

Avengers assemble to honour terminally ill Catholic

When Catholic writer and editor Stratford Caldecott entered the final stages of cancer, his daughter Sophie sprang into action. She launched a Twitter campaign in an attempt to bring her father one last moment of joy.

"The doctors now say that dad is into the final stages of the disease, the part where your bones fracture under the slightest impact, and swelling around vital organs starts to happen for no reason. They say that we only have around 12 weeks left," Sophie wrote on May 12 on her blog.

Using the Twitter hashtag #CapForStrat, Sophie sought to surprise her father. "CapForStrat" is an abbreviation of the slogan "Captain America for Stratford Caldecott," because Sophie wanted her dad to have a chance to see the new Captain America movie, *The Winter Soldier*.

Diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2011, Stratford ("Strat" for short) was now



fighting his final battle. Last year, his family had thrown him a superhero-themed 60th birthday party. Since childhood, he has always enjoyed the messages of hope and courage, the stories of good defeating evil, found in the best comic books. But this year Strat was too sick to go with them to see the new Captain America movie in the theatre.

If you have seen the movie, you know what spectacularly good fun it is. That's why the family, knowing how much Strat would love it, planned to show him the DVD version when it would be released in August.

But the latest news from the doctors overshadowed that plan. In response, Sophie asked people to use Twitter to request from Marvel Studios



Chris Evans, an actor who plays Captain America, a Marvel Comics superhero, shows his support for Stratford Caldecott, a Catholic diagnosed with terminal cancer.

a special moment for her dying dad. Her hope was that she could arrange for an advance private screening for him.

Using her Twitter hashtag, Sophie targeted her appeal to the actors who play the Marvel superheroes in the *Avengers* movies and the *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* television program. Her hope was these famous actors might tweet selfies using her hashtag. If they

could publically support her request, then perhaps Marvel would be unable to ignore her.

The response was overwhelming. Within hours, the actors had tweeted pictures of themselves holding up signs with the names of their superhero characters, declaring their support for "CapForStrat." (Some of the actors are working on the new *Avengers* movie, *Age of Ultron*, which

is codenamed *After Party*, and you can see that mysterious logo at the top of the signs they are holding up in their photos.)

Sophie was humbled and awed. But she quickly shunned the spotlight and redirected attention to the problem of prostate cancer. Blood tests do not always catch it in time. Sadly, her father became aware of this fact too late. Sophie's hope is to spare others the painful lesson, by raising awareness. Hopefully more awareness will save lives.

Sophie now has Twitter photographs from real-life superheroes showing love and support. Her plan is to print them all out so that they can surround her dad during his final ordeal.

Stratford Caldecott has lived a beautiful and extraordinary life. He converted to Catholicism in 1980 and his wife Leonie followed soon after. He studied Philosophy and Psychology at Oxford University as an undergraduate. He then went on to work as an editor for a number of book publishers.

He himself has written a

number of fascinating books that show a brilliant mind at work. Although he never did a theology degree at university, he had time to explore the subject deeply because of his work for the theological book publisher T&T Clark and for the journal *Communio*. Joseph Ratzinger, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Henri de Lubac founded that journal in the 1970s; Strat served on the editorial board of the U.S. edition.

Strat wrote a superb book on the philosophical and theological meaning of the work of J.R.R. Tolkien. Originally titled *Secret Fire*, the tome has been expanded and reissued as *The Power of the Ring*. He has also written deeply meditative works on scripture and the sacraments, *All Things Made New* and *The Seven Sacraments*. A noted teacher and public speaker, Strat also reflected profoundly on the cause of liberal arts education in two excellent books, *Beauty for Truth's Sake* and *Beauty in the Word*.

I love all these books, but my favorite is *The Radiance*. See STRAT – Page 16

Letters to the Editor

Strat gifts new book

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of Being, which came out last year. In it, Strat takes up all my favorite themes in cosmology and philosophy. He unites modern science with theology in a dazzling tour-de-force, covering everything from quantum field theory to the mystery of Islam.

Much to my surprise, although fighting cancer, Strat has still been able to give us another gift this year, a new book called *Not As the World Gives: The Way of Creative Justice*. While *The Radiance of Being* contemplates the nature of the entire universe, this book focuses on the meaning of human nature in

its two genders.

Further, the book demonstrates how "Catholic social doctrine" cannot be treated as a separate subject that fragments into a political ideology. Rather, it must be part of a wider spiritual vision of true humanism, a humanism open to the divine.

Marvel has granted Strat and his family the gift of a special private screening, thanks to the creative Twitter campaign Sophie started. But Strat himself now gives us a truly inspiring meditation on Pope Francis' call for "creative justice."

You don't want to miss this book. It's even better than the movie. □