

Dr. Angela Wu: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Spring 2018

I came to the United States from Taiwan in 1976. For many years I had practiced Traditional Chinese Medicine in my home country, and my dream was to continue my work as a healer in America. But I soon discovered that it was not legal for me to practice acupuncture here with my Taiwanese credentials alone. The best path, I told myself, was to go to Western medical school and become an M.D.

But practicing medicine wasn't my only objective. After I got settled in this country, my mission became obtaining custody of my two children, who were still in Taiwan with their father. I wanted my daughter, Robyn, to have a better life than I had experienced, breaking from the old Chinese traditions that held women back and made my childhood so difficult. And I wanted my son, Devin, to realize his full potential beyond the restrictions of Chinese tradition. A fourth-generation first son of a first son, Devin was born with a lucky star, which meant I was not supposed to gain custody of him. Winning custody cost me all my wealth in Taiwan. It was worth every penny.

When my children arrived in 1979, my life priorities shifted dramatically. Caring for Robyn and Devin became far more important than attending medical school. And so, I found another path: I earned the credentials required to practice Traditional Chinese Medicine in the United States, and began a satisfying career, with many achievements of which I am proud:

- In 1981, I founded San Francisco State University's Chinese Healing Studies program, and served on the faculty until 2002. I was a faculty member in the Institute of Holistic Health Studies (IHHS) department of San Francisco State University for many years. As an expert practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine, I offered students precious insight into the value of alternative healing practices. Upon my retirement in support of the IHHS mission, we created a special fund to benefit the programs and its students, The Angela Wu Holistic Health Fund.
- In 1982, I was appointed by California Governor Jerry Brown to the state's first Acupuncture Licensing Board.
- In 1993, I co-founded the HIV/AIDS and Chinese Medicine Annual Conference, which for the first time brought both Western and Eastern doctors and practitioners together to discuss the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In addition, I earned recognition for work with HIV/AIDS patients.
- From 1999 to 2003, I served as Chairperson of the Healing Tao Instructors Association, conducting workshops and certifying practitioners in QiGong and Traditional Chinese Medicine.
- In 2006, I authored Fertility Wisdom: How Traditional Chinese Medicine Can Help Overcome Infertility (Rodale), a bestselling title in Amazon's fertility category.

None of these accomplishments prepared me fully for what I would experience in recent years as my personal health challenges came into the foreground. On July 2, 2015, I was diagnosed with A-Fib (atrial fibrillation). I had surgery to correct the condition on June 2, 2016. The procedure was successful. It gave me new life, for which I am extremely thankful. But never could I have anticipated what I would go through, in my physical body and in my mind, between diagnosis, surgery, and post-surgery – particularly the powerful side effects of Western medications.

Over the course of two years, I was prescribed 10 different drugs. My body reacted poorly to all of them. I experienced every possible side effect. I was admitted to the emergency room 14 times. In one incident, my heart rate dropped to 30, and paramedics were called to my office. During this time my weight dropped 20 pounds. The level of toxins in my system was phenomenal. I came to terms with the possibility of moving on to the next level of BEING.

It wasn't until the winter of 2017 that I began to feel like my old self again, physically and mentally. Once my clarity returned, I had my Ah-Ha moment: Life is always a gift, even when the package is, to say the least, unappealing. As long as you have the courage to open the gift and see what it reveals, wisdom can be found within, no matter how poorly that gift is wrapped.

Assessing the unexpected gift of my illness, I asked myself: What is inside? What is underneath? As I delved deeper, here is what I discovered: I am thankful for the life I have lived and what I have achieved. I made the right decision to put family before career, and my children have turned out very well — both successful in their professions.

Even more important, both are wonderful people - not just my children, but my best friends. My wish for my daughter has come true; she has taken the advantages of growing up in this culture to an amazing level, and I am so proud of her. And I am proud that Devin has turned out to be a well-balanced and evolved individual whom I admire.

In my youth I wanted to go to Western medical school. These past few years, I got my wish. My condition provided me with a crash course in Western medicine, giving me the opportunity to better understand what others are experiencing when I see them in my practice. The lessons I have learned are more valuable than anything I could have gotten from a class or a book. And they are a great reminder that life is a gift; it's up to us to learn how to receive it.

I also learned a few other lessons about healing:

1. Your body is your best partner. Each of us has a moral responsibility to respect and listen to our partner.
2. The mind is powerful. Be aware of your choices and focus on the roadmap to health.
3. Learn to say “no” to preserve your stamina — including, when necessary, “no” to loved ones who want to visit and help.
4. Keep exercise simple. Cultivate breath awareness – easy and smooth.
5. Smile!

This year, 2018, my health is back. I begin each morning with a big smile, welcoming what life brings. And I cultivate appreciation — for the tremendous support of my family, my staff, my patients, and my friends. I also value the unexpected gift of a Western medical education, without ever having to attend medical school!

