

## Masako Tamura

I was surprised to suddenly see a photograph of Dr. Robert Butler several months ago, while flipping through the pages of a monthly magazine published by Costco, a warehouse/wholesale type members-only store. It was an article featuring his newly published book, “The Longevity Prescription: The 8 Proven Keys to a Long, Healthy Life.” Typically books sold at Costco are bestsellers, novels made into movies, or cookbooks by famous chefs who have their own TV shows. So it was no exaggeration to say I was surprised and puzzled to find Dr. Butler among those pages. In the field of gerontology, Dr. Butler’s name is commonplace, and I wondered if he was now somehow reaching out to the general public through the mainstream of Costco consumerism.

After I purchased the new book, I was greatly surprised to see the title he had chosen for himself. Dr. Butler holds many prestigious titles including “Pulitzer Prize Winner”, “Professor at Columbia University”, and “Adviser to the WHO.” Instead, the title listed under his name was “President and CEO of the International Longevity Center –USA.”

I learned of Dr. Butler’s name as an author of textbooks when I was pursuing my Master’s degree at Columbia University’s School of Social Work.

A former MBA student at that time, Mr. Shintaro Nakamura (who was on leave from the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare) shared with me that a foundation called the “The International Leadership Center on Longevity and Society” (named ILC at that time) had been created in Tokyo. My concentration for my Master’s degree was “Aging,” and I wanted to learn more about the work of ILC, as most of the other organizations I had heard of in Japan were service oriented. During one of my breaks I visited the Japan Office and the former president of ILC-Japan, Dr. Hideo Ibe, mentioned Dr. Butler. He explained that Dr. Butler had founded ILC in New York City and had also created institutions for research outside the US, as aging is a global issue. I was impressed with Dr. Butler’s foresight and scope of thinking internationally and creating something that was uniting the world together in the field of gerontology.

After completing my Master’s degree,

I was working at the Japanese External Trade Organization in New York. I had the opportunity to work with ILC-Japan and often heard Dr. Butler’s name being mentioned. After moving to the West Coast in 1997, I was fortunate to participate as a volunteer interpreter at a journalist-oriented educational project planned by the ILC’s of Japan and USA. It was there that I was blessed with the opportunity to meet Dr. Butler! Though there were only three participating countries (Japan, the US, and France) Dr. Butler stood out like a larger-than-life rock star to those of us who knew of his contributions to the field.

The Introduction of his newly published book (2010) states, “The aim of this book, is twofold: to use the accumulated knowledge, research, and resources of the International Longevity Center (ILC) in order to offer you the best strategies to live long and to live well.” The book then goes on to state that the ILC has continually expanded and now currently includes 12 member countries; that the ILC alliance is continually active even on an international level; that it has been certified as a United Nations NGO;

and that the ILC has exhibited leadership at the World Assembly on Ageing. Because of Dr. Butler’s dedication and life-long commitment to the organization, the ILC has already achieved world-level recognition and an international following.

I read the unexpectedly sad news of Dr. Butler’s death in the obituary column of my local newspaper, The Seattle Times. He had passed away on July 4th, a holiday known as Independence Day in America. The fact that Dr. Butler’s passing fell on a day that Americans celebrate independence both as individuals and as a country seems very appropriate. When the fireworks brightly light up the sky every year on July 4th, I will think of Dr. Butler in great appreciation for all the contributions he has made to the societies of the world.

To give a brief overview of the book, “The Longevity Prescription: The 8 Proven Keys to a Long, Healthy Life” Dr. Butler explains the 8 points as follows:

1. Maintain Mental Vitality
2. Nurture Your Relationships

3. Seek Essential Sleep
4. Set Stress Aside
5. Connect with Your Community
6. Live the Active Life
7. Eat Your way to Health
8. Practice Prevention

The beginning of each chapter lays out the research that verifies the importance of each major point. Each chapter also includes a set of key questions designed to stimulate self-examination. Dr. Butler provides strategies and recommendations on how the reader may be able to accomplish these goals. I thought this was an extremely effective method for promoting self-awareness and change. For example, some of the recommendations are “turn off the TV and read a book for an hour every day,” “bookmark a website you like and check it every day,” and “re-read a favorite book or read a book written by an author who is new to you.”

By interpreting Dr. Butler’s various recommendations as “prescriptions,” a reader cannot stop thinking about ways to improve one’s life. For instance, everyone has experienced thinking, “I should exercise more!” However, that

type of general statement can prove to be paralyzing and overwhelming and not generate any results. Dr. Butler’s advice offers specifics on how to initiate change. Regarding exercise, one of his prescriptions states, “Don’t use the elevator, take the stairs.” His recommendations are simple and easy to try. (In fairness this prescription was recommended by Mr. Shigeo Morioka, President of ILC Japan. Dr. Butler thought this was such a great idea that he ended up using the stairs at every opportunity).

In the Costco Magazine article, Dr. Butler mentioned that he remained close to his four daughters and six grandchildren, and that he was happily in a relationship. Several years ago, through the Columbia University School of Social Work Alumni Magazine, I had read about the death of Dr. Butler’s wife, Dr. Myrna Lewis. Dr. Lewis was Dr. Butler’s loving spouse as well as his partner professionally. Reading more recently the Costco Magazine article, I am inspired by not only how he had overcome this insurmountable loss, but also by his ability to deepen ties with his family and form new meaningful relationships. Dr. Butler practiced what he preached- he followed his own

“prescriptions” for living.

As I read the book, I began to see why Dr. Butler wrote this book for the general public. If we follow Dr. Butler’s “prescriptions,” I think that each of us would be able to live vibrantly and with longevity. By applying his wise and practical advice in everyday living, a “prescription revolution” could transform and improve society.

The Longevity Prescription is a book that offers plenty of helpful guidance in an engaging manner for people living ordinary lives in today’s world. While providing a better understanding of

longevity and its effect upon the quality of life, Dr. Butler’s book also gives the reader courage and a boost of energy to take that first step towards a better life.

On the first page, Dr. Butler dedicates his book to the “Families of America.” With his global awareness and influence, a more appropriate dedication perhaps may have been to the “Families of the World.” It is my hope that his lovingly written final work, complete with its prescriptions for leading long and healthy lives, will one day be embraced and utilized by all people around the world.

(writer currently resides in Seattle)

