



CORY TAYLOR'S DYING: ILLUMINATING THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF DEATH

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Abstract:

Death is an unavoidable phase in the life of an individual. Dying is the act of getting close to death. The process of facing death and the process of accepting it, are different from one another. The situations people go through, the support they get and their own mindset may influence the people in their final stage. Stress and strain increase as people age and individuals are prone to consider negative aspects of life when they are nearing their end. They remain aloof from the rest of the world. Embracing the end peacefully is more important for the individuals who are nearing death. In order to see the positive side of the final stage of life, one must gain strength and incline oneself to live with contentment.

This paper deals with a memoir, entitled *Dying* by an Australian writer, Cory Taylor. Memoirs are ever inspiring and can give the readers a perspective other than their own. This memoir talks about the conflicts in Taylor's last stage of life. The health problems she faced, how she dealt with the situations, how her reminiscences made her strong, and how certain events in the last phase changed her views on death are beautifully portrayed in her memoir, *Dying*. Cory's *Dying* is a touching narrative that imparts lessons of life particularly regarding the last days of life.

Key Words: Memoir, Death, Acceptance, Struggle

Cory Taylor was an award-winning novelist and screenwriter who also published short stories and children's books. Taylor grew up in Queensland and Fiji. She lived in Brisbane and often spent time in Japan with her Japanese-born artist-husband Shin, whom she has been married to for 33 years, and her sons Nat and Dan. Her first novel 'Me and Mr. Booker' won her the 2012 Commonwealth Writer's Award (Pacific) and her second novel 'My Beautiful Enemy' was nominated for the Miles Franklin Award in 2014. At the age of sixty, Cory Taylor is diagnosed with melanoma-related brain cancer. Her illness is no longer treatable, she construes the experience as her health declines. She wrote the memoir in the last few weeks before her death. In the memoir she reflects her life and her parents, her feeling about dying, explaining why she would like to choose the circumstances of her death. She died on July 5, 2016, shortly after her book *Dying: A Memoir* was published in Australia.

This paper focuses on Cory Taylor's *Dying – A Memoir*. A memoir is an intimate look at the period in time, which is more focused than an autobiography. "Memoir" comes from the French "mémoire" or "memory." A memoir is a non-fiction narrative, written from the perspective of the author about the personal memories. It is a monograph, on the specialized topic about an important part of their life. In contrast to autobiographies, memoirs discuss specific events in the author's life. Since memoirs are simple to write, anyone can do it in an effort to encourage others. Through memoir, reader can gain insight into the author's viewpoint, learn from their experiences, and alter our attitudes. Memoirs describe the author's reflections on their life's experiences and their advice for the rest of the world. Memoirs surely provide us inspiration and influence how we view the positive aspects of a situation. Memoirs are now a popular topic of conversation in literature. In fact, there is a day set aside for memoirs. August 31 is celebrated as **We Love Memoirs Day**. The Australian writer Cory Taylor is the subject of this paper, who wrote a memoir about her experiences and tribulations as she approached death.

Death is the final stage of the life cycle. At first, nobody is aware of it. While it is not a topic of conversation during the intermediate stages of life, it becomes a significant issue during the final stages. Every person's process of approaching death will be different, but every day of life brings with it a thought of death. Every day, especially in the final stages, people grow more afraid of dying. One should strive to gain courage and make their final days serene and enjoyable with their loved ones rather than being afraid of death. Through her memoir, Cory aspires to inspire bravery and highlight benefits of dying, especially in its latter stages.

The idea of death is viewed in an entirely different manner by optimistic and pessimistic people. The former sees it as cheerful, peaceful, hopeful, while the latter views it as the end of everything. The repercussions they encounter, the state of the health, their mental capacity everything matters when they age. Death has both positive and negative side, much like a coin, the perspective which we consider is important. Cory Taylor is one who reflects on the positive aspects of death, after having experienced a lot. Taylor's *Dying* was dedicated to her loving husband Shin. She divided this memoir into three parts, titled Cold Feet, Dust and Ashes, Endings and Beginnings. In the three parts she discloses her pains and pleasures, thoughts, experiences, relationships. Her change in view of death and acceptance are clearly showcased in her memoir.

Taylor, was first diagnosed with melanoma in 2005. She had a stent for right kidney functioning, she still had deposits of melanoma, which was incurable in the year 2011. In addition, she had a tumor in brain, which was, successfully removed later. By 2014, she had a seizure. This made her temporarily helpless as a baby. As a result, she initially wanted to commit suicide with the help of a drug called, Euthanasia, which is on her wish list always. Even though, she never used the drug, it gave her a sense of satisfaction. She made a suicide note, apologizing to everyone for committing suicide. In her suicide note, she mentions that she wanted to end her life in this way, she also says how she loved all the near and the dear. But she never committed suicide because she knew her responsibilities as a wife and a mother of two. In addition, suicide is considered a crime. She started writing her memoir as she is facing a battle with cancer and observing others who are struggling with it. She wanted to be immortal through her writing. Writing has remained her passion. It was her grandmother who inspired her to write. She feels writing the memoir, a pleasure, as it shapes her death through words.

She said, "*No doubt my horror at how my parents ended their days influenced me to look into ways I might improve things when it came to my turn.*" (11) The death of her parents was a reason for the change in her perspective towards death. She joined in Exit International, as soon as she was diagnosed with cancer. None of them talked about dying in Exit International. In Exit, they used to conduct Exit meetings, so that one can accompany the other to conceal the fear of death. Somehow the premises was unsuited for her. She felt terrific. If there is a choice between dying there or dying by her hand, her choice was clear. But soon, she was referred to a home nursing service run by Buddhists. She had regular meetings with psychologist, which she never liked. On every Wednesday, the patients were visited by a biographer. Their duty was to visit the patients, record their stories and present them to the families of the dying. Susan was the biographer of Taylor. Within no time they became good friends. Despite losing her only son at the age of nineteen, she never wallows in self-pity. This was a source of inspiration for Taylor. Later, Susan never turned back as she passed away. Taylor felt that her death was not as tragic as Susan. She had enough time to bid farewell to the family peacefully. Even the bad memories matter at the time of dying. She had now accustomed to the process of death.

The second part introduces Taylor's family. Her father, Lesile Gordon Taylor was a pilot, he never visits the family, nor takes care of them. His only job was to fly. Her sister, Sarah and brother Eliot, studied at boarding school since their childhood. It was her mother, Everil Mary Taylor (nee Murray), a teacher at Canberra, who was with Taylor always. The marriage of her parents was a sham. She reminisced her childhood memories at her mother's place. Mary Taylor spent her days in solitude, similar to her mother. She harbored grief throughout her life. *"To be honest, I feared Dad more than I feared the robbers,"* (135) through Taylor's words, one can understand her relation with her father. The familial relations too, were never harmonious. Communication between siblings was non-existent. They lived separately, Taylor at Brisbane, Sarah at Newcastle, Eliot at Blue Mountains, West of Sydney. Even her grandmother's life ended in failure. She was gorgeous, pompous, irascible woman, and an inept mother. She had an unhappy married life and spent years alone in exile and battled disintegration.

Surprisingly, in the second part Taylor talked about the ashes of her parents. After the death of her mother, her ashes were with Eliot. But her mother always wanted her ashes to be buried at Toowong Cemetery, towards the Murray Plinth. Taylor and her sister did not even attend the death of their mother. The three gathered at a restaurant in Sydney just for an hour, to collect her mother's ashes as Cory wanted them to be buried as per her mother's wish. Eliot placed the ashes in a shoebox and handed them to Taylor. The talk between the siblings was always the same. Taylor buried her ashes and left without paying any tribute. She rarely visited the tomb because, she was certain that her mother will never be there, she must be rambling to far places. She was aware death is not the end.

Her father's job caused her to travel to numerous locations, which helped her learn new things and made her a travel enthusiast, despite the fact that he is not with them and busy with his own work always. She travelled to Queensland, Fiji, Canberra, Brisbane in Australia. She travelled to England and Japan too after she was married. She continued to travel to Japan and Australia for more than three decades, primarily to see her mother and to earn money. She stayed longer in Australia than in Japan.

Cory's father stayed majority of the time with Eliot. As his health was deteriorating, Cory paid him a visit. It was hardly an hour of a typical conversation. After speaking with him, she left, and that was their last encounter. She shared her father's undesirable childhood, which contributed to his reckless, irate behavior as a parent. He never gave his family any thought and always did what he wanted. Even though their father passed away months ago, the sisters were unaware of it. Eliot might believe that communicating the issue to them is pointless because they do not care about him. Later, they learned that his ashes were scattered at the national park on Mount Kosciuszko, where he had been to horse riding. He always talked about the importance of not returning, but if Cory had the choice, she probably would have scattered them somewhere out to sea from an airplane where they were blown away by the wind.

As death was nearing, she began to consider her own ashes. There was no such thing as Cory's hometown. However, she had always preferred Australia to Japan. She considered asking her husband to decorate her remains, split them in half and scatter them equally in Brisbane River and Japan. Later, she realized that the family should make the decision rather than her. She wanted to encourage them to go to a bar and drink a little while they sobbed over her loss together.

Every conclusion is a fresh start. Every beginning ought to have a conclusion. Taylor's life also ended in a similar way. Taylor's struggles in the final stage are revealed in the third part. *"Things live until they die. Consciousness begins and then it ends. How it ends I'm only now discovering"* (110) spoke she. The final act probably contained Taylor's final words to the world. Her health had been irreparably damaged. She was confined to two rooms. Her words were the expression of her entire life, which was in front of her. In the final section, she discussed her early years, her time in school, how she came to love writing, and her love for her family, especially her mother. It is true that she felt a special connection to her mother more than anyone else. She was the only person Cory spoke to throughout her ordeal, seeking her advice and believing that she was always there to listen and give her advice on how to make the best choice and be strong enough to face the battle of death. She even described how her anger over the death evolved into acceptance. She had degenerated into a bag of bones, but she claimed that *"we start dying the moment we are born."* (145) She was also grateful for the Chinese drug because it completely made her feel less helpless. She wanted to kiss the beloved one last time and bid a sad farewell to the family. She stated, *"I've come to the edge of words now, to place where they falter and strain in the face of dying's terrifying finality."* (147) By facing death, she effectively defeated it.

A succinct and moving memoir, *Dying*, was written by Cory in almost her final days. She was aware that she was deteriorating, but she persisted in living, writing, and changing her attitude towards death, undoubtedly inspiring people all over the world. Every word she speaks discusses her suffering, which is where she derives her pleasure. It is without a doubt a heartwarming, extraordinary gift to the world. Her memoir inspires readers and provokes thought in those who are approaching the end of their lives. It encourages everyone to consider the positive aspects of death, to think positively about it, and to accept it without complaining. Through her memoir, she attempts to alter people's idea of death.

Anybody's death is a universal truth. Since it has been almost 10 years, Cory's death is getting closer. The same hardships Cory experienced were also experienced by her mother, grandmother, and father. Despite her many challenges, she never gave up. She endured much suffering, confronted it, and then stood aside, serving as an inspiration to many. Everybody has issues and suffers from debilitating illnesses, but it is crucial to develop bravery and fight the inevitable. For everyone who is battling in their final stage of life, Cory is such an encouragement.

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