

# The Last, Final Stop

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I like traveling in a foreign country, in an unfamiliar city, riding a bus, a tram, or a train to a destination, and then from that destination return to my point of departure. The scenery in between is affluent in the cultural ambiance of the foreign nation and the genuine lifestyle of the locals. In life comes with many destinations, and people begin a new journey from one destination to another. To travel back and forth between two unfamiliar destinations alone, one has to spend considerable amount of time in preparation, and the preparation is often filled with joy and a sense of anxiety, but it is precisely the gratification of throwing yourself into a journey of unknown.

What if we have reached the final destination of our life? When you realized the your days are numbered, or when you are told you do not have much time left, what would be the first thought that rushes to your mind? Before arriving in that destination, there will be no announcement of the conductor reminding passengers of their carry-on luggage, then how can you prepare your departure? And will this destination be connected to another start point?

While lying on the hospital bed and concentrating on the feeling of intravenous solutions dripping into my body, my attending physician came in coincidentally. The ward round is three times a day, hence I could not be more familiar to the doctor's voice and expression. However, this time, from the doctor's facial expression, I detected grim news waiting to be announced. Even the routine greeting was grave. When the doctor handed over my new pathology report, emerged in front of my eyes was the clear wording imprinted on the top right corner by a rubber stamp, "malignancy". The first thought that came to mind was, "have I arrived at my final destination?"

The doctor stood beside me benevolently explained to me, with considerable amount of English terminologies, the severity of the disease reflected in the biopsy. While directing my attention to comprehend the

doctor's words and nodded frequently in response, I quickly browsed my past: in my life time, have I ever made my mother cry for me in sorrow? Would I let my mother attending my funeral? Would she accept the reality as readily as I had?

In every train stations people come and go, and every day we greet someone farewell. Birth and death, they are the most natural principle of life. Yet, farewell is such a sentimental word, especially when facing your own mother. Luckily, my mother who stood on the other side of the bed was more graceful than anyone else, knowing that I had to receive a second surgery and half year of chemotherapy immediately after surviving the first. Before the doctor left, he asked me: "Why are you so calm?" I answered: "If crying my heart out would change the truth, I would beat everyone else in the world." The doctor and the beautiful nurses left in laughter. I told my mother that I wanted to buy a lottery, for I would be sure to win. "You would be criticized by Master!" Mother replied with a smile. I could donate the money to Tzu Chi, I said. My elder sister actually asked me to point out the nearest lottery office on a local map! In the ward, there was nothing but laughter.

The night was particularly silent. The flesh pain of my two surgeries sometimes made me wonder if I was placed in the inferno. As I was fatigued by the severe periodic abdominal pain, from the neighboring

A formal hat-on ceremony will be held for Tzu Chi nursing students before their intership, for them to undertake the responsibility to be a good nurse. Photo depicts Ms. Hui-Ling Lai, director of Nursing Dept. of Tzu Chi University, empowering the student representatives with a nurse hat to grant them the duty to fulfill as a good nurse.



ward came a mournful repent, of how sorry she was to her family. At first I thought she had lost her son, but later I heard that she shared the same situation as I. Afraid that I might be influenced by the experience, my family brought me a book that appeared to have been worn from frequent browsing - "Mantra on Extinction of Rooted Karma". Within the book were numerous annotations and notes. My mother and sister always reminded me to possess the perspective of impermanence in daily lives, and the concept of karma in the times of ill. Nurtured in the world of Tzu Chi for many years, I have come to familiarized myself with the principle of karmic relations, yet I was glad that my family had been influenced by the Buddhist sutras, comprehending the essence of impermanence. My illness did not bring emotional torment to my family and I.

Although the concept of palliative care was introduced in Taiwan since 1983, the hospital beds could never accommodate with the demand. Hence in 1994, palliative care team was founded, extending the model of palliative care into acute wards. Head Nurse Wang could not bear to see me lying on my bed in fatigue, after consulting with me, she requested a specialist in palliative care, Supervisor Shu-Chen, to ease my discomfort. Aside from medical treatments, nursing staffs of palliative care also studied numerous complementary therapies, and this was the first time I experienced in person the incredible potency of essential oil massages.

I was suffering from a rare cancer, not many prior cases were available for epidemiological analysis, it was only natural that the cancer could not be staged, nor was prognosis of the disease possible. I always joked with my colleagues, asked them to treat me nicely, as I was on the verge of my life: many colleagues still believed that the mentioning of death was ominous. But, anything could happen. The cancer could recur, or it could spread, at any moment I could step into the final destination of my life. However, palliative care has alleviated many physical and mental discomforts of many patients, that is irreplaceable by medical treatments, and it is the perfect care model for accompanying the patients approaching the final destination of their life, and the departure for a new beginning.