

A Role Model to Emulate

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Tuesday, 31 January 2012 11:47



A very dedicated volunteer, Tan Peng Hong did not slow down his pace in carrying out Tzu Chi's work even while undergoing cancer treatment. His positive attitude towards sickness and life is an attribute that everyone who knew him, will always remember.

“A fulfilling life is a life that we can look back and smile when death comes knocking on our door .” These were his parting words to those who came to pay their last respect.

At a sign language performance of “Vow in Action” held in conjunction with the screening of the “Venerable Jian Zhen” movie in April, 2011, the scene of 60-year old Peng Hong, dressed in a borrowed robe, playing the role of Venerable Jian Zhen, is still fresh in the memory of everybody. He said during an assembly after the performance that he was not thinking of how much time he still has because he knew that tomorrow might not come if impermanence was to strike first.

Unexpectedly, a few months later, he became the living example of impermanence.

So healthy mentally

On July 10, 2011, Peng Hong injured his back while at work. Initially he thought it was a small matter but upon further examination, he was diagnosed with nose cancer which had already spread to his spine.

He said, “It was really hard to accept this in reality.”

It was only a year ago that he had a clean bill of health. To suddenly be diagnosed with a 4th stage cancer while having a healthy lifestyle is something that the doctors found hard to believe or comprehend.



Tzu Chi Hospital in Taiwan later confirmed the diagnosis. He accepted the blessings from Master Cheng Yen, who told him, “For now, let the doctors take care of your body; and leave everything else to the Bodhisattvas.”

He suffered greatly while undergoing treatments and experienced difficulty in swallowing due to his very bad sore throat. His body and his immunity system weakened. He said: “It was like going through the three lower realms of hell, animal and hungry ghosts.”

But Peng Hong was grateful that this sickness had led him to a different stage of spiritual cultivation. He said, “Thanks to the guidance of the Dharma, I managed to go through the most difficult moments.”

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The suffering he encountered had raised his spiritual cultivation to a higher level.

Every day is a bonus

He hardly complained, took things in his stride, taking each day at a time and treating each new day as a bonus. He said: “Whatever you think of doing, don’t hesitate. Just do it!”

Though sick and unable to stand longer than an hour, Peng Hong still carried on shooting with his camera to capture historic moments for the community. On October 23, when visitors from a secondary school in Seremban came to Tzu Chi Melaka, he happily gave them a guided tour and he maintained that he would do it as long as he was still able to. In a way, this helped to distract him from the pain.

He said, “My body may be weak but my mental faculty and oratory skills are still active. As long as Tzu Chi needs me, I will continue to contribute happily and willingly. In fact, I will treat this as my first priority.”

He added, “Nowadays I have stopped drinking coffee, which has been my favourite drink for many years. When it’s time to rest, I will rest. When it’s time to work, I will work. Likewise, when it’s time to serve, I will serve. I will make full use of all the 24 hours in a day.”

Out of the 60 years of his life, he was involved in Tzu Chi for 15 years. He actively participated in relief distribution to the elders and shared with the young, was a hospital volunteer, a speaker on environmental protection, a photographer, and so on.

To reflect on his involvement in Tzu Chi is akin to tracing the development of the four missions (charity, medicine, education and culture/humanity) and eight footprints (environmental protection, community volunteering, international relief and bone marrow donation) of Tzu Chi Melaka.



Spread the Dharma, shoulder the Missions

Since young, Peng Hong had always been independent and responsible even though he was the youngest child of 11 siblings in his family.

His father passed away when he was in Senior Middle 3. That put his family in dire financial straits. When he was studying Mechanical Engineering at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in Singapore, his mother only managed to send him RM100 (\$32) every month for the four years of his tertiary education. He had to work during the semester breaks to supplement his meagre allowance. Despite this, he still could not afford to buy all the books needed, so he resorted to borrowing books from the library or from friends. He also hitched rides for his transportation.

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He started working immediately after his graduation; and because of his good performance, he was quickly promoted to a managerial post and later became General Manager.

During his secondary school days, he used to ask his teacher, "What is the purpose of living?" For years, he found no answer. In the eighties, he started to learn about Buddhism, but was more confined in "Believing" and "Understanding", and not so much focused on "Action" and "Testimony".

In 1997, he came to know about Tzu Chi from a copy of "Tzu Chi Magazine". Later, after attending a talk held by Tzu Chi, he joined as a volunteer where his forte in planning, organizing and coordinating was well-utilized. He believed that as a practising Buddhist, one should not just learn the Dharma, but instead should take on the mission of spreading the Dharma.

Not long after joining Tzu Chi, Peng Hong resigned from commercial work and went into semi-retirement. He became a certified Tzu Chi volunteer in year 2000 and with a thrifty lifestyle, he managed to save enough to also be a Tzu Chi Honorary Board Member (The requirement to become an honorary board member is to donate NT\$1 million for Building Fund).

In 2006, and with his proficiency in Chinese and English, he was actively involved in promoting the concept of environmental protection to schools, corporate and governmental agencies, thus creating positive affinities with many people.



Coming back with a great vow

In recalling his 15 years' experience as a volunteer, he said with a big smile "When we were bathing and trimming the hair of the elderly at Machap Old Folks' Home, they used to wish us good prosperity and good health. I can still recall those nice moments that filled me with joy."

On the morning of January 8, 2012, when all Tzu Chi volunteers in Melaka were busily hosting the Year-End Relief Distribution as part of the New Year celebration for care-recipients, the sad news of his demise at 8:30 that morning came in. Despite the shock and sadness, Tzu Chi Dharma brothers and sisters carried on with the event; and upon completion, they visited his family and prepared for his last rites.

He had his favourite quote displayed next to his ever smart and good-looking portrait; and it was: "A fulfilling life is a life that we can look back and smile when death comes knocking on our door." All those who came to pay their last respect were visibly touched by this quotation.

At his memorial service held on January 10, about five hundred friends, relatives and Dharma brothers and sisters came to express their condolence.

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"Pain and suffering is also a form of blessing. Though painful, it provides room for spiritual development." These were the words he said during the filming of "Tzu Chi in Malaysia" - entitled "Learn from Sickness". This film was scheduled to be screened on Da Ai TV on January 14, 2012. Sadly, Peng Hong did not get to view it before his demise but it was screened at his memorial service. All present cried when seeing him in the picture - so tranquil, courageous and cheerful to the end.

The last shot of Peng Hong was captured while he was waving from his car after his talk. That moment of him will remain forever.

Master Cheng Yen sent her condolences and a written eulogy, which was read by volunteer Lim Geok Choe. Master gave her blessing and wished for Peng Hong to return soon to fulfill his wish to become a living Bodhisattva to lead the way.



Till we meet again

Wong Ah Lan said, "Listening to his voice on the video, I can almost feel him beside me. I feel sad because I cannot believe that he will go before me."

Ah Lan and Peng Hong met in Tzu Chi 15 years ago. They had developed a very close brother and sister relationship; and had worked together in Tzu Chi's many tasks throughout the years.

A terminal cancer patient herself, Sister Ah Lan could fully understand the pain he endured. She shared her experience with him, and they both encouraged each other along the journey of living with cancer. Both of them were very strong and developed a very positive attitude towards their illness.

Ah Lan said, "His demise reminds me to treasure my life even more and to live it to the fullest."

Tai Piang Boon, who is in the same community zone as Peng Hong, had always treated the latter as a big brother. He shared at the memorial service that although he became very close to Peng Hong only in the last 2 years, he has learnt a lot from him, especially his virtues.

Piang Boon shared, "His strong will and his positive attitude in facing difficulties or setbacks had greatly influenced and motivated me on the Tzu Chi Path. I am deeply grateful to him for his company and guidance."

Tan Teck Siang said he was grateful to Peng Hong for the opportunity to perform at the musical sign language performance of the "Sutra of Innumerable Meanings" last year together with him. Teck Siang revealed that he had thought of withdrawing due to his heavy workload, but Peng Hong encouraged him by saying that it was a very precious opportunity and that he would benefit greatly from it. Sure enough, Teck Siang was very happy with the experience and has never given up on any opportunity to participate in Sutra Performances after that.

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"Peng Hong's greatest influence on me is the reminder to seize the present moment and just do it!" Teck Siang said.

Peng Hong's eldest son, Wei Ren said, "My father never wanted others to worry about him. So, we are always smiling, so that when he see us, he sees our smile."

Wei Ren said the image of how his father was respected by his subordinates when he was young has greatly influenced both him and his brother Wei Jie; and they have emulated their father since young.

Wei Ren added, "My father had told me: We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. His love was not only confined to his family, but was also extended to society; and this is what we must learn from him."

Wei Jie said, "I am very sure that my father will return soon to carry on helping Master Cheng Yen with the mission on purifying minds."

Although Wei Ren and Wei Jie are now residing in Australia, we sincerely hope that they will join the family of Tzu Chi soon.

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Around noon on January 11, Peng Hong's hearse arrived at Melaka Jing-Si Hall for his final tour before departing for the crematorium. A hundred fellow volunteers formed the funeral procession to accompany Peng Hong on his final journey, with a wish to meet him again on the Path of Bodhisattva.

Dear Peng Hong, all the best to you! You will forever be in our minds.

By Low Siew Lian & Loh Siew Chien
Translated by Wong Mun Heng, Matthew Lim & Hew Kwee Heong