

# *Epiphany*

Forest Gump, in the movie with the same name and starring Tom Hanks, was right - *Life is like a box of chocolates*. Life is full of pleasant little surprises. Sometimes, but not often, a lucid thought would slip into my consciousness, bringing insight and clarity of thought. In those brief moments, the grand design of the universe and the purpose for my very existence would be revealed. This past week I had two such revelations, *Epiphanies* if you will.

## The Problem

As long as I can remember, I could never sit cross-legged on the floor for more than a few seconds. The best that I could do was to wrap my arms around my legs and hug them tightly against my chest. I could hold this position for only a few minutes before my body's defensive mechanisms would kick in and forced me to change position under the threat of severe bodily pain and ligament damage. Giving in to the pain, I would loosen my grip while losing my balance and keel over onto my back or side. One of the main reasons for this problem was my lack of flexibility. I do not have a full range of extended motion or flexibility at the joint that connects my right thigh to my torso. This limited flexibility was probably caused by a childhood injury.

For years now I have been diligently stretching my muscles and ligaments in order to become more flexible and limber. My goal was to be able to sit cross-legged on the floor and to eventually be able to assume the lotus position. I have been at this for over ten years now. It has been a long, painful and arduous process.

One day last week as I was doing my stretching exercises, I asked myself the same question I always ask when I am reaching my threshold of pain - *where or how did I get the injury?* After much pain and

thoughtful reflection, the answer suddenly occurred to me - I had probably injured it falling down the stairs when I was young.

### The Staircase

My family moved to Hong Kong when I was very young. It was still a British colony then. We lived on the top floor of a 3 or 4-story building on top of a big hill in Shatin. At that time Shatin was a small village by the mouth of a river that flowed into the Pacific Ocean.

I remember we had to climb a long flight of stairs from the floor below to reach our home on the top floor. I also remembered how all my other family members were able to climb those stairs with ease - left foot on the first step then the right foot on the second step, and so on and so forth. Boy was I impressed! They could actually keep their balance while climbing up the stairs. But then almost anything will impress a two year old. Oh, did I tell you they could even walk down the stairs like that? Yep I thought, *when I grow up I wanted to be able to walk up and down those stairs, just like them.*

Now the distance between each of the individual steps in the staircase (the riser) was very steep. The problem was that my stubby little legs were too short to allow me to have one foot planted on the first step while placing the other foot firmly on the second step. This was especially a problem when I tried to climb down the stairs. My back foot would have to release its grip on the upper step before my forward foot could touch the lower step. I had to sort of hop down the stairs very carefully, one step at a time. To compound the problem, the step's trend (the base where you plant your foot) was not very deep. The distance between the edge of the step and the base of the next step was not very wide. With each hop down the stairs, my foot would land precariously close to the lower step's edge. One misstep and I was a goner. (To understand my plight, imagine yourself trying to climb down a long flight of stairs that are 6 inches deep and with a three feet drop between each step, and you will get an idea of the problems I was facing.) I could usually navigate the

first few steps before my luck would inevitably run out. Then with arms flapping wildly like a flightless bird trying to take flight, I would succumb to the laws of gravity and tumble head first down the stairs. After a few accidents like that, my mother would not let me near the stairs anymore without an older family member accompanying me. What a bummer.

So that was how I injured myself, by falling down the stairs. And then suddenly I had my *First Epiphany*.

### *The First Epiphany*

I have often told the story that the reason *I went to law school and became a lawyer was because my mother dropped me on my head when I was young*. But as you can see, I was quite capable of falling on my head without any outside assistance, thank you! Mom never dropped me on my head. As far as I can recall, Mom never dropped me at all. Poor Mom. All these years I have been unfairly and unjustly blaming her for my becoming the person that I am today. Through all these years my mother has suffered in silence with dignity and grace. Mom never complained nor tried to correct my misperception. Now it turns out the major influence on my life was a set of stairs. Boy, what a mess! I think I better apologize to Mom soon.

### *The Second Epiphany*

A few days later as I was doing my stretching exercises, the pain become more and more intense as I was working on stretching the same troublesome ligaments. Through my veil of pain I suddenly had to ask myself the obvious question - *Why didn't I just grab the stupid hand-railing next to the stairs so I could spare myself all these years of pain and suffering?* And that was when the *Second Epiphany* hit me – “My arms were too short.”