

Idiom by Lon Yan

命途多舛

ming4 tu2 duo1 chuan3

Jose and Liso were rescued last year from a circus in South America and flown across the world to a sanctuary in South Africa where they were supposed to live out their lives free and in peace.

But that is not to be. Recently, the pair of male lions were found dead, with their heads and paws hacked off, probably for selling as witchcraft ingredients or as souvenirs for overseas collectors.

The idiom “命途多舛” (*ming4 tu2 duo1 chuan3*) applies. “命” (*ming4*) is “life,” “fate,” “途” (*tu2*) “a road,” “a way,” “a journey,” “多” (*duo1*) “many,” “much,” “plenty” and “舛” (*chuan3*) “mistaken,” “erroneous,” “contradictory,” “astray.”

The term, “命途” (*ming4 tu2*) means “the course of one’s life,” “one’s fate” and “多舛”

(*ming4 tu2 duo1 chuan3*) is “full of trouble and misfortune.” Literally, “命途多舛” (*ming4 tu2 duo1 chuan3*) is “the journey of life is full of trouble and misfortune.”

The idiom means “to suffer many a setback during one’s life.” It describes people who have had many misfortunes in life.

Everyone has setbacks. But the idiom only applies to those who suffered major setbacks. So don’t complain about “命途多舛” (*ming4 tu2 duo1 chuan3*) if you failed a few examinations, which usually is the result of laziness, not fate.

Someone who lost both parents when young, did not have a chance to go to school and then suffered chronic illness can be called “命途多舛” (*ming4 tu2 duo1 chuan3*).

Terms containing the character “途” (*tu2*) include:

途徑 (*tu2 jing4*) – a way; a channel; a route

途中 (*tu2 zhong1*) – on the way; enroute

歧途 (*qi2 tu2*) – a wrong path; a fork in the road

途人 (*tu2 ren2*) – passer-by; stranger