

# Book Review

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*Tuesdays with Morrie:  
an old man, a young man, and life's greatest lesson*

**Mitch Albom**

**Hardcover edition: Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc., 1997**

**Paperback edition: Broadway Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 2002, 192pp,**

**ISBN: 0-7679-0592-X, US\$12.95**

In June 2005, Dr. Chan Sik, our first geriatrician in Hong Kong, asked me if I have come across a No.1 best seller 'Tuesdays with Morrie' by Mitch Albom, a book he found very enlightening. I replied no and said I would have liked to read more books but I did not have the time – then I was buried under commitments to the Hong Kong Geriatrics Society and my father was ill. In November 2005, I acquired the book because my sons had this book included in their school list of extra books for reading. Then I discovered that I had actually quoted from this book unknowingly in 1999 in a talk to my colleagues in Princess Margaret Hospital on 'Death and Dying,' a topic chosen at a time when a junior told me that his reason for leaving geriatric medicine was sadness at the sight of elderly patients dying and when I told his supervisor of this, his supervisor responded "how come that as a doctor, he cannot overcome death?" The sentence that I quoted back in 1999 was:

*"the truth is once you learn how to die you learn how to live,"* to show a positive view of death as an ongoing journey of spiritual growth.

This was then extracted from Professor John Morley's article 'The Ethics of Old Age' in *Cyberounds* in 1999, which in turn was quoted from Mitch's book.

Mitch, twenty years after graduation, visited his college professor, Morrie, whose life is coming to an end from motor neurone disease. Their rekindled relationship turned into one final 'class' every Tuesday: lessons of living taught from a dying professor. Finding the book full of words of wisdom on death and dying, I quoted more from it in my talk for the Conference on End-of-Life Care in Long-Term Care Settings organized by Haven of Hope Hospital in 2006:

*"When you realize you are going to die, you see everything much differently."*

So, if you treat every day as your last day, your life will be completely different!

*"Swallowing, I don't care so much about – so they feed me through a tube, so what? But my voice? My hands? They're such an essential part of me. I talk with my voice. I gesture with my hands."*

So, we should not restrain the hands of patients with Ryle's tube by reflex action! Do away with boxing gloves!!

*"Every morning he insisted on being lifted from his bed and wheeled to his study..." "When you're in bed, you're dead."*

So, we should organize more activities for our dying patients instead of restricting them to beds with bed-side rails up.

*"Don't let go too soon, but don't hang on too long."*

Should signing and documenting NAR be a priority?

*"People act as if death is contagious. It's not contagious, you know. Death is as natural as life."*

End-of-life care is really about living with a disease that's going to kill you, about good living on the way to death.

One evening in June 2010, after the review meeting, I rushed to the Hong Kong City Hall to join my wife and son to watch the drama "Tuesdays with Morrie" by Dr Chung King Fai and Mr Edmond Lo, a production run for the fifth time by Chung Ying Theatre in response to the great local demand. Afterwards, I recommended the drama to Dr. Chan Sik and in turn he recommended a TV film of the book produced by Oprah, starring Jack Lemmon in 1999, glimpse of which can be seen by browsing the site: <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/dAxAY5uuQLo/>

*"Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine?"* Mitch is fortunate to have such a great teacher, Morrie.

This book is a great lesson on coaching, mentorship, ageing, dying, living,.... Geriatric Medicine.