



*A  
Beautiful  
Journey*

By Dr Ivan Lin

**IT HAS** been five years; nevertheless, the pain remains. I still cry alone at night in bed; I still recall my leukaemia.

Time might have passed, but I will never forget. I was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukaemia back in March 2010, and became a patient. Nobody knew me. I wasn't anyone famous. I hadn't won any awards. I was just a junior doctor. Quietly, I took the pain. I went through the chemo, because I wished to show everyone it was possible. As a doctor, I wanted to set a good example for my patients; I wanted them to believe in the medicine.

Nobody said life would be easy. There was so much pain, yet I didn't give up. Even if I were to die, I wanted to die knowing that I have done my best. I wanted to have no regrets. Every moment was precious, and I was happy for each day I had.

Even today, I am grateful. So many people have come up to me, and encouraged me. They had found out about my story, and they wanted me to live. I was truly touched by the love I received. I have never felt so loved before.

Deep inside me, something has changed. I am no longer the man I used to be. I have learnt to accept that I am human, and I am humbled by my fragility. Even doctors die, and they die quietly, fading away into the distant past.

Some time back, my story was made known to the late Prof Lam Khee Sien. We kept in touch, and he wrote to me:

*Hi Ivan,*

*Sorry to take some time to reply to you. Thank you for your sharing. Both of us shared the same experience.*

*I am Dr KS Lam, senior orthopaedic surgeon from Changi General Hospital and in KK Women's and Children's Hospital. I was doing well, and successful and happy in my career. My whole life and priorities suddenly and dramatically changed. My career and wealth were no longer the desires of my heart. My God and my family became the most important things in my life.*

*I was devastated like you when I learnt that I had advanced stage transitional cell carcinoma of my right lower ureter with metastases to the pelvic and para-aortic lymph nodes in June 2009. I had a right nephrectomy with right ureterectomy done and subsequently had six cycles of chemotherapy. I was cleared of metastases.*

*It was different to be at the other end of the table - being a patient. It helps me to be more understanding, compassionate, sensitive and caring when dealing with patients and relatives.*

*Praise God and I was able to continue where I left off. However, I had a relapse after 1.5 years with metastases to the pelvic and abdominal lymph nodes, liver, left lung and left supraclavicular lymph nodes.*

*Like you, I will never give up. I will never give up.*

No one lives forever. I have seen death, and I know death. Prof Lam passed away on 18 May 2013 from ureteral cancer.<sup>1</sup> He had touched my heart while he was alive, because he made me realise that we are all the same. Regardless of what kind of doctors we are, we are human.

There were others as well. I remember a friend once shared with me about a kind and helpful registrar he had come across during his houseman posting. The registrar's name was Dr Ng Tsong Haur. While I didn't know Dr Ng personally, I had heard about the good deeds he had done. He was kind to his juniors, and was always willing to render his services.

He too, has left us, on 25 July 2009 - barely a few weeks after he was diagnosed with terminal gastric cancer.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes it is not easy. Nonetheless, I will carry on. Good people do die, but they leave us with memories of their kindness. And I want to always remember the kindness I have received.

Life is a journey. There are challenges, yet there are beautiful moments too. I have grown so much since my leukaemia, and my life will never be the same again. Many people have supported me, which warms my heart. I want to keep going; I want to make a difference. It is because I am happy to be alive.

Someone once told me I was very special. My buddy even stated that I was, and will always be, an inspiration to everyone around me. It is difficult for me to believe.

I was never in the Dean's List. I don't have any accolades. I haven't published any papers in any journals. I am neither a trainee nor a specialist. But I am a doctor.

I am Dr Ivan Lin. ■

## References

1. Ang YG. *Fond memories of our beloved classmate Khee Sien.* Available at: <http://class7479.blogspot.sg/2013/05/khee-sien-passed-away-on-18-may-2013.html>. Accessed 12 February 2015.
2. Chua CA. *Gone too soon... SMA News 2009; 41(8):22.* Available at: <http://news.sma.org.sg/4108/Gone.pdf>. Accessed 12 February 2015.



*Dr Ivan Lin is still on follow-up for his cancer. He will live life to the fullest, and make his dreams come true. He can be contacted at [ivan.lin.xiaohui@gmail.com](mailto:ivan.lin.xiaohui@gmail.com).*