronavirus" "We are delivering the device to your door today, please be sure to go down to have the test. It only takes about ten minutes. We hope you can cooperate and voluntarily conduct a free Covid - 19 test." And also there was government free food available.

As a result, about 150 Chinese families were served throughout the day! When I went back to the test station for further assistance I learned that all the medical staff were from Adelaide, South Australia, and it was a national united front act! I was much moved by their very careful operation. After the swabs sampling test, they would make sure to put each person's four pieces of personal information on the test tube label, and finally gave each a box of 50 free masks and a bottle of disinfection liquid to Say "Thank you!"

On the second mission, it was a public housing building at a different location. With the experience I had before I was much more confident this time and of course with the same precautions. But I found that “the old revolutionary encountered new problems”, the work of the two places were completely different! This time was door -to-door inspection and testing. We need to be 'fully armed' to accompany the medical personnel to go into the high-rise residential building. It was a face-to-face contact to convey the Government's request. You never know if someone will suddenly sneeze at you, or spit on you as you speak. The knowledge of the three PPEs I got from WeChat has come in handy. The mask should specially be sealed with tape between the cheeks and the eyes. We also wear an eye mask. Not to mention the protective overcoat and gloves. The team leader was a person with clear instruction. The work was effective and satisfactory in particular. I felt very proud that our Chinese community has been doing well throughout the outbreak, and so far there has been no official announcement that any of the buildings I have participated in are infected or that any residents need isolation treatment. Our efforts has been recognized from the Prime Minister to the Premier.

After going through much thought and psychological struggles of uncertainty during that week I am glad that I finally decided to take part in the work of the State Government on the Covid - 19 testing of the Chinese residents of public housing buildings.

It was once-in-a-century madness to fight against the virus and I was lucky enough to experience a few 'wars'! I feel that I have played the role as a servant to the society, to me, it was such a worthwhile and unforgettable experience.