

Opportunity With in Crisis

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“When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity.”

John F. Kennedy

Although linguists consider this to be a misrepresentation of the Chinese characters, I have found truth in this concept. My interpretation is that within every negative situation there is a promise of hope and positive transformation. I have experienced personal crisis and I understand on a very visceral level that danger and opportunity are often intertwined.

Four years ago, while living in Malaysia, I suffered a hemorrhagic stroke. I crumpled to the ground while running laps and my physical self was transformed. I lay there alone and scared in a foreign country, the entire left side of my body paralyzed. I spent the next month in the hospital trying to find the promise of hope within the negative. I chose to pursue my recovery in Malaysia, which meant that I would not have the personal support of my family and friends and that I would experience the most difficult year of my life in a foreign culture. That year was characterized by moments of joy and gratitude coupled with pain and loss.

I have always been a physical person. I suddenly found, however, that my body would not cooperate and that I couldn't perform even the simplest movements. I accepted the reality of my situation, yet put all my energy and determination into changing that reality. I worked non-

stop. If I was awake I was focused on rehabilitation. For example, I would tie my right hand in a plastic bag in order to force myself to retrain my left hand.

I made a tremendous recovery and currently experience only minor physical deficits. I attribute my recovery to several factors. I received excellent medical care, had the strengthening support of my wife, and pursued multiple avenues of therapy. I believe my relentless and indefatigable approach to therapy was integral to my recovery. I am proud of the effort I made in such adverse conditions and the positive attitude I maintained throughout the process. I apply that positive attitude and sincere effort to all aspects of my life.

This experience shaped me in many important ways. It forced me to recognize the fragility of life and my own vulnerability. This in turn allowed me to reexamine my goals and priorities. My decision to become a nurse was a product of this reexamination. Nurses helped me to regain my physicality and independence and quite simply, I want to do that for someone else. I learned firsthand what it's like to be a patient who is totally dependent on the care of others. This has given me a sense of empathy and understanding that informs my daily life and will strengthen my ability as a nurse. Most importantly, I have learned that though life is short and can be tragic, a positive attitude and the ability to see opportunity within crisis are powerful tools.