

Details emerge in story of teacher who caught falling child

Xiao Qi, 38, an English teacher at No 11 Senior High School in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, didn't hesitate to open his arms to catch a 6-year-old girl who fell from a third-floor window on Sunday as she leaned out to call to her grandfather.



Six-year-old Mei Qingwen (left) is treated in the ICU at No 1 Affiliated Hospital of Harbin Medical University. Xiao Qi (right) shows how he tried to catch the falling girl. [Liu Mingxin/For China Daily]

On Wednesday, the girl, Mei Qingwen, was in the intensive care unit of No 1 Affiliated Hospital of Harbin Medical University, with kidney and lung damage and skull fractures, according to her grandmother, Yu Huilan. But the girl's condition seemed to be improving.

"Fortunately, my granddaughter is now out of danger and has regained consciousness," Yu said. "The doctor said Xiao's heroic action greatly reduced the damage."

Xiao explained the details:

"On Sunday afternoon, as I was on my way home, I saw a girl leaning out the window on a building's third floor," he said. "I attempted to warn her with a loud shout, but she looked flustered and didn't seem to be listening."

Mei was born with a hearing disability and only learned to speak after undergoing cochlear implant surgery to provide some sound through a tiny electrical device.

But the implant was out of power at the time, so she couldn't hear Xiao.

"I was not thinking about anything," Xiao continued. "I acted on instinct to save her life."

Xiao sustained minor injuries to his arm as a result of the forceful impact of the catch. He was able to slow her descent considerably but couldn't hold on.

"If I had caught her better, maybe she would be less seriously injured," he said with evident remorse.

Xiao dialed the emergency 120 number and left without a word after the ambulance arrived.

Yu, the grandmother, wanted to find the identity of the hero and asked a local broadcasting station for help the next day.

"My neighbors told me only that he was a middle-aged, medium height and wore glasses," Yu said. "Working with many people together, we finally found him."

"I can't express my thanks with simple words," she said. "I can't imagine what would have happened without his help. He is the savior of my whole family."

Yu said that when the girl found that she had been left alone by her grandfather, who was going to the market, she wanted to signal to him through the window.

Xiao was passing by at the time and acted quickly to catch her when she fell.

His colleagues at the high school were not surprised.

"Of course, he'd rush to help. He's very kind and willing to help others. He is a provincial-level excellent teacher, and in June we recommended him to be named among the city's Teachers of the Year," said Wang Zuosheng, the principal.

"In my mind he is always my hero," said Peng Ana, Xiao's wife. "This is not the first time he's saved someone's life."

Peng recounted an incident in the winter of 2003. Xiao found a young girl who seemed to be having thoughts of suicide on a busy traffic bridge. He spoke patiently with her. Finally the girl changed her mind.

Li Bing, a physics teacher at Harbin No 3 High School was quoted in the Heilongjiang Morning Post saying the girl, who weighed about 20 kilograms, would generate as much as 75 kilograms of direct force in a fall of three stories.

Netizens praised Xiao's heroism. "Such a good deed is a ray of sunshine that warms and encourages us," one person posted. "He is really the most beautiful teacher in the city, and I believe virtue will be rewarded."