

"A LITTLE PAIN NEVER HURT ANYBODY"

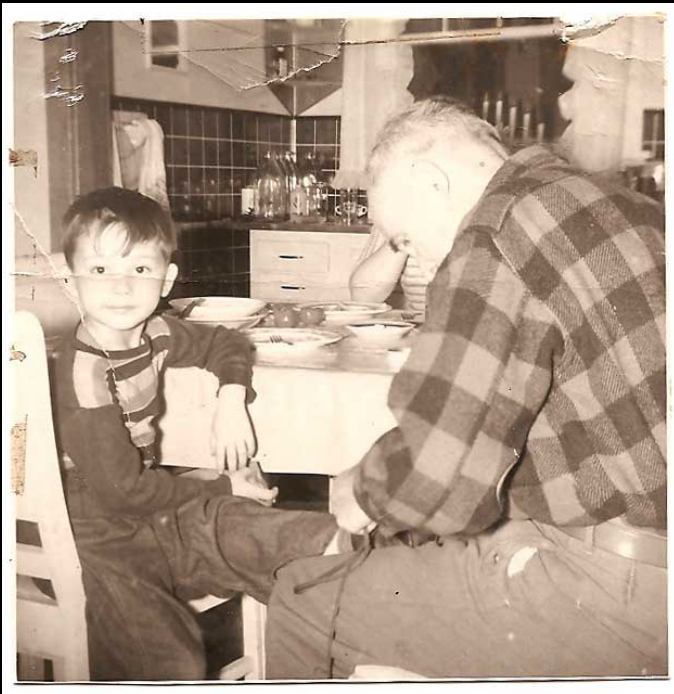
Written by Gary Cifra Date: September 9th, 2012



[Warning: The content of this article and images contained within are related to pain, and may not be suitable to the faint of heart.]

I guess when I first started using the phrase "a little pain never hurt anybody", what I meant was: "quit whining!". Pain is a message being sent from a part of your body to your brain. If the message does not include broken bones or damaged ligaments or muscles, then move on! The "message" will go away.

However, there are certain types of pain that greatly bely this statement. I've often been told I have a bigmouth. Well, now I can shoot my mouth off into a microphone and my DRAGON software will turn it into text on my computer. So here goes:



My grandfather came to America around 1903 at the age of 16. After my parents, he was the first person I got to know. He was my next-door neighbor throughout my childhood and teenage years. As a youth I was told he came from Czechoslovakia, but there was no such country until 1918, after the First World War. He came from a small village called Tichy Potok that had no access to doctors, Band-Aids, iodine and so forth. If you broke your arm, you stuck it between two tree branches and bent it back into shape, then favored your other hand for the next two days. "Pap" was known to pull his teeth with pliers, and I actually saw him operating on a growth on his wrist with a penknife. He poured kerosene on it

afterwards as a disinfectant. He operated on our pet dog Melody, who had a growth under her skin. "Pap" stuffed Melody's head into a boot, and again with his penknife, cut the tumor out and disinfected it with turpentine. Melody scurried away in fear from Pap for the next few weeks until she recovered from her "surgery".

As an iron worker and as a rock climber I learned to shake off minor injuries and get back to work. Some cultures develop medicine and poultices and so on. In the Cifra family, we learned to suck it up and move on. I was schooled by "Pap"'s stoicism and fortitude. All my life I have lived by the wise and simple adage, "**a little pain never hurt anybody**". But there were some exceptional incidents when I experienced extreme pain that I was unprepared for:



Not me...but this kid is making the same face that I did when I got stung.

1952: At around age 2 or 3, I was sitting in my front yard looking across the lawn at my grandparents' two-story house. I was just sitting there when WHAM! My little finger experienced something that I had never even dreamed of before. At birth I had minimal foreskin and never received a circumcision so I missed that experience. But this one was a doozy, and I have a vivid memory of what I was looking at when I noticed the sensation of the bee sting (my grandparents' house).

1975: My friend Keith and I had hiked six or seven hours back into the Palisades glacier. It was so cold that night in the tent that I had to sit up several times at night and pound on my legs to get the blood flowing. Accompanying this article is an image of me ice-climbing on that very day in 1975. No ropes. Just crampons and an ice ax. This is not one of my favorite types of climbing. It's tedious, precarious and cold. By the time we came down and were sitting on a boulder at the base of the ridge where we started to climb, the sun was out and I took my boots off and let the sun bring my veins back to life. My understanding of this is that in severe cold weather the body shrinks back blood from its extremities in order to protect the heart and lungs - the essential core organs needed to keep you alive. Blood had been taken from my legs and feet for the last several hours. When the blood is gone for a significant time, the veins collapse and flatten. When your body warms up and your circulation starts again, miles of veins rip themselves open to allow blood to flow, and man does it feel like it! I was actually screaming when this was happening. My toes were numb for several months after this. Since there was no tissue damage, I did not have frostbite.



Three hours after this photo was taken, I was laying in the sun screaming, as the blood started to enter back into my veins.



"Pour me a stiff scotch, stat!
I'm ready to start the incision..."

1976: For some reason I had decided to start wearing my Levi's without shorts. This eventually led to an infection and I was talked into having a circumcision by a doctor. Interestingly at the time, I was working with a guy who had a similar experience and lost half the head of his penis. My doctor assured me this would not happen in my case. When I moved into the surgery room they extended my right arm out and attached something to it, then they put a mask over my face and asked me to count backwards from 10. Next thing I know, I am completely and fully awake and conscious, and

trying to wiggle my fingers and yell out. Even though I was as awake as I had ever been or could be, my body was under the influence of powerful muscle relaxers and I could do neither. I'd woken up right at the exact moment when the doctor started to make his incision on my penis. I don't know how long I was awake, looking back. I'd guess 10 to 20 seconds but it felt like a very, very long time. I had once heard of a man who had endured 40 lashes during a barbaric Sharia flogging. He described it as "excruciating and unbearable". My experience on the operating table could be described the same way. Being subjected to that incision while fully conscious was excruciating and had to stop instantly. It was unbearable. Do yourself a favor and avoid countries with Sharia law...and always wear your Levi's with undershorts!



Pretty disgusting, isn't it?

1989: I was working as an iron worker and had learned that a group called Last Chance for Animals (LCA) had found and photographed a couple of 55 gallon drums filled with dead cats behind the experimental lab at UCLA. When they asked what was the goal of this research, LCA was told that it was just "Basic Research" - in other words, whatever a scientist can think of to test, they would be granted money to do this type of research. At one of LCA's demonstrations they

showed a photo of a dog in a cage holding out his broken leg. The scientists broke the dog's leg and had left it there untreated. At the demonstration there was a guy in a suit

looking at this photo. I went over to him and said something like "pretty disgusting, isn't it?". He replied: "how else would you come up with a paradigm for stress?". I went back to LCA's booth and they told me the guy I had been speaking to was a well-known vivisectionist.

I got to know the LCA group and I liked what they were saying. They oppose animal research because its' premise is fraudulent. Animal research cannot be correlated to humans. For example, aspirin helps humans with headaches but can kill a cat; strychnine is highly toxic to humans but acts like a vitamin for sheep. (I'll be talking about this more in depth in an upcoming blog.)



Dog with leg broken for research - is this a "paradigm for stress"?

About 30 of us LCA volunteers went to UCLA's research offices and demanded to see one of their directors. Of course they refused. We all sat in the lobby waiting room. The press and media were in the hallway going back and forth negotiating. The media was asked to leave and the police came to us and said that if we didn't leave they were going to force us out at this time. We

were prepared for this. I was sitting way in the back. Chris De Rose, our leader, was in the front when the cops came to him and asked him to get up. He refused. Next thing I knew Chris' arms and legs were flailing through the air and he was screaming as they dragged him out. I thought maybe because some of the media stayed, Chris was putting on a show for them. As they started to take us out one at a time, some of the little old ladies were taken out without much hassle, whereas some of the younger men went out screaming. When they got to me, one of the last protesters, they asked "are you going to walk?". They wanted to know if I was ready to leave. I responded negatively, and I heard one of the cops say, "let's put a little pain on him"...the next thing I knew, I was hearing screaming. I didn't know where it came from but I was walking. There was a guy next to me holding a stun gun device hitting my thigh repeatedly but all I could feel was my wrist being bent back by the two cops. That's why I was screaming. It felt like that my wrists would snap into horrible compound fractures. It was a new kind of pain. It was as scary as it was painful. I later learned that one of the young girls with us who underwent this treatment had her wrists broken. Also a young actress in a popular TV show of the time named Lara (Chris' girlfriend) was hit on her bare thighs with the zapper and which resulted in red marks all over.



They got me out of the building and headed towards a school bus with my other compatriots. Before getting on the bus one of the cops said, "Put him in a squad car, he fought". Really? I fought? I didn't fight him. I just got up and did what they told me to do. Later they released us all and the researchers went back to their lucrative research shenanigans.

Was it worth it? Well, we had a great front page photo in the Los Angeles Herald Examiner with LCA activist Diane Beam being

carried out of the UCLA research building. I think we decided that civil disobedience does not go over well with the public. I guess we didn't change a lot, but I wouldn't hesitate to do it again if I thought it would help. Chris De Rose, Diane Beam, and the girl who got her wrists broken and myself – we did it for justice and for the animals.

I haven't mentioned emotional pain because that always seems to be entwined with some sort of silliness. In 1996, 2005 and 2008 I lost three very, very dear friends – my dog Zero, my friend Christine Maggiore's 3 year old daughter Eliza Jane, and then afterwards Christine herself. Loss is a very different kind of pain than the physical sort. Those losses will always stay with me...the grief subsides, but never does go away.