Script for the AOS storytelling night. Sunny Tseng.

* Start of the story – the Siberian Crane flying to Taiwan, at the summer that I was graduated from University trying to figure out what I wanted to do in the future. And the crane bought this opportunity to me.

In 2014, there was a big news happened in Taiwan. For those of you who don’t know Taiwan, it’s an island in east Asia serving as a mid-point stop for a major migratory route, and it’s also the country I was born and raised. So, in 2014 winter, there was a Siberian Crane appeared in one of the wetland in the northern Taiwan. The news about the visit of this rare bird was soon distributed worldwide as we have never had reported sightings of Siberian Crane in Taiwan. Siberian Crane is listed as critically endangered species and usually migrates from the Siberian Tundra to southeast China, so obviously, having this bird showed up in Taiwan was unexpected.

Knowing this bird might take a wrong turn on its migratory route and got lost from other members in the group, Taiwanese people tried to send this bird back to Russia. One of the Taiwanese conservation agency contacted the Russian Academy of Science, and everyone decided that it might be the best for the crane if human try not to interfere, to not do anything, and let the bird fly back to Siberia by itself.

This Siberian Crane was the catalyst for Taiwan to send a small group of young scientists to Siberian Arctic Tundra to visit the breeding ground of the crane and learn more about how these two very different places are connect by birds. They were calling for proposals from young scientists. Now, you can probably guess how the story would go.

* Learning about birds because I wanted to get the opportunity. Physical strength and mental strength. So many people told me that I won’t get it.

The time I saw this opportunity I was 23. I was a student freshly graduated from university, not knowing for sure where my life should go. The only thing I knew was the world is so big, and I haven’t had the chance to explore the it. I see it a very precious opportunity to explore the place I have never seen, I have never been. I thought “arctic tundra, who wouldn’t want to go”, and especially you have people pay for you to go. So I “bravely” wrote up a proposal saying that I could record the sounds of the birds in the Arctic Tundra, to document the birds in the ecosystem that few people can get access to. But funny enough, at that time I haven’t started birding at all. I know nothing about birds, and nothing about field sound recording. Like none. At that time, there were many people telling me that it’s almost impossible for me, who didn’t have any experience working with birds, to get this cool opportunity. But I just wanted to try it and see how far I can go.

So I started contacting professional field recordists to learn about recording bird sounds. I took several sound recording courses. Another thing I did was that I wanted to demonstrate that I have the physical ability to work in tundra. So I spent 10 days riding my bicycle from the north point to the south point of Taiwan, and recorded my trip using sounds. I was carrying my MP3, the little sound recording device, to record sounds on my journey, like the sounds of a train passing by, sounds of the fireworks on the beach, sounds of the crowd in the market, and also sounds of the wind blowing through trees. Each night, I would put my headlamp on in my tent, squishing in my sleeping bag, and write all the stories that happened at that day. I wanted to practice how to use soundscapes to tell stories. After all these training, I got the opportunity.

* I got the opportunity! But the story wasn’t smooth after this. My fieldwork was cut short, and there is a storm hitting the town.

After 3 months of preparation, I started the journey. I flew to Yakutsk, the capital city of Siberia. My flight landed Yakutsk at 2 am, and all I can see from the air plane window bright in the city. And I realized “Oh right, because I am at such a high latitude of the earth.” I came down the plane, it was Ruslan, my Russian fieldwork partner, who came to greet me. Ruslan is a Yakut, the aboriginal people in the Siberia area. He looks just like Asian in another country. I don’t speak Russian, but I can feel people were very nice to me. When you are in a country where you can’t speak their language, probably smiling is one of the best languages to communicate. We are very different in background, but we all have a very kind heart.

I was looking through the window and seeing the storm with strong wind, lots of rain, and the temperature kept dropping. It gets colder and colder. It was like typhoon in my home town but with temperature close to zero. I started to have the feeling “Why I am here”. I was only 23 at that time, I was so young, a young girl, and I have worked so hard and travelled so far to this place far away to my beloved country. I travelled so far to Arctic. I have no access to internet, no access to cell phone connection. And everyone around me was speaking Russian, speaking languages that I don’t know. With the storm going on, and with the dropping temperature, I felt I am abandoned by the world. I can be left in this village and no one could help. It was the first moment I realize how fragile human beings are.

At the moment I was thinking, “I just wanting to wait for the moment that I can step on the tundra to record bird sounds.”

I always remember that Ruslan gave me a piece of cookie and told me “Sunny, don’t worry. You are in tundra already. You are already making progress”. It was really hard for a young spirit to realize that how difficult it is to

* The ecosystem in Tundra and how I got injured in the tundra
* The recording of the Siberian Crane with Ruslan
* The ending. How this trip influence my life.

As a girl who didn’t know what to do after her graduation in university, it turns out I found field sound recording fascinating. I have been continued my journey of bird sound recording since and recorded the sounds from almost 300 bird species around the world. I also started my graduate study working on avian bioacoustics and absolutely loved it. All this career changing experience started from one single stray Siberian Crane. It’s the missing Siberian Crane that helped me find my way to my life. Thank you.