

A lesson in pain

Petra Gimbad, originally published 11 January 2007 in [The Sun](#)

In Chinese face-reading, there are five major features; I do not recall them. What I do remember: If all major features are unlucky, the person concerned will be incredibly lucky. Somehow, lots of un-luck has the ability to transform into great luck.

I do not know what the foundation for this philosophy is. At a gut level, however, it makes a lot of sense. Not luck in a superficial sense - but the sort that provides opportunity for growth and greater wisdom.

My mother encouraged the reading of Buddhist philosophy in our Catholic home; we are still great fans of Kahlil Gibran. I read but could never comprehend, that pain accompanies growth. "Why should it?" I was confused. "Surely, if one can understand, it is sufficient?"

Then, I did not know that some of the deepest lessons we learn as human beings involve the experience of pain.

University came, I left the nest, life happened. Understanding at a mental level, I discovered, was different from the penetrating understanding that can only come with experience.

For instance: you can call loss of a loved one through death, sad - but until you have felt the sort of raging sadness that threatens to rip your heart apart, you will not comprehend what grief truly means.

You will be helpless and unable to comfort the person who grieves in front of you because you will not understand.

Experience is truly a great teacher. Yet, we shrink from pain. This might be wise.

A middle-aged woman once told me that unless you have encountered a flasher or been at least sexually harassed, you did not have a Malaysian female childhood.

During a recent conversation with friends, all of us discovered that we have all encountered sexual violation to various degrees - from indecent touching to rape. I was reminded of what that woman said.

My girlfriends and I fear walking the streets at night, getting into cabs alone, men in public places, ex-boyfriends in private places. Still, we choose to live life by choosing again and again the risk of getting hurt.

Someone explained that broken bones, once healed, are stronger than before. I am guessing this applies to bones which heal correctly. Whether this happy outcome occurs is largely the responsibility of its owner.

Bad experiences can break or make a person. People who have triumphed, had fears to face and struggled through anyway. There really is no way to deal with what life throws at you other than to walk through. Running away just delays learning whatever it is that life wants to teach you.

Looking at my friends, I realise that our experiences did not break us. Perhaps we have some scars to show for it. Some of us have yet to resolve what occurred. Others never will.

Most of my close friends chose to make something of their pain by creating art, educating others, helping other women who have gone through the same. One of them exposed a relative for what he had done in order to protect her sister. She now speaks freely of her rape and is studying criminal law to advocate for others.

We try to remember that people who victimise others were once victims themselves. We hold them accountable for their actions, yes - but we must not forget injustice, too, has happened to them in the past.

Whatever we weathered in the past has made us better artists, advocates, psychologists and lawyers. Our lives have been made the richer for it, even if the choices we had to make were not easy.

This sounds clichéd: Your trials shape you. Those with experience and who can say this with conviction know that trials shape the strong to be more than what they thought they were capable of.

Bad luck, therefore, can be turned into good luck - if you so choose.

Petra has great hopes for 2007. Comments: feedback@thesundaily.com