



*Urs Burki — humble thoughts on your life*

*(My husband suffered cardiac arrest on 13th January 2016, and has not woken up from his coma. He is in Santena, Italy, at the moment.)*

*When you were 18, you kept a diary for a few months — using a typewriter, so that you could practice proper typing with 10 fingers. You were reflecting on the destruction of nature and living creatures by man. You asked yourself whether we had the right to destroy things which God, not human beings, had created. And yet nature forgives us lots of mistakes, and helps us find peace and reflection — stoical for thousands of years. It's amazing with what clarity and spiritual wisdom you were already able to communicate even then, as a young man. And it was at this time that you discovered your love of writing and poetry.*

*On the 8th of September 1963, something life-changing occurred in your life. I'm talking about an epiphany which you experienced. You suddenly felt the profound desire to love all human beings unconditionally. At that moment, you thought of your future profession in medicine, and strongly wished to help lots of people in need, and free them from their pain. Part of your longing to be close to people was fulfilled the day you became a physician. How close you were to people is shown by a lovely example from your early childhood. With your brother Dolf you used to give puppet theatre performances. You made the puppets yourselves, and brought them to life; they fell in love, got married, had children and died. You gave them characters, and humanity. The raven-haired Maria with her fiery eyes was your first great love. You didn't let her know your feelings, for fear that they might vanish if you put them into words. This is how you experienced falling in love: "A fine thing came over me, a feeling, that more than everything else I love, and that makes me full of the joys of life." You experienced love as "indescribable sweetness which exists in everything that lives." And that is all from the diary.*

When you were still a child, and in your early youth, you always found a way to express yourself in art. Whether in drawing, modelling clay, handicrafts or painting in water colours. All your life you have been intensely preoccupied with art in all its forms: literature, poetry, philosophy, opera, theatre, ballet, classical music, architecture, painting, sculpture and photography. Your library houses several thousand books. With your intellectual curiosity, you hardly ever went to bed without reading a few more pages. Books were your constant companions. You never wandered far without having at least two dozen books with you. Wherever you drove, you always had a stack of audio books to listen to. You knew many of the most important works of world literature and philosophy, and you had studied the majority of them intensely. This regular intellectual engagement with the ideas of great thinkers left a visible mark on your painting and your writings.

During the philosophy lectures, which you attended as a medical student, you discovered, as well as other great thinkers, the works of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Over the past 3 years, you have been intently preoccupied with the ideas of this great thinker. The prose poem "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" was for you the apotheosis of Nietzsche's literary works. This masterpiece accompanied you almost everywhere. You didn't just read a lot, you were an author too. Your book entitled "Art & Aesthetic Surgery" is not just artistically designed, but also a very interesting read. It was published in 2005. Making the face of the Mona Lisa look younger, which you dreamed of one night in full detail, and afterwards realised step by step with the assistance of computer technology, put you in the spotlight as an artist for the first time. The image of the Mona Lisa, which received a lot of attention from the Press, illustrates the cover of this book. Finally, with the publication of both books on your artistic and performance work, and your first art exhibition, you achieved not only a great dream, but also the desire for a certain degree of "earthly immortality".

With every fibre of your being, you feel yourself called upon to be a creator of fine art. In fact, you possess all the characteristics of a true artist: imagination, sensuality, intuition, the dogged strength to make your intuition reality, a contemplative guiding spirit leading you to create works of art, sensitivity to capture the transcendental in the sensual, and the ability to release your inner riches. For you, photography is a kind of interplay of imagination and reality, which presents itself to your wide-awake senses in a multitude of shapes, colours, movements, atmospheres and situations. But you never lost yourself more than in painting. You often painted as if in a trance, your whole body was in constant movement, as if you were performing a secret dance. In sculpture, the artistic process was just as important to you as the created work. The act of creation itself is holy to you, a moment where you become one with something higher which guides your creative process. Only in that creative moment do you feel fully alive. Only in these sublime moments of the creative act could you truly be yourself: happy, free and connected to eternity. It is these feelings of boundless happiness which shine through your pictures, and which you would like to share with the people who look at your works.

Like all intuitive people, you live simultaneously on various levels of reality. One example of this: your art studio does not only house the tools you need for painting and sculpture. In this place, which is your inner sanctum, there is also gym equipment — a rowing machine, racing bike and dumbbells —, as well as hundreds of books from all types of literature. And here we also find your violoncello and other musical instruments, works of art from around the world, clams and rocks which you brought back from your travels, artistic pieces of wood shaped by nature, surgical equipment, a camera and camcorder, as well as a real human skeleton. It is all there to put you in the right frame of mind, for you suddenly to alight on during the process of creation. The words of poets and authors often found their way into your painting. Everything happened at the same time in this "holographic" state of consciousness. As a surgeon you were a master of precision, as an artist you loved chaos. For you, they are both an expression of a higher order.

Anxious to get to know the customs and traditions of foreign cultures, you travelled round more than half the world (you speak 4 foreign languages!), accompanied almost always by your camera, racing bike, a couple of canvases and tubes of paint. You even climbed high mountains with your painting

kit and a rolled-up canvas in your rucksack — along with Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" and a little book on "Greek gods and heroes". Scarcely had you arrived at the summit than the force of inspiration acquired on the climb was released in painting. If the magic and beauty of nature had entered your soul to such an extent that you felt yourself at one with the ethereal world, it could well be the case that you communed with the mountain nymph "Echo". The nymph "Echo" who withdrew to the woods a long time ago, lives in lonely caves, concealing her face with foliage. Only her voice can be heard as an echo by human beings.

It was not in the brown grizzly bear, but in snow white polar bears that you recognised yourself most profoundly. Did you know that Indians call the "upper chamber", the centre of the brain, the "polar bear cavity"? The white bear lodging there embodies the diamond-bright light, pure consciousness and our true being — the divinity in us! Yours is a noble, refined spirit, coupled with a gentle, nurturing soul and marked sensitivity. And although this sensitivity has often led you to great happiness, it has often also brought about emotional distress and several times even led you to despair. What consoled you in such moments was music. You were a gifted cellist. You started playing the cello at the age of seven. You often performed in a Trio as a teenager. Until a few years ago, when the permanent sharp pain in your right leg took the pleasure of music-making away from you, you played Bach's 1st and 2nd sonatas almost every day.

Challenges gave you strength. As far as you are concerned, obstacles and barriers are there to be overcome. You see in them an opportunity to grow beyond your own limits. When you set yourself a goal, there is nothing and no-one who can hold you back. People who stand up for their ideals and pursue their destiny uncompromisingly, win your admiration and respect. You feel connected to them, because they are driven by the same strength and conviction. For you, one of these great souls is Albert Schweitzer, pianist and philosopher, who started to study medicine aged 30, and subsequently built a modest hospital on the bank of a river in the middle of Africa, where he then worked selflessly as a doctor for many years. At the early age of eighteen, this great physician and humanist was one of your role models - alongside Leonardo da Vinci and Einstein. And Gandhi too, who as a successful lawyer decided to live as a simple human being, and with gentle tenacity tried to move India away from growing consumerism and the slavery of human beings which accompanies it, also impressed you deeply. The life and works of these courageous humanists, whose free spirits were willing to make sacrifices, and who exercised the freedom to lead lives in which they recognised themselves, were an important and constant source of inspiration to you throughout your own life.

Genuine, sincere and natural people are close to your essential being. For you they are the "true" people. And you also love nature above all else. In it you found strength, inspiration and spiritual awareness time and again. Nature revealed so many secrets about life and death to you. In untouched nature you searched for stillness, and the experience of the being at one with creation. In painting and sculpture, "mother earth" was often the instigator of the artistic process, and not infrequently a fellow player. You dedicated the last sculpture you created, which is 4 metres high, to the earth goddess "Gaia". This sculpture, created at the end of 2014, is a homage to woman as the goddess of fertility, in both the worldly and spiritual sense.

You have always had a particular regard, admiration and appreciation for the female of the species. What you love about women are the softness of their bodies, their ability to grasp things intuitively, their spiritual strength, natural charm and art of seduction. Women have inspired you more than anything else. You have dedicated a large part of your artistic and surgical work to women. Famous prima ballerinas have served as models for your sculptures and photography. What you love about them is their delicate, perfectly trained and supple bodies, as well as the beauty and natural elegance of their movements. Ballet is one of your great passions, and at the same time the source of inspiration for your artistic creations.

It is not only the cultivation of your mind, but also of your body, which has always been of great importance to you. The motto: *Mens sana in corpore sano* — a healthy mind in a healthy body, speaks to you from the heart. You talk about sporting activity as "a necessity of life". Top-class sport

strengthened your resolve and confidence, gave you pleasure and safeguarded your equilibrium. Whilst you were a medical student, you spent as much time rowing and cycling as at the university. As an elite amateur cyclist, you competed in numerous national cycle races, and often won. And you were also successful at rowing regattas in your skiff.

You are an aesthete with exquisite taste for everything beautiful: people, landscapes, and objects. Even your palate wanted to be treated to something beautiful. Whether with delightful, artistically presented food or fine wines, particularly the rich, full-bodied Nebbiolo grape from Piedmont. And you were a fabulous dancer! When we were young, we often danced the whole night away. You were unsurpassed in rock 'n' roll. On New Year's Eve at home in 2015, you unexpectedly asked me to dance. Curiously, I understood that it would be our last dance...

I admired your achievements as a surgeon. You completed your medical studies in record time, and after having, for several years, completed surgical training in different fields of surgery, you first specialised in hand surgery, and subsequently also in plastic, reconstructive and aesthetic surgery (FRCR title). After an 8-month Fellowship with the leading cosmetic surgeons at that time in the USA, Mexico and Brazil, you moved with me to Geneva, to open an Aesthetic Surgery practice there. This medical practice, performed with passion and motivated by empathy, was to permit you also to discover and appreciate your own inner beauty. It didn't take long for you to make your name in the field of Cosmetic Surgery. A couple of years later, you opened your own private Clinic for Aesthetic Surgery in Geneva, and a Centre for Aesthetic Medicine. Your great talent for the craft of surgery, exemplary skills coupled with a highly developed sense of beauty and harmony — this combination raised you to become one of the world's leading specialists in cosmetic surgery, bringing you male and female patients from throughout the world, including famous personalities and stars from show business. Your constant striving to overcome limitations and achieve pioneering work drove you to perform operations outside your clinic, for instance on the terrace of a luxury villa on Lake Geneva, on a yacht in calm waters, in Geneva's "Conservatoire de Musique", on a glacier near the Matterhorn, in the penthouse of a rich lady and finally beneath the peak of Switzerland's highest mountain, the "Dufourspitze," at an altitude of 4,650 m. All these operations (except the last one) were broadcast on television. These surgical "performances" were prepared by yourself and your team in minute detail for weeks beforehand. You got scientific support from the highly regarded German surgeon Dr Julius Hackethal (1921 - 1997) and from specialists in high-altitude medicine. At the end of 2008, you closed your Clinic for Aesthetic Surgery. This enabled you to fulfil your dream of dedicating yourself fully and completely to your artistic works.

Despite all the happiness and opportunities which life offered you, you also had to battle major upheavals and challenges. After your Clinic closed, you experienced your first life crisis. Numerous injustices and tough strokes of fate, as well as the absence of real challenges, which you had experienced daily as a top surgeon, kept bringing you to the edge of despair in subsequent years. In one of your numerous notebooks, you write "Since 3rd March 2011 my life has become a perpetual road to calvary. There is no comfort, no respite from my inexpressible emotional pain, even tears provide only temporary relief." But you were to be tested even more severely by fate. Because of a serious injury to the sciatic nerve which you suffered in 2012, you had to battle almost ceaseless severe pain in your right leg and foot, which no drugs seemed to alleviate. This immense suffering took away from you your profession, your sport and your music-making. You could only carry on with your beloved art with the greatest effort, and thanks to your iron will. This gruelling condition of hopelessness pulled you into a deep depression. You still fought every day like a lion, because despite all the misfortune that befell you, you loved and cherished life. Of course, you still had one important task to accomplish. I know that this task consisted of helping as many people to experience pleasure and happiness through your artistic work, as you had done as a cosmetic surgeon.

You have sought to make people happy your whole life. With your last ounce of strength, you compiled the incredibly rich material for the publication of two books, and in the meantime you kept on painting and even created — besides other sculptures — the 4 m high sculpture you dedicated to Gaia, the earth Goddess. Your last pictures were painted on 29th December 2015 in the mountains of Piedmont. They reveal a mysterious intensity

— a last blossoming of the creative power which worked through you for your whole life.

You did in fact want to succumb to the adventure of India again, a country where the power of the spirit most seems to resist that of the material world, and which changes everyone who sets foot in it, because there one mysteriously feels at one with the whole of creation. In India you wanted to let your spirit soar again, and pursue the quest for the meaning and significance of your life. But fate decided otherwise. Perhaps it is pointless in any case, to seek for something in the world which one hasn't yet found inside oneself. . .

As a result of a cardiac arrest which you suffered on 13th January 2016 in your beloved Italy, to the present day you have not awoken from your coma. But during all these months of the apparent absence of your conscious self, you have been more spiritually awake than ever, and have probably had the most profound and healing experiences of your life. The messages you have sent to me through the two mediums Mary and Peter are testimony to this. You gave me to understand that even in a body which for the most part lay there motionless, "there is still a lot of life". It is a comfort for me to know that you are happy, free and at peace with yourself, and that you are surrounded by the vibrancy of all-encompassing love, in which you feel yourself to be accepted and profoundly understood. "Peace and contentment with life as it is, is simply unimaginable," is a quote from the mediums' message on 8th October 2016. In the light of eternity which envelops you, and which has transformed me too, your soul has purified itself. You have reviewed your life, and in doing so have come to understand the true meaning of your destiny here on earth. You have become deeply aware that the most important thing in the life of any human being is all-encompassing selfless love. This love, which lasts for all eternity, allows us to recognise what is true, good and beautiful, and permits us to forgive and let go of duality. By recognising the perfection in God's creation, and thanks to the unconditional love bestowed on you by the spiritual realm, you have been able to heal your suffering.

After all, I know that I too have been able to experience healing and the sense of becoming whole through your suffering. For this "School of Love" I am grateful to you. The words of Robert Schwartz, which remind me of the entry in your diary referred to above, speak to both of us from the heart: "We are here to remember love, and to express it and make it real on a physical plane. It is this experience which the soul strives for." (In: Every soul plans its journey, p. 277).

Urs, thank you for your love. It is the "indescribable sweetness which exists in everything that lives."

With gratitude, love and spiritual bond,

Romy (Your companion for part of your journey)

Pecetto-Torinese, 5.12.2016

Postscript:

My husband died in Italy — in my presence — on February 10th 2017 at 18.40 pm. By letting me participate in this most crucial moment in anyone's life — his death, he bestowed on me the greatest gift a human being can receive.