



Taiji

by Sharon Boyes

Have you ever wondered what Caine did during those fifteen years? Where he was, who he met, what stories exist? Here is perhaps one story ... it takes place in a hospital in a large Midwestern city ... beginning sometime in the fall of 1991:

There I was, sitting in the physical therapy center, trying to lift the weight with my right leg. As I grimaced in pain, concentrating and struggling to do another repetition, a voice startled me. I turned and saw a man with graying longish hair in a brown shirt covered by a white lab coat ...

He softly repeated his question, "May I help you?"

Huh? I thought, weightlifting is a rather solitary task ... I could hardly imagine what he could do to help me. I'd been struggling every day for the past three weeks with the damn weight machines. I was trying to rehabilitate a knee that had been shattered into a dozen pieces. Each exercise was a strain and an effort, and the pain resonated up my leg and into my hip and back. What did he think he could do to help? This was the rehabilitation program prescribed by the best specialist I could find.

I guess I just looked at him rather dumbfounded, because he continued talking. "I did not mean to startle you, but I have noticed you during the past days. You are very determined. But also unhappy ... I feel your pain."

Oh great, an empath. Reminded me of one of my least-favorite Star Trek: The Next Generation episodes, when Troi "feels" everything. I stopped using the weight machine, turned toward him and responded with, "Yes, I'm in pain, what do you expect ... I'm trying to strengthen a joint which was completely destroyed. And I was trying to concentrate on doing these exercises right. I don't like being distracted, which is why I'm here at six in the morning."

"You are angry."

Great, not only an empath, but a social worker, too. I gave him the same stare I give my eleven-year-old when he asks for the impossible, the "get real" stare. It didn't work on this one, though. He just looked at me ... or perhaps through me or even into me.

"Let the anger flow through you like water through a sieve."

Okay ... now it sounds like cooking. At this point, I figured I might as well talk to the guy. After all, my leg muscles had already cooled off. "Why do you think I'm angry?" I asked him.

"Only you know the answer to that."

"No, I mean why did you think that I was angry when you walked over to me?" I prompted him, wanting a more concrete response. I waited for his answer. He made a sweeping open-handed gesture and said, "I ... felt that you were disturbed, that you were not at peace. Much distresses you. You are angry over what you think life has done to you."

"Not think, I know it. Life's been rough. I've had to deal with a lot. And being in a cast and unable to walk is the pits. I may never walk normally." I sounded despairing even to myself.

He waited a beat, and said, "You need ... to view your life with different eyes." He put a hand on my shoulder and said, "Perhaps ... you need to talk."

Something in me wanted to trust him, but I was still too raw. I didn't want to explain the string of events that had led me to this particular spot to a complete stranger. He noticed my hesitation, and said "Perhaps I ... could talk. And you could listen." I nodded. I was drawn to him in spite of my reluctance to tell him my



personal story.

"Do you know the parable of the man and the horse?"

I laughed, "You mean, I've got to see a man about a horse?"

"No, this is an old Chinese tale. I will tell it to you. There was an old farmer who had a son whom he loved more than anything. One day, their only horse ran away. While searching for him, the son found a wild horse. He brought the horse back to his father's house, and all the neighbors said 'how lucky'. The son tried to tame the wild horse, and fell from the horse and broke his leg, and all the neighbors said 'how unlucky'. Just after that, the emperor's soldiers came by and took all the healthy young men to become soldiers. The son was left behind because of his broken leg and while many of the neighbors' sons went off to war and died, the old man still had his son, and the neighbors all said 'how lucky'."

"And ..." I prompted.

He shrugged. "That is the story."

"But ... I don't understand."

"Events themselves are not lucky or unlucky. It is how you, yourself, choose to view them."

How did he know that it was a series of awful events in my life that had brought me to this moment in time? That one of my friends often commented that if I didn't have bad luck, I wouldn't have any luck at all. His story made me stop and think about those events. Perhaps they were only random events, neither horrible nor good ... I pondered this, lost in thought.

As I studied his face, he looked into my eyes, and said "You are beginning to understand the Way of Life. All things are both Yin and Yang at the same time, both lucky and unlucky and neither lucky nor unlucky. Once you truly understand this, the anger within you will begin to disappear. It will flow past you. Then your soul will begin to heal." I could tell by the expression in his eyes that this was a lesson his own life had taught him. Then he smiled, "But I will help you now to heal your body. We will start with 'Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain'. It will help you move easily without all this ... pain." He gestured at the weight equipment. And as he began to move gracefully, I stood up and tried to follow him ...

Months later, I walked through the park toward the lake. I looked up into the sky gradually turning blue, watching the rising sun. I tried to remember to stay in the present, to experience the "now," seeing the green grass, the trees as the buds had just started opening into new leaves, and smelling the newness of spring.

Once I reached the lakeside, I joined the group harmoniously moving through the Taiji form taught by our teacher. Although we were all doing the same basic form, we each had our own uniqueness, something our teacher encouraged. He wanted us to "feel" Taiji, to make it our own, to use it to free our spirit. I had been doing this with him for months now, and each day, each time, brought something new to the experience.

Almost six months had passed since he had found me while working as a volunteer in the hospital physical therapy clinic. He had pulled me out of my downward spiral of depression as surely as if it had been a physical rescue and not a mental one. His calm and serene approach to life was in everything that he said and did, and his teaching, mostly without words through Taiji, gave me hope that I could soon put my life together again.

But that morning, as much as I tried, I failed at staying in the present moment. I was distracted by more disturbing events in my life. It showed as my Taiji movements were ... well, let's be charitable and say that they didn't much resemble anyone else's.

I was lost in my own world of thought, trying to sort through a divorce, a death, a serious injury, the lack of any close family, a job that sucked the life out of me ... and the most immediate concern, a car accident. Sure enough, on top of everything else, my prized six-year-old sports car was now planted at the junk yard, a victim of insurance company pronouncements. Although it sure looked like it could be fixed to me, they had proclaimed it "totaled." I was frustrated by their unwillingness to listen to my opinion on how cheaply the car could be fixed. And now my "hobby car," a 1971 VW Bug, was my only mode of transportation. It was prone to fits and starts, whims and fancies; although I had tinkered with it for years, I still didn't trust it



to provide reliable transportation. The pittance from the insurance company sure wasn't going to buy a new car, so I figured I'd rather keep the Bug running than buy someone else's trouble in a used car lot ...

As my mind was racing along that path, the, "You seem distracted," startled me back to the present. I guess a lot of time had passed while I was lost in my reverie, as I was now the only student by the lake. Master Caine's gaze was both amused and inquiring.

"I'm sorry , I was just thinking ... um ... I didn't mean to ..."

As I stammered around trying to figure out what to say, he simply gestured with his open hand (almost a benediction) and said, "It is all right, you do not need to be sorry. I only wished to ask if you needed to talk."

"I am so confused, Master Caine. I have been trying to bring what I'm learning here into my daily life away from here, and most of the time I think that I do. But these last couple of weeks, well ... it's just been too much. I try to accept everything that's happened, but I am still unsure ... I don't know, I just feel my mind racing all the time with possibilities, and I'm frantic, and I don't know what to do, and I just feel miserable, and I feel like I've let you down, too, because in spite of trying to accept both good and bad as you've taught me, I just can't stop feeling like I have failed and been dumped on." I finished in a rush, stringing days worth of thoughts into one big run-on sentence. I looked up at him to see the effect this confession would have on him.

He sank gracefully to the ground beneath the nearby tree, and indicated that I should take a spot near him. As he waited for me to sit down and get settled, I could almost see the sense of peace descend on him as he quietly focused on his breathing. I had the feeling that I could do Taiji for years and never achieve that peace. I wanted that peace. Right then.

"What is it ... you find confusing?"

"I don't understand why I can't find any peace in my life. Even though I accept that I can't change the stupid insurance company's mind, and get my car back fixed and whole, I can't stop feeling frustrated by it. I still feel this rebellion inside of me, that I can't take it anymore, that I'm tired of being dumped on by the universe. And that if one more person comments on my lousy haircut, I'm going to have an apopleptic fit."

"I think that you do not understand ... the difference between acceptance and resignation. What you feel ... is resignation. It is not acceptance."

Great. I'm in a quandary, feeling horrid, and now I'm discussing semantics. But I'd learned at least this much in my six months: no matter how obscure I might find Master Caine's dialog, once I understood it, it always helped. So I asked, "What is the difference between acceptance and resignation?"

"You say that you have accepted this. Yet your mind tells you that it is unfair, that it should not be so. So your emotions are frustrated. You want it to be different. It is the wanting that is the difference."

I looked at him quizzically. "Wanting?"

"You have heard the joke about the Zen vacuum cleaner?"

What did this have to do with it, I wondered, but ... "No. At least, not yet."

"It had ... no attachments."

I chuckled. At least I got this one, which was unusual. His sense of humor often seemed a bit odd, or else his joke-telling skills were just underdeveloped. However, although I understood the joke, I didn't understand the reference. "What does this have to do with wanting?"

"It is because you want it to be different that it is resignation. Resignation is like 'yes, but'. It is false acceptance. It is attachment to a desired result. It means that you understand how it is, but want it to be different. If you did not ... want it to be different, it would be acceptance."

"Uh-huh, I think I understand. I still don't like what happened, so I still wish it hadn't happened. And that is why I am still frustrated by it."

"Yes, you have grasped the essence, and in this essence lies all of the Tao. What is, is. What is not, is not. Accept what is, and you will be one with the Tao. Want what is not possible, and you will be apart from the Tao." With those words, he stood up and continued "Now, I will teach you the movement which you did not



notice the others were learning this morning. It is called the Five Elements ... Through it you will increase your focus and energy, your Chi. Remember to stay in the present moment, accept the present moment, and you will feel peace , that same peace you so desire." And with a smile , was it possible, a wink? , he began to move, teaching me yet more about life and my relationship to all things ...

R_ecommended Reading:

365 Tao by Deng Ming-Dao. This book contains a reading for each of the days of the year, filled with contemporary Taoist themes. This book (like *Scholar Warrior* and *The Chronicles of Tao* by the same author) does a good job of describing Taoism as it exists in today's world and gives the reader the feeling that Taoism is possible in our own lives. It is poetical, lyrical and practical. The way of life that is Taoism is well defined in these pages. I personally find much to contemplate daily in this book!

The Tao of Pooh and *The Te of Piglet* by Benjamin Hoff. I have recommended these books to many people, and rarely does anyone say that they didn't absolutely love them. For anyone who enjoyed Winnie the Pooh as a child (or reading those stories to a child), these are a special treat. Benjamin Hoff describes the philosophy behind much of Kung Fu in a very easy-to-understand fashion using the characters and stories from Winnie the Pooh, and the Taoist/Buddhist stories included are great illustrations of the various themes.

Zen Seeds by Shundo Aoyama. A very readable introduction to life as a Zen priest by a well-known Japanese female priest. This is a transcription of many of her talks, and it retained my interest ... those friends I recommended it to have also enjoyed it. It is a book filled with stories that I could imagine coming from Kwai Chang Caine.

Thank You And OK, An American Zen Failure In Japan by David Chadwick. This is a witty and amusing account of life as a Zen monk. Although it sure doesn't relate directly to Kung Fu, anyone interested in Buddhism will find something interesting in this book.