

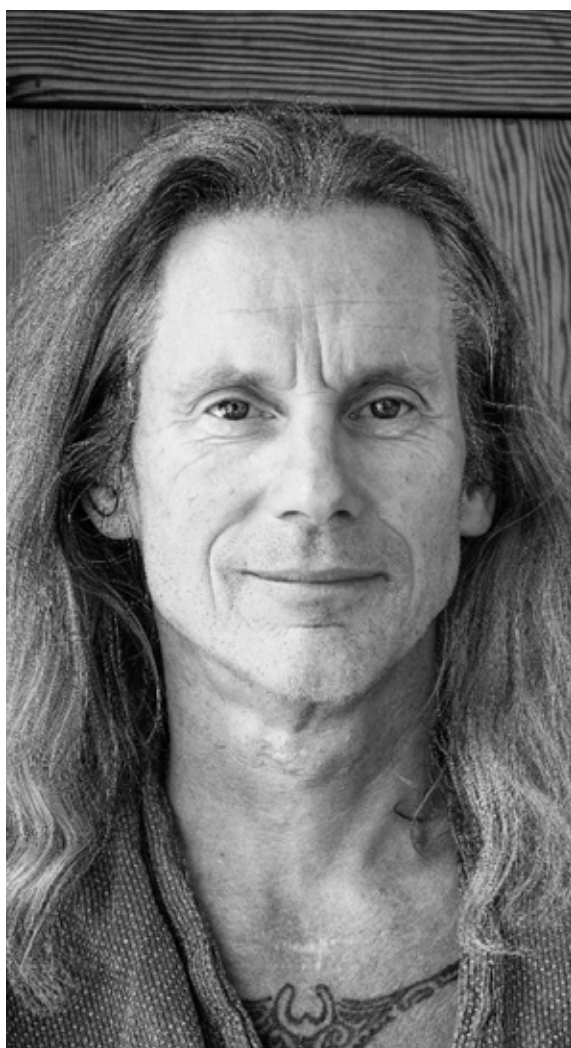
Grace and Power: In Memory of Charles 'Chip' Chace

Abstract

This article is an obituary for the East Asian medicine practitioner, author and teacher Charles 'Chip' Chace.

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Credit: Monika Chace Photography

The East Asian medical world lost one of its most extraordinary teachers and practitioners when Charles 'Chip' Chace passed away on 3rd November

2018 due to pancreatic cancer. Chip lived a well-considered and coherent life. Regardless of whether he was rope soloing a rock climbing route, sharing his knowledge and love for the traditions of East Asian medicine, or just sitting quietly, he always fully expressed his being. His strong centre allowed him to be a generous and caring soul, someone who could be both self-effacing and yet memorable. His presence and thoughtful interactions have left a profound impression on everyone who had the good fortune to come into his sphere. His motto, 'Grace and Power', was an apt description of who he was.

We had the honour and joy of knowing and working with Chip for many years. His mental fortitude and ability to be fully committed to whatever he was doing was a wonder. From the outside he had three main interests, but in fact he tied them together so closely that they made a steady three-legged stool that served as a platform for his life.

He had an intense love of the wild, which expressed itself in his connection to rock climbing, a passion that started in his mid-teens and continued throughout his life. Besides having climbed all over the world, he spent a few weeks almost every year in solitude among the peaks of the Wind River Mountain range in Wyoming. The years he missed were because he was doing things like long solo trips to very isolated locations, such as Mt. Asgard on Baffin Island in Canada. As amazing as this was, the 'Chip twist' is that he had a coterie of climbing friends that he had climbed with since the late 70's, and who continued to be his *compadres* right up to the end. In fact three of them were by his side when he died. These friends, themselves well-known fixtures of the Boulder rock-climbing scene, all spoke about Chip's intensity, his pursuit of

excellence, and his utter lack of any interest in celebrity. *Fine Jade, the Sound of One Hand Thrashing* and *Ziji* (the pinyin for 'self' in Chinese) were some of the climbing routes that Chip pioneered. The names of these and other routes speak of Chip's innate ability to stay connected at once to climbing, East Asian medicine, meditation practice and his own quirky sense of humour.

He was rigorous without the slightest rigidity, self-assured yet humble, and both very determined and very funny.

Chip was a kind and patient teacher on the rock wall, as well as in the classroom. He was free with input to less experienced climbers and was happy to offer suggestions when needed. He had a very specific way of taping his hands for crack climbing to protect the skin and allow for the best use of the special techniques unique to that discipline. He often brought his meditative practice directly onto the rock, spending moments before, during and after climbs in quiet contemplation of the task at hand. Yet, he could also be a fiery competitor while climbing, although most often he was in competition only with himself.

He had an almost equally long and intense relationship with East Asian philosophy, Buddhism and meditation. This expressed itself not only in a daily practice, but in multiple long retreats and a sense that all of his time in the wild was a way of obtaining the same experience. This interest in East Asia took him to study the medicine. He saved up by working in the oil fields of Wyoming and went to the New England School of Acupuncture in the early 1980's. After finishing these studies, he returned to Boulder where he had a very successful practice until his death. We have had the opportunity to see quite a few of his patients who moved to Seattle. Chip had not only been extremely helpful to these people, but had made deep and lasting connections with them.

By force of will and dedication, Chip learned to read Chinese pretty much on his own, which as many people reading this will realise, is an impressive feat. In addition to his own voluminous translation work that has made a major impact in the field of East Asian medicine, he was warmly welcomed at advanced seminars on such topics as medieval Daoism and Tang poetry. With his friend Antje Richter, a professor at Colorado University, he recently published a long article in a prestigious Sinological journal.

While the above were the three legs of the stool of Chip's life, the seat that made it all solid was his relationship with Monika, his wife of more than 30 years. Originally they met around rock climbing, but their intimate connection went far beyond shared

interests and attraction, to become something special. They shared office spaces for much of their married life — that they did it successfully and stayed together is all anyone needs to know about the strength of their bond. Both intensely private people, they found refuge and true love in each other's company.

Our personal connection with Chip revolved primarily around our shared interest in East Asian medicine in general and the role of palpation specifically. We spent hundreds of hours together discussing these topics and teaching together. Chip was a generous and demanding friend and teacher. He was always ready to encourage someone by referring to how 'juicy' a particular topic was, yet all who worked with him had to be ready for his special way of saying 'Really?' to call out some sloppy thinking or a half-baked idea. He was rigorous without the slightest rigidity, self-assured yet humble, and both very determined and very funny. He always took seriously whatever he was working on or whoever he was working with, yet never took himself seriously.

His ability to integrate all these facets into one being was what stood out the clearest to us. To most people, the fine and subtle approaches to using the hands in forms of Japanese acupuncture like *Toyo Hari* [where many of the practitioners wear gloves whenever not seeing patients in order to protect their hands] would be diametrically opposed to rock climbing, where fingers are jammed into cracks and twisted tight [and therefore damaged] to provide a hold. Not to Chip. Not only did he demonstrate clearly that rough and frankly disfigured hands could be capable of the subtlest of sensitivity, but he would practice some of the hand positions associated with those types of acupuncture while putting his fingers in the cracks used for rock climbing. Those who referred to his approach to acupuncture as 'Chip-ohari' were on the right track.

We mentioned above that Chip had climbing friends who went back decades. One of them summed up Chip succinctly by saying that 'He was the most intense laid-back dude you'll ever meet.' His own epitaph says the same thing in a slightly different way:

He arrived and departed as an empty vessel.

Pursued many summits in between, attaining some while others remained elusive

But found grace in his life and death.

Dan Bensky and Craig Mitchell were friends of Chip Chace.