

**Now I Live Again
by Boonsri Tangtrongsin**

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Chapter 1: The Outbreak

Boonsri (V.O)

It is early in the morning.
There's something which is not right.

Boonsri

It's burning inside my chest.

Fredrik

You probably have heartburn. I'll get you something for that.
Here, you can try this.

Boonsri (V.O)

I take the tablets, but nothing happens.
Oh! Tomorrow is Sunday. There is no doctor and all pharmacies are closed.

At night I cannot lie down. It's burning in my throat. I have to sit in an armchair and half sleep.

The next day, I call the health centre to get advice.

Nurse

You should take a medicine called Omeprazole. It is a medicine that reduces the acid in stomach.

Boonsri (V.O)

Fredrik buys the medicine and comes back to me. It works! It stops burning in my throat. But, in a bit, it is hard for me to breathe.

I call the health centre again. This is the beginning of the worst nightmare.

Doctor 01

There is a lot of gas in the stomach. This is what is causing your breathlessness. You will get new tablets for this, and you must also continue with Omeprazole for one month.

Boonsri (V.O)

I eat less food and sleep poorly at night. I don't feel better. It feels like I have a big stone in my stomach.

Finally, a month has passed. I meet a new doctor. He seems optimistic.

Superman(Doctor 02)

No problem! We're going to fix this.

There could be some bacteria in the stomach, so called Helicopterbacteria. They can destroy the mucous membrane in the stomach. We don't know where they come from, but... we usually find the helicopterbacteria in ...stressed people.

Boonsri (V.O)

I submitted a stool sample. After a week I get the results from the lab. It was normal. There were no helicopterbacteria in the stomach.

Now the doctor has a new suggestion.

Superman: Doctor 02

You should start taking two tablets of Omeprazole per day. If you don't get any better after two weeks, I will send you for a gastroscopy examination.

But whatever you do, don't stop the medicine until we know what is causing the problems. It could be dangerous.

Boonsri (V.O)

I'm very uncertain about this, but if I don't follow the suggestion, there will be no further examination, so I am forced to continue taking the tablets.

I feel really tight in the stomach. There must be something wrong. I don't feel better at all.

Fredrik

It could be the medicine. It says under the side effects that you can get a stomach ache from the medicine.

Boonsri

But when one takes medicine because one has a stomach ache how can one know if one gets a stomach ache from the medicine?
Ooh! I'd better call the health centre.

Nurse

It may take a few days for the medications to take effect, but you should continue to take the tablets as recommended by the doctor.

Boonsri (V.O)

I start eating even less food and with less variety. I can only eat rice porridge, boiled egg and fish. That's all my stomach can handle.

Boonsri (V.O)

I lose weight and a lot of hair. I can't sleep at night. It hurts so much when I lay down. I start getting pain in my back and everywhere else in my body.

Eventually, I cannot manage to go to work. I can barely manage to talk to my mom on the phone.

I get to meet another doctor because the previous one doesn't have time.

Russian Doll(Doctor 03)

"You are going to have a gastroscopy examination and also a gallbladder ultrasound. In the meantime, you should continue taking Omeprazole.

Boonsri

I wonder if it's not the medicine that hurts me.

Russian Doll(Doctor 03)

This is rare, and it's dangerous to stop the medicine when we don't know what's wrong.

Boonsri (V.O)

After a month, I finally get an appointment for the gastroscopy examination and the ultrasound. I really hope they find out what's wrong, so we can find the cure for it.

Gastroscopy Doctor(Doctor04)

There is nothing wrong with your stomach. No, I can't find anything wrong.

Boonsri (V.O)

I go to the hospital again for an ultrasound to check if I have gallstones. But I won't get the diagnosis for a few weeks.

I'm so tired with all this. Imagine if it is going to be like this forever, I'd rather be dead.

However, Fredrik says that this is just a small glitch in your life. This too shall pass.

Boonsri (V.O)

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve. I got the result from the hospital. There's nothing wrong with me except that the gallbladder is shrivelled. It's because I haven't been able to eat enough food for a long time.

Boonsri (V.O)

I hurry to the health centre before it closes for the Christmas holiday.

Nurse

It won't be until next year before you can see the doctor again. You can try to stop taking Omeprazole. It might help you digest food better. But you should reduce the medicine little at a time so that your stomach has time to adjust.

Boonsri (V.O)

I celebrate Christmas with Fredrik's family. I bring my own food and eat with all the relatives.

I'm trying to stop taking Omeprazole, but it's not going so well. It hurts and burns in the stomach. So, I just take one tablet a day. I feel worse for a few days. Then, I feel better.

I see the doctor one last time. He says I don't need to visit anymore because he can't find anything wrong with me. There is nothing more he can do. "You might have food allergy", he says. I ask him to write a medical certificate for me.

I decided to go to Thailand. However, the problem is that I need to eat every two hours but I can't eat whatever, and the trip takes 16 hours.

I show the medical certificate to go through security with my food thermoses. I didn't believe it would work out, but it went alright anyway.

Chapter 2: The journey

Boonsri (V.O)

When I meet my mom in Thailand, she thinks I look terrible. "However, we're going to fix this", she says.

We start with meeting a good massage therapist. She is blind, but her hands are magical.

The massage therapist says my stomach is full of air. It's like I have many ping pong balls in my stomach. She squeezes my stomach intensely. She tries to catch the balls with one hand and then she crushes them with another hand.

At first, I feel uncomfortable, but later it feels actually nice. After a few hours it starts to hurt again.

The massage therapist says that "You must stop taking Omeprazole at once. You shouldn't eat medicine that doesn't help."

Boonsri (V.O)

The next day I stop taking Omeprazole completely.

I go to a Chinese doctor. He examines his patients by feeling the pulse. He says my pulse is very confused. There is a lot of air in the system.

The tongue is also very red. I have lost the balance in my body. He checks my nails and then he asks if I've slept properly and if I've pooped every day.

Then he says that I should avoid acidic food and fresh vegetables because it can cause a lot of gas in the stomach.

The doctor gave me seven large packets of dried herbs. One package per day. I will boil the herbs with a litre of water until there is only 250ml of liquid left. I drink the liquid three times a day.

It smells bad. It looks like coffee, but the taste is much worse. I get tears in my eyes every time I drink it.

After I have drunk the medicine. I feel a lot of pressure in my stomach. All the air comes out. I belch like an old man and fart like a machine gun. It feels like I've pooped more than I've eaten.

It feels like the worst is over now. I don't any longer need to lie with my head high up. I can lie down flat on the floor.

The doctor explains that the medicine helps me detoxify my liver and gallbladder. It gets rid of the toxins that I have been accumulating in my body.

I am starting to be able to eat a little more variety of food and larger portions. Now I don't have to eat so often anymore. But I still can't eat whatever. My stomach still hurts when I eat most food.

Fredrik has gone back to Sweden. I decide to travel to a meditation centre in the northeast of Thailand.

There are various types of exercise at the centre. We exercise all day. Some exercises are quite common, for example, walking, standing, sitting or lying still. Some are quite different from what is normal. For example, shaking and screaming.

Boonsri (V.O)

In the afternoon, we do rotational meditation. We sit and listen to music and rotate our body. It is important not to think about anything. You just have to follow with the movement.

The shake and dance exercise is like going to the pub. The difference is that you are fully aware of yourself.

After a few days I start belching and throwing up during meditating. I feel worried about it.

But people say It's good. The body begins to heal itself. Just continue. I actually feel better after I have been sick. It's like this almost every day or when I feel bad.

I stay on at the meditation centre for a month. I find peace in my soul. I understand that the most important thing is not about the disease to be cured, but rather how I can live with it and still be happy.

I go back to Bangkok and see another doctor who is also a massage therapist and a bone setter.

The doctor asks me if I have been taking any medicine for a long time that I cannot tolerate. It seems my muscles have wasted a bit. It can affect the nerve system and blood circulation in the body. The only thing I can think of is Omeprazole.

She says I should meet her a few more times. But now we will fix the worst first. She pushes and twists my back a few times. It creaks a lot, but it doesn't hurt too much.

They use a piece of cloth to spin around my stomach and rock me in different directions, back and forward. It's a bit hard to breathe.

Then I hear that they need a rubber hammer and a chisel. I'm terrified. What are they going to do now!

They tap lightly on my skeleton. It doesn't hurt, but it shakes the whole body. They say it helps to lift my muscles. It's actually nice.

After an hour it was finished. I vomit a lot. Afterwards it feels like I'm 10 kg. lighter. I can really take a deep breath. I haven't been able to do that for a long time.

We start with sauna. It is hot, very hot! I breathe by having my face in an ice bowl. The doctor said the moisture and heat will soften the muscles and joints.

Boonsri (V.O)

The next day, we start with sauna, the same as yesterday. Then we continue with the treatment. But it is more peaceful today
(31:04) The doctor says I need to massage myself every day. It is enough to just rub back and forth. Especially at the ribs.
(31:05) Now it's done. I survived. Although it hasn't completely gone away, it's much better anyway.

Chapter 3: Coming back

Boonsri (V.O)

I'm back in Sweden. Life is different here. I still don't feel very well when I eat certain foods. It goes up and down all the time.

A friend says I should meet a stomach specialist in Jönköping. But I have to go through the health centre first.

So I see a new doctor at the health centre. She says I have anxious stomach. There is nothing to do about it. She never sends me to the specialist in Jönköping

I decided that I will solve this problem by myself. I continue with the meditation every day. It helps a lot when I feel bad. I usually throw up when I mediate, and then I feel better again.

Boonsri (V.O)

During meditation I learn something new all the time. When the mind is still, I figure out how to heal myself.

I massage myself on the ribs and stomach from time to time. I learn how different parts of the body affect each other. Sometimes it helps to massage on the back which helps the stomach feel better. My suffering becomes much less.

But I still feel that something is not right. By the end of the summer, I travel to Thailand again.

I meet another bone setter that my friend told me about. His name is Yang. He is happy and jokes with me all the time. He checks me out thoroughly.

Then he shows me a pose and asks if I've been sitting like this for a long time? I am surprised and admit that this is how I sit when I work.

He said that the spine is crooked which affects the ribs. They are twisted and can affect breathing and digesting.

Boonsri (V.O)

He begins by tapping the side of the spine with a rubber hammer and a piece of wood. He says he has to "tenderise the meat before he can make the soup".

Then he takes two wooden sticks and taps the side of the spine to correct my crooked back. It does actually hurt.

The doctor says I have a nervous stomach. When it is getting hurt, I should press at one spot, three fingers down from the ribs under the chest. It will help.

Then the doctor holds my index finger towards me and says that when it hurts, you yourself are the cause. Do not forget it.

I go to a meditation centre outside of Bangkok. I stay there for a few days. There they use bells instead of music, but the ritual is pretty much the same as before. It feels like a lot of power comes from within. I spin around and scream. It feels very empty afterwards.

One night something strange happens. Before I fall asleep, I see pictures of different insects one after another. It wasn't a dream. I still hear people talking nearby. I stare at the pictures until I fall asleep.

I wake up again in the morning. Since I got sick, I haven't been able to sleep more than a couple of hours a night. But from this day on, I sleep like a baby every night. My stomach gets better quickly when I can sleep properly. Perhaps the meditation helps me ease the stress.

I'm going back to Sweden. I'm not that scared anymore. I eat at regular times and can carry the bags myself, without having a stomach ache.

It has been more than a year since I got that pain in my stomach. I've become a lot better than last Christmas Eve. I can eat the Christmas food and don't have to bring my own food anymore.

Perhaps just like Fredrik said, "This too shall pass."

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