

A Doctor Whom I Loved ~ “My life could be lived only for 3 days”

Currently, I fight with cancer. I am so-called “Returnee” and therefore I had a hard time to get used in Japanese society and confined myself at home. It was last September to receive “a sentence of a cancer”. When I was told about cancer, the first person to come to mind was Harry who was my doctor I met in Melbourne. So, I sent him an e-mail, which created “an unexpected miracle.”

Harry is “a psychiatrist” who is specialized in research for trans-cultural frictions and troubles. He is the leading authority in this field, a member of WHO, and works as an a/professor in a graduate school. In usual Japanese sense, he is a person who stands at the greatest position that should be “out of my league”. However, to me, he is an irreplaceable important person than anyone else. Because of him, I am here what I am. No matter how difficult my life could become, I can live to look forward.

The time when I met Harry was 30 years ago. In those days, in Japan, it was a usual practice to keep and control psychiatric patients in iron-bars of the hospital rooms. Going to see a psychiatrist or mental doctor meant as being labeled as “a mad and crazy person.” Being different from present, treatments for an illness of depression are not positively cared. Therefore, at beginning, I was frightened to go and see Harry. I felt as if all my personality were denied and rejected. However, at that time, except going to see this doctor, I had no other choice for living. If I did not meet Harry, probably I would have killed myself.

The world of 30 years ago was very different from today, and there were not many Japanese people living in Australia, especially in Melbourne. It was the time that I must bring my English-Japanese dictionary if I became sick. Otherwise, doctors could not prescribe any medicines for me. Then, what for I chose to live in such a difficult life? It was because I wanted to become a chartered public accountant (CPA) in Australia. Before going to Melbourne, I worked as an executive secretary for President of the Tokyo Branch of the world-wide accounting firm. Thus, it was very clear to me that, as many Japanese companies started to establish their business in Australia, Australian accounting firms would soon need Japanese accountants who resides in Australia. So, I wanted to open a course to become “a pioneer (=the first local Japanese accountant in Australia)”.

In those days, Japan was still in bubble economy. Hence, as an executive secretary in a leading world-wide company, even though I was only 27 years old, my annual salary was close to 10 million yen (approx. A\$ 129,000). Hence, when I said that I would become a university student again, throwing away all luxurious life, in order to get qualified for becoming an accountant in Australia, almost everybody called me “you are stupid, idiot and mad”. Nobody surrounding me did not try to understand my intention.

Particularly, my father’s ignorance was the worst. Australia has the history of the foundation that had built by the English convicts, but he said, “There is nobody but convicts in Australia. There is nothing but Koala and kangaroo there. Why do you need to go to such a strange country? I did not raise you up for that kind of ridiculous purpose. If you insist to go there, you will be regarded as no longer my daughter. You are disowned. Get out of my house!” But I did not give up. Having worked for a world-wide accounting firm, it was “my dream” to become a CPA on my own. Thus, the more my parents were against “my dream”, the more I felt like challenging to achieve “this dream”.

Accordingly, I became a student in a university in Melbourne. I was an only Japanese student among over 1,000 students in the business department in that university. Before going to going to Australia, I had a little confidence in my English, because I had a short-stay to study in California University and experienced to work as an executive secretary for accounting firms in California. However, Australian English is very different from American English. English words to express the same things are different (such as cookie & biscuits, garbage & trash) and English intonations are very different. In addition, Australian people did not feel pleasant to think of American cultures (including American movies) and American ways of speaking to others. Therefore, I was not only in trouble to understand Australian English, but also, I received lots of bullied from Australian people because my English was based on American English. I could not make any friends in Melbourne for long time.

When I applied for the university, I don’t know why, but they requested me to arrive in Melbourne before the Christmas holiday season (in order to prepare for enrolling English classes). I did as they requested. Then, when I arrived in Melbourne, there was nobody but a Chinese student manager in the dormitory for the university. As a result, my life in Australia was begun to be in a big trouble

to find a shop where I could buy food and other daily necessities. Living in the modern life style in Japan, through many current TV programs, it is very easy to obtain any information how to live in overseas. However, at that time, most shops were closed in Melbourne for holidays and sat & sun. Looking for a shop opened, I had to walk in streets for several hours. Then, I noticed that many cars stopped in front of the building like “a warehouse to me”. Since there were many people were in-and-out from that building, although I felt frightened, I decided to have a look inside of the building like others. Even now, I cannot forget how I felt, nearly crying for a joy, to find food in the warehouse (that is, “Coles Safeway Supermarket”).

Why I fell in the circumstance that I needed to see Harry, a psychiatrist in Melbourne? It was because there was no computers nor mobile phones available in those days. I did not understand English, no friends at all, and hence I could not find what I should do to live in Melbourne. I was sad and missed my friends in Japan, I kept making international telephone calls. The charge for international telephone calls was expensive in those days.

Therefore, the money (I brought from Japan to Australia) was used up within two years. I became impossible to pay for the tuitions of the university. If I did not pay for the university, my student visa could not be extended and hence I would not be able to stay in Australia. But because I did not have money, I could not buy an airplane ticket to go back to Japan. Accordingly, I had no choice but asking my parents to send me money to return to Japan. However, the fact was that they refused to help me.

From the beginning, I did not expect them to forgive me so easily because we had a serious fight and I was disowned from them. However, I had a little expectation that no parents would destroy their children’s life. As their daughter, if I would make sincere apologies, they would save their daughter’s life. But my parents were different. They hung up my telephone call less than within 5 minutes, saying “You have gone there as you like. We don’t care whether you would live or die. Do not make any more telephone call to us!”

So, I got into a desperate situation. This happened just before examinations of the university’s school terms. In order to extend a student visa in Australia, there are requirements to attend classes and to achieve certain amount of studies. However, being on the desperate state life or death, I could not put myself to concentrate

on my studies. And one day, impulsively I went to see a school counsellor in the university. As I could not go back to Japan, I needed to look for a way to remain in Australia.

Then, I found that there was “a spirit of warm consideration” in Australian schools, which is not existed in Japanese society. I first found the fact that I could postpone attending exams if Australian doctors write their doctor certificate of “special considerations” for the student’s illness or special reasons. For this purpose, a psychologist nor a counsellor could not be of my help, but a person who has a doctor license was needed for me.

Consequently, the school counsellor recommended to go and see Harry, because I did not have money to pay for doctor’s fees. Harry works for an Australian government organization and therefore the payment for medical fees could be avoided. This was “the very fate of the encounter” through my life. Probably, the school counsellor thought that Harry was the best doctor for me (an only Japanese student in that university) to be referred because of Harry’s professional knowledge in trans-cultural problems. And just became so. Harry was “the very right person” to me.

Meeting Harry was “a series of surprise” to me. As he is a leading person of his work, his smartness and sharpness are second to none. But the biggest surprise to me was “his tenacious & persistence”. He never gives up until he reaches to his goals. There were many things happened with him, but the very first day when I met Harry was the biggest astonishment. I still feel how dare on earth he could say what he said. If I were him, I would not say it to be afraid of the consequences might be happened.

I said Harry, “I have only A\$50 in my pocket. I have no money, no friends nor family. I am like a refugee from Japan. No visa to stay in Australia, but my parents says not to come back to Japan even if I would die. Therefore, I must die.” Probably, I went to see Harry, not because for my school studies, but because I felt fear for death.

I was seriously considering for suicide. Anything could happen in these situations if anyone says irresponsible or insensible. The person might impulsively kill herself. But Harry said, “If you have A\$50, you can still live for 3 days. If you

really want to die, you can die after 3 days to live.”

I felt, “Well, this person does not stop my committing suicide.” I wondered “whether this person is in serious to hear what I said?” Then, Harry replied, “I am serious to listened to you.” So, I questioned to myself, “What if I really kill myself with this person’s words, how on earth this person may feel for my death?”

Later, Harry told me about the story he lost his patient while he was working as a trainee in a hospital. He felt devastated and would never want to lose his patients again. Therefore, there was no doubt that he was taking my words very seriously. “My life to live only for 3 days” ~ What Harry really meant by his words was not postpone my actions to kill myself, but he wanted me to discover “the possibilities” of what I could do if I still had “3 days to live”. He wanted me to make the best use of my possibilities for 3 days. Even now, no matter how it looks impossible, his attitudes for “seeking possibilities” would never be changed. Hence, even though I feel in despair for my cancer, he kept saying, “Do not give up! So long as you live, there is a hope. Have courage to keep living at the best you can.”

The example of what Harry and I questioned and answered is well-known for a psychological study, that is, “a half glass of water”. Like myself, if we look at the part of non-existing water in the glass (or the part we already used up), then we may feel “there is only a half glass of water”. We may feel sad and pessimistic. However, Harry’s view is different. He always sees the part of still existing, “there is still even a half of glass is left. This creates a room in our heart to think positively and in constructive. It comes a significant impact on later life.

From my experience, when we become obsessed with our desires for suicide, we may not feel any more energy to think anything else but seeking for the easiest way to kill ourselves. But I stopped it because of what Harry said.

“Even if you kill yourself to be relieved from pains in your present life, there is no guarantee that you may not feel pain after your death. Nobody knows after we depart from this life. You may become more painful than now. Therefore, do not escape from your problems. The more you try to be escaped, the more your current problems would become bigger and serious.”

“A cliff in front, a wolf behind.” I felt, even hell live or die, I would try to believe in

Harry’s words, to “live for another 3 days”. I made up my mind what to do after “the 3 days to live”.

That 3 days I lived at that time led to 30 years of my life till present. Since I did not have money, the first thing I needed was to quickly earn money for my living expenses. Thus, I walked and walked streets in Melbourne to look for a job. Then, I found an advertising paper on a window at an opal shop. They wanted a Japanese sales assistant for Japanese tourists in that shop. I was working for the shop for a while, and then one day suddenly a manager for the biggest bus touring company visited me, requesting me to become a Japanese tour guide and to contribute myself to develop the Japanese programs for that company.

From that point, my financial problem was resolved, but incredibly extremely busy life had begun. Although there is a regulation for a student visa in Australia that I could work only for 20 hours during a school term, but the touring company was kind to support my financial status. They did not calculate my wages by hours, but they decided my wages per tour per day. Melbourne is very famous for Japanese tourists to go and see fairly penguins at night. The tour departed from Melbourne city around 1 pm in the afternoon and returned around 10-11 pm at night. However, the hours required for my guide was only for a few hours to explain about the Melbourne city and penguins. Each tourist went to watch penguins at the beach on their own and they became exhausted in return to sleep in the bus going back to Melbourne. Thus, I used the spare time in bus for my study. Almost all weekdays, I attended to my university lectures in the morning, and I worked and studied till late night.

Looking back those days, I see how determined I was for trying to achieve my goals. Since I did not understand English well and I did not have friends in any class, I brought tape-recorders for taking notes for all classes. And each night after finishing my job for a tour guide, I dictated all the tape-recorders to my notes. Usually, it took for 3 hours for each 90 minutes lectures. Hence, I could not really catch up my studies. Harry supported me to explain my situations to my university for special considerations. This kind of my life was continued for 3 years until I finally graduated from the university.

Keeping up my studies and busy working schedules was needless to say very difficult. However, dealing with Harry, meeting a non-Japanese doctor, was much

harder than anything else. Although my English was not so good as now, Harry had his marvelous ability to grasp what I tried to say.

However, because of the different way of Harry's (Australian) thinking and my (Japanese) attitudes, the time I faced with Harry was like the time when I was in the middle of heavy storms. These cultural differences were against each other as if it were repelling like poles of the magnets.

Japanese society is "a group-oriented society". We belong to some groups in our daily life, and we closely relied on each other. That is called "Amae" in our Japanese language. We look after each other so well. The foremost important value in Japanese society is to live in harmony as a team in a group. Thus, "Amae-Jozu" (i.e. the person who can be good for relying on others like an innocent small child) is very much respected in our Japanese society.

To the contrary, Australian society and English cultures respect "individuals" even from the small children ages. As the word of "self-actualization", each individual person is required for "self-sufficiency" to take their own responsibilities. Thus, the words of "help yourself", "look after yourself" are existed. Therefore, from the beginning, it was obvious that my Japanese "Amae" (= relying on Harry) was rejected in complete. However, at that time, Harry was an only person whom I could ask for help. Without having him, I could not continue my university studies.

So, what I did? In order to create a better and comfortable relationship with Harry, I needed to tell Harry what is "Amae", Japanese way of thinking and behaviors. I needed to explain about the difference in the Japanese style of living, relating so closely to others. Fortunately, because of Harry's specialized research fields, Harry showed me his interests in listening to these cultural aspects. He gave me his cooperation to try to understand me. He regarded as this was "a joint-venture work".

Currently, I keep "a diary box" at home, which contains over 5,000 pages of my diaries & letters I wrote for Harry. It was an amazing work I had done, but I could achieve it because Harry was willing to help me out. The time he needed to spend for reading all these diaries/ letters was also enormous.

So, one day, I asked Harry, "Why did you try so hard to help me?" I questioned

him because he was vigorously working from early morning till late night (as he prepared for his teaching students for his lectures and as he was writing his own books). From time to time, his wife telephoned him because he had sacrificed his time to spend for his family. Even in these difficult situations, Harry gave his time to see me 2~3 times in a week. He seldom cut out my story, and there were a few sessions continued till 9~10 pm at night. His help to me was extraordinary.

Harry replied to my question, "I want to help you because I can. I feel affections to you for many reasons that I cannot describe. I find that you can love others. You are a caring person. Thus, I believe that, if I help you now, you will help many others in later." "You are a gift to me."

Through the time I spent with Harry, through many clashes of personalities, I reconsidered my own self. I realized how I lived before I met Harry. Before seeing Harry, it seemed me to be impossible to keep my life. However, I believed in Harry's words, and I did not give up living for "another 3 days". At the time for graduating from a university, Harry wrote his letter to the Australian Government, accepting to become a guarantee for my permanent resident visa in Australia. Consequently, "my dream" to become CPA in Australia was fulfilled.

I wish I could stop my writing here for "a happy-ending" to have achieved "my long-standing dream". However, my life is full of ups and downs. Another page of my life without Harry's support was begun.

Although I could start to work as an accountant in Australia, but it was in Sydney where most of Japanese companies establish their business. The culture of Sydney and Melbourne is different like between Tokyo and Osaka. People's living style and their characteristics are different to each other. As I do not like the noisiness of Tokyo, I could not find myself to be accustomed in Sydney. Once again, I could not make friends in Sydney. I was terribly busy at work and could not find enough time to sleep each night. Accordingly, on my way to come back from Sydney to Melbourne, missing my close friends in Melbourne, I fell in a sleep while driving a car. When I realized after the car accident, the doctor at the hospital said, "You are a miracle to be saved. Your neck bone was injured, and if a slightly different, you would not be able to walk again."

Because of this car accident, I could not go to work for a few months. This created a bad relationship with my direct boss at work. I received so-called "a power

harassment” or “sexual harassment”, which result in losing my job. A lawyer advised me that I might win in this case, but it would take enormous amount of money and time before obtaining such good results. Therefore, he recommended me to forget what happened and move on to my new life. So, I did.

I achieved my dream to become CPA by getting through many difficulties and with Harry’s enormous help, but someone suddenly destroyed my dream and my life. For a while after this experience, I completely lost confidence and respect in myself. I was afraid of looking for another job, but I should keep living. Therefore, I tried to find someone to get married and to support my life. This kind of marriage would never be expected to go well because I was losing myself. The person I chose was not right to me. Just a few weeks before my wedding with this person, he hit someone by an iron bar to make an injury and caught by a police force. I decided to cancel my wedding and came back to Melbourne.

The person who saved me at that time was once again Harry. He was too busy to see me or write to me, travelling around in Australia and world-wide, but he knew the best way to help me. He made me recall how I survived difficult times before. He suggested me to write a book by compiling the diaries I wrote while I was seeing him.

While I was writing a book as Harry told, I started to see something very different that was not realized before. Through him, I learnt “what is Japanese” and “who I am”. I disliked the way of the Japanese society, and I started my life in Australia. It was obvious that I was standing at the bridge between the both cultures of Australia and Japan. I made up my mind to return home in Japan.

It past already 15 years since I came back to Japan. My home town is Hokkaido which is very rich for great nature, where there is “the Australian Village” for an exclusive ski resort. People in Hokkaido is extremely warm and innocent, showing a full of hospitality to look after others. I had no troubles to live in peace and happy to take care of my old parents.

But my life was not over as “a happy ending” again! This time, I received “a death sentence” of being suffered from cancer. In the past while I was seeing Harry, I attempted suicide several times. But now, if I would not try to keep my life, I would be able to die vey easily. Recalling all my memories, impulsively, I felt like

making a contact with Harry, although I did not see him at all for the past 20 years. As a doctor and a patient relationship, I did not expect anything to Harry. I even did not know how he cared about me because he seldom replies to my messages. I almost gave up making any contacts with Harry, but I thought that I should write to him again, expressing my heartfelt thanks for what he had given to me.

That email I sent to Harry “turned over” my life. Harry often said to me, “Life is a miracle.”, “Our life is unexpected.” To me, “Harry is a miracle person through my life”. It is almost certain that, if Harry did not come back to me, I would give up fighting with my cancer because I am allergic to all pain killers and anesthetic (except morphine). It looks much easier for me to accept the death sentence of cancer to be passed away earlier.

What surprised me was his “direct” expressions (in his returned email) to show his deep care and warm thoughts for me. For his own personality and probably because he was trained as a psychiatrist, he says what he thinks but he seldom expresses his own feelings. He tends to tone down his messages, but this time it was crystal clear to tell me how he thinks of me.

It was not only his way of writing to have made me surprised. I was surprised that, in Harry’s returning messages, he attached the draft for the book I wrote 20 years ago. I gave up publishing it as a book, because Harry was too busy to assist me for the work. I almost have forgotten such an existence of the book, but Harry kept it with his care. He said that the draft was remarkably well-written. He sent me back the copy, hoping for me to find some meanings to fight with my cancer. Harry questioned me to think about “a meaning for life.” “What for we live?” My answer to this question is “just live now at my own best”. No matter how I regret what happened in the past, I cannot change it. I should accept as it is. No matter how I feel fear and anxieties, nobody knows what would happen in the future. I need to deal with it if the worst comes as it is. Instead, if we love someone, love the person to make him/her happy. If we find someone in needs and trouble, save the person at our best possible care. “Our everyday life is a sequence of miracles.”

I learnt so many valuable lessons from Harry. I think that the most important thing I learnt was “a power of love”. Harry never ever gave up supporting me. Even if I fail in doing something and even if I put him into a big trouble, he never

criticized me. Instead, he always accepted me as the way I am. Therefore, I could keep challenging myself. I did not feel fear for starting a new life.

This is a doctor whom I loved. It does not matter whether Harry was a psychiatrist to me in the past. As a person, I dearly respect him from my heart. He is very strong and tough, but he is very affectionate and tender-hearted in his personality. I wish I could lead my life as Harry does.

Now, I am facing the biggest challenge in my life. Fighting with cancer with severe pain in all over my body is not comparable to any challenges I conquered before. However, I would never give up till the end, because Harry is with me. Living in such a long distance between Melbourne and Japan, it is invisible, but I often see him in my dreams at night. He believes in me. I asked Harry to stop “the time bomb explosion” of my cancer. I wish I could stop it, so I would not make him sad for me.