
MEMORIAL FOR TOM MYERS

纪念托马斯·迈尔斯

Dr. Rebecca Leung 杨美云医生 & Stephan Rothlin 罗世范

Thomas A. Myers, who passed away on May 21, 2019, was known to the public at large as the founder of T. A. Myers & Co., a CPA firm that specialized in forensic accounting and tax planning for foreign investments. He was notably successful in this practice, having authored multiple books on lending, asset management and financial reform; testified at the request of the U.S. Congress on banking regulatory reform and fraud in the financial system; taught courses on money laundering and fraud to various law enforcement entities including the FBI, the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Justice. At the pinnacle of his career, Tom was an expert witness in many class action lawsuits that led to successful verdicts. In his role as President and CEO of the China Trade Institute in Beijing, Tom became a friend and supporter of our work on business ethics education and corporate social responsibility in China, through Rothlin Ltd., in Hong Kong and Beijing, and the Macau Ricci Institute in Macau.

But beyond his professional accomplishments and our collaborations, we came to know and cherish Tom for his deep commitment to caring for cancer survivors, especially in supporting them in their spiritual journeys, as they struggle to deal with the consequences of a potentially fatal illness. Tom's commitment was personal, for he was himself a cancer survivor, at least until it finally took his life. Fortunately, he wrote a book, *Cancer*

as an Opportunity (Myers, 2016), which we are translating and publishing in Chinese, because of its relevance to so many people struggling as he did with a diagnosis of cancer. We want to share with you our reasons for regarding Tom's contribution as so significant, first, a book review of *Cancer as an Opportunity* by Rebecca Yeung, and second, a memorial offered by Stephan Rothlin, who knew him best among us, as Tom carried on in a struggle that he knew would be terminal. At the MRI Journal, we will all miss Tom terribly. He fought the good fight. He strengthened us all, with his easy good humour, his commitment to restoring social justice and the integrity of global financial markets. Here, then, is our tribute to Tom Myers. May he rest in peace!



BOOK REVIEW: CANCER AS AN OPPORTUNITY

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I was delighted and honoured when Fr. Stephan Rothlin invited me to write a book review on *Cancer as an Opportunity*. This is a very brave and exciting topic; it is also something I have been pondering about. What makes the book even more special is that the author has been undergoing the cancer journey himself, and gives us a personal account of his experience.

As an oncologist, I can testify that cancer fills the background and content of my daily life. In the past decade, rapid advancement in medical technology has significantly improved the treatment outcome of cancer. Nevertheless, patients are no better in coping with cancer than before.

Fear is almost a universal language among cancer patients. From time to time, I see patients taking futile treatments to evade accepting their terminal condition. It is also not uncommon to see patients still requesting new and unproven treatments at the end of life.

However, on the other hand, some patients can cope positively and venture the last journey with serenity. I am amazed by the diverse ways patients face their struggles with cancer. I wonder what are the underlying mechanisms and biochemical reactions that make for such different attitudes. Faith may be the answer in some patients. But how about those without a religion?

So I read this book with interest and curiosity, as well as respect.

This book focuses on the core issue of overcoming fear and presents to the readers a self-help protocol to combat it, to turn pessimism into optimism, and to transform mere living into a fulfilling journey.

The author Thomas Myers is a very distinctive person. He is a prominent and successful figure in the financial field, is a leader holding prominent positions in business and public services. On the other hand, he is a victim of cancer, having struggled with multiple cancers since youth, and even now he is battling prostate cancer. In this book, he shares his personal experience, including his delinquent teenage period and his various cancer journeys, and subsequently he gives a detailed account of his own protocol for self-transformation which he has devised out of his experience.

Tom begins the book by telling a story about his father, who died of cancer while he was a teenager. Though his father had only a few months to live after the cancer diagnosis, he managed to develop great bonding and communication with Tom, far beyond what they had experienced before. This has given Tom the affirmation that life can be fulfilling even when it is short and terminal. And that everyone has potential of achieving this.

Following his recollections about his father, Tom shares his own life story, his dark age of being a delinquent teenager, his epiphany, and

finally his metamorphosis to a life of personally fulfilling achievements. Overcoming fear is the key to his miraculous turning point. He went on to develop his own protocol for transcending his emotions, strengthening his mind and refining his behaviour. This book shares his unique recipe.

Cancer as an Opportunity provides a logical and systematic approach to tackling fear. It describes the anatomy of fear and explains its neuroscience background. It goes on to give a stepwise guide, utilizing cognitive behavioural psychology and guided imagery, to transform fear, and turn pessimism into optimism.

When reading this book, I cannot help thinking of my patients. I remembered once seeing at the clinic for new cases a lady with breast cancer who was particularly anxious. She was emotionally upset and refused chemotherapy. One week later, she returned, calm and composed, and ready for treatment. Given my surprise, I asked why she had this change. I expected she might say it was due to my detailed discussion and reassurance. No, rather, she said it was because she had met volunteers from the breast cancer support group who were survivors of breast cancer, who shared their cancer experiences, which had given her reassurance and confidence.

Yes, this is the key. And I see it confirmed in this book. Certainly, I appreciate the wonderful protocol that the author has shared. But to me, the most convincing and reassuring protocol is the author himself. He is the witness and his testament is his most important contribution.

Tom's motivation and effort to share with people facing similar adversities is very admirable. He took a leave of absence from his business, to contemplate his life and to compose this book. Throughout the book, I can feel his fervent wish to reach out to readers, to share his experience, to guide them through, to convince them to start practising at once. Despite being a prominent leader and commanding figure, he has not chosen to talk like an authority. Rather he is humble and frank, and this book is, just as he

says, up front and personal.

Readers may forget what exactly is in the protocol, but I will always remember Tom's transformation, his compassion and keen wish to support those similarly affected. He is leading the way, but he is also walking side by side, hand in hand.

As an oncologist, throughout the years, I have learnt to behave in a professional way: calm, objective, scientific, confident and reassuring. As time goes by, I note that I have lost the instinctive response of a human person. I will not shed tears with the patient, and I will not admit uncertainty, since I am a professional and I am leading the way. But Tom has shown me that there is no contradiction. And indeed being human is a prerequisite for being a leader.



EPILOGUE: FRIEND TO THE END...

Stephan Rothlin, S.J.

More than 20 years ago in Zuerich, the American sociologist Richard Sennett gave a talk in which he described his research concerning a cancer hospital in New York. When the local government decided to move the cancer hospital out of the city, they were surprised by the way young people mobilized to protest this decision. The protesters' main argument was that contact with people affected by cancer intensified their own sense of reverence for life and its value.

Inspired by Sennett's story, I organized a competition among my Chinese students focused on the design of a cancer hospital in downtown Beijing. The student project proposals were both challenging and often quite original. What made their designs genuinely encouraging was the way in which they considered ecologically sound solutions and also the spiritual needs of both cancer patients as well as their families and friends. Three groups, for example, insisted that chapels should be integrated within the

complex of the cancer hospital in order to cater better to the spiritual needs of cancer patients. Such a suggestion may strike many as most unconventional in a country like China where religion is still treated as a difficult, if not subversive topic.

I was reminded of these things when Tom Myers—a key adviser for me and my colleagues

Cancer as an Opportunity—the book that Tom completed before his own final struggle began in earnest—shows how various meditation practices can be very helpful. In my own approach to contemplation, focused inevitably on *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits, I am one with Tom in beginning first of all with an awareness of breathing as a most precious gift of

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at Rothlin Ltd. on various projects in China including finance ethics, economic models for the common good, poverty alleviation and corporate philanthropy programs in China—shared his desire to write a book on living with cancer. I was happy to give him my full support as a friend. I strongly sensed that this work would provide him with a unique chance to share his experiences and insights and demonstrate his love for the Chinese people who might learn from him. I pledged to do whatever I could to make sure he was successful in reaching out to them.

A diagnosis of cancer inevitably is an existential threat, but it was Tom's gift, in the midst of anxiety and depression, to see in it a unique opportunity to recognize more fully the value of life. Recall, for example, Leo Tolstoy's story, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" (1886), which tells of a successful judge whose career comes to an abrupt end when he gets the news of terminal illness. This unwelcome news first comes as a terrible shock and setback to his brilliant career. Only little by little does Ivan Ilyich accept his illness and overcome all his fears. One important step in overcoming such fears, is in learning to let go, becoming truly relaxed, learning to go beyond mere words.

life. A contemplative mind becomes more aware of music and the sounds which surround us as well as our whole body. Such contemplation is rooted in both Western and Eastern "apophatic" methods, i.e. going beyond words by emptying one's mind from all negative thoughts.

As Rebecca Yeung has pointed out in her review, *Cancer as an Opportunity* offers a secular approach to contemplation: Tom's focus is on opening practical ways to face cancer and to avoid falling into anxiety and depression. It has been profoundly inspiring for so many friends of Tom to experience how Tom coped with a serious illness and encouraged many people to do the same. More specifically Tom hoped to make a decisive contribution to the development of spiritual awareness in China, precisely because he and the vast majority of Chinese people remain firmly agnostic in their views of religion and what yet may come beyond this life. This is one reason that Rothlin Ltd. will soon publish a Chinese translation of Tom's work and see to its distribution.

Working with Tom has helped me to enter more decisively into a dialogue with colleagues and friends from other religions, or no religion at all. In particular, I feel inspired by friendship with

Moslem medical doctors from Iran whom I met in Beijing. Their life is strongly structured around the prayers they make seven times a day. Their deep faith has not at all made them intolerant of people from other walks of life and religion; on the contrary, I experienced these Moslem doctors as most welcoming with their Chinese hosts as well as friends like me from other cultures and religions. Their commitment to helping the sick got significantly enriched by their zeal to pick up the know-how of Chinese medicine before they return to their home country Iran.

The story of my friendship with Tom started on the sidelines of a conference on Business Ethics in Geneva nearly a decade ago. We found ourselves committed to a common cause, in the

help reform the economy and finance for the sake of the disadvantaged, the jobless and the poor. With the struggle against cancer opening new insights we have been challenged to overcome our own selfishness, however complacent we may have been before.

Being present as a friend in Tom's battle with cancer accelerated the process of mutual learning. I was again surprised when he recently challenged me to explore with him the "Joy of Salvation," a topic close to my own heart, thanks most recently to Pope Francis's message, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (The Joy of the Gospel), published in 2013. What I brought to our conversations was less dependent on any theological insight, than on my experience in conducting the funeral for

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hope of finding a response to the breakdown of the global financial system around 2007/2008. We pledged to join forces, once back in Beijing, in developing an approach to economics which is oriented to the common good. Our cooperation has been focused specifically on ethics in finance. We both felt that a new paradigm for finance is urgently needed which is more oriented to the benefit of the larger society rather than just for the advantage of the small privileged group at the top of the social pyramid. What could we do in order to come up with concrete pragmatic proposals to reform not only the economy but also the training in values in business schools and other institutions of the tertiary education? Rothlin Ltd and the Macau Ricci Institute will continue to pursue this commitment, as a fitting tribute to Tom and our work together.

When the news about the reappearance of Tom's cancer emerged, it seemed as if our plan would be totally disrupted. Actually, the contrary was true: I do think that Tom's discovery of an opportunity for personal development in cancer significantly reinforced our sense of mission to

the son of a dear Chinese friend who suddenly died at home. He was only 22 years old. The friend asked me to accompany him and his wife with a few friends for the funeral in Changping which is located north of Beijing. The sudden departure of their son left them so shocked that they were unable to share the tragic news with their parents. In such a situation it is a challenge to find appropriate ways to respect the feelings of friends who do not have any religious beliefs. How can you not share your own experience of faith, which witnesses to the hope of a life that does not end with death? In fact, my Chinese friend who is an outstanding expert in Chinese traditional culture believes that Chinese culture lacks the hope in a life that never ends. During the funeral it was very moving to hear the two favorite songs – one Chinese, the other Japanese – of the son who had died. I then started to read the well-known Psalm 23 of the Old Testament about the "Good Shepherd": "Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing. In grassy meadows he lets me lie down..." It is a wonderful expression of deep trust, fearing no danger and anxiety, "even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death." Surprisingly,

my friend's wife, although completely devastated by the departure of her beloved son, took the copy of my Chinese Bible and continued to read the Psalm until the end: "... Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life. I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come." At the time, it seemed only natural to give a copy of the Bible to my grieving friends who put it on the seat where their son used to sit. It is, for me, one of the most rewarding experiences to share with friends this hope in the Risen Lord, trusting that this force of conviction may help them on their journey.

No such similar opening occurred in my last conversations with Tom, and it would be presumptuous of me to have tried to create one. Only God can create such transformations. Rereading *Cancer as an Opportunity* in light of Tom's terminal struggle, I treasure the gift of his wisdom, distilled in a self-help manual encouraging cancer patients to optimism, asserting that pessimism is unhealthy, which it truly is. But what happens when all the psychological mobilization cannot change what Tom himself calls "destiny"? What happens when the happy warrior's strenuous defenses begin to collapse, as Stage Four sets in, and one's days really are numbered? In the very last section of the book, "Bottom Line," Tom offered some advice entirely consistent with what he had counseled before:

If, for example, I were given 3 months to live, the best use of my time would be to savor my peak experiences from the past with which I have been blessed; give unfettered thanks; and spend the rest of my time saying goodbye to those whom I love and admire. Playing the victim and feeling sorry for myself, although perhaps understandable, would be time wasted and counterproductive.... I would like to check out of this life on a note of pure, unadulterated gratitude for the many blessings which I have been privileged to receive.... It is a wise man -- and in my book, a superhero -- who, in the face of death, can give thanks, smile, and celebrate the blessings that have been,

without remorse and without reservation. (Myers, 2016, p. 155)

In extremis, Tom would have us face death as he hopes we have lived, and as he has counseled us to live through any struggle with serious illness. There is no mention of God in Tom's book, no mention of prayer, no residual appeal to either the comforts or the challenges that religious faith has to offer.

Even so, I was very touched a few weeks before he died when Tom asked me for Psalms from the Bible which could resonate in his present situation. Without further ado I referred him to Psalm 90 as it acknowledges very vividly the facts of human frailty: "You bring human being to the dust, by saying, 'Return, children of Adam.' A thousand years are to you like yesterday which has passed, like a watch on the night". However, facing these facts of life should not lead to depression but rather challenge us to discover the "wisdom of heart," namely, as the Psalm advises, "Teach us to count the days that are ours." Tom's wisdom offers us an opportunity "to count," that is, to cherish, "the days that are ours," by outlining a commitment to a program that will "determine your success, along with confidence and faith in your ability to improve" (Myers, 2016, p. 65). His message is not simply for those struggling to overcome cancer, but for all of us still learning how to live each day with integrity. It was Tom's deepest wish that the message of hope, sketched out in his final work, *Cancer as an Opportunity*, will reach many hearts in China a country and its people whom he loved so much.



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