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TRUTH IN LOVE

Pain Is Progress

By Parris J. Baker
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Many readers have wondered what happened to me concerning my recent and precipitous absence as a contributing writer for the Jefferson Educational Society. My sudden disappearance was due primarily to the pain I experienced from chronic orthopedic issues that required immediate surgical repair. The chronic pain in my left hip was unrelenting, so excruciating it brought tears to my eyes. Sleepless nights and easily agitated days forced me to call my orthopedic surgeon. I have had two total hip replacements and four hip revisions: the first hip replacement occurred in 1986 and the second in 1989. The most recent hip revision was done on December 16.

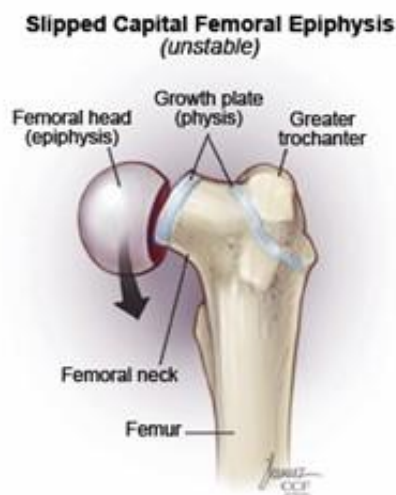
The history of my orthopedic problems, however, began on June 20, 1970. While participating in the long jump, keenly focused on breaking the junior high school record, I instead severely broke my ankle. As a 12-year-old track and field athlete I was consistently jumping distances well over 20 feet. However, my jumps of record were all in the 18-foot, 6-inch range. I lost between 18 to 24 inches per jump because I would use my hands to support my body weight while landing. The recorded distance of a long jump is measured from the edge of the take-off board to the closest depression in the sand. Any part of the athlete's body, which in my case was my hands, while landing closest to the take-off board, was how the jump was measured.

Unfortunately, the long jump runway at Woodrow Wilson Junior High was not a rubberized, nonslip surface nor did it have a certified sanctioned sandpit. It was all grass! To avoid being penalized after each jump, one of my dearest friends, then and now, Dale Barney (who was also 12) suggested I hold my T-shirt when I

landed. I thought, "What a great idea!" Excited and confident that my next attempt would be a record-breaking jump, I ran full speed ahead toward the take-off board and thrust myself into the air, well over 20 feet and crack! I had broken the junior high school long jump record (though not officially because the field was not sanctioned) along with my ankle. I was quickly rushed to Hamot Hospital, where my fractured ankle was repaired and cast.

Thus began my long and painfully recurrent pattern of personal injury and rehabilitation. From 1970 to 1975, I was frequently hospitalized for various orthopedic problems. My orthopedic surgeon believed I may have had a dormant congenital abnormality in my hip joint, not detected at birth. The traumatic break of my ankle may have contributed to a condition known as Slipped Capital Femoral Epiphysis (SCFE). The etiology of SCFE is unclear, however, a small percentage of cases is associated with a traumatic event, such as the one I experienced.

According to Johns Hopkins Medicine[1]: *Slipped capital femoral epiphysis (SCFE) a disorder of adolescents in which the growth plate is damaged, and the femoral head moves ("slips") with respect to the rest of the femur. The head of the femur stays in the cup of the hip joint while the rest of the femur is shifted.* SCFE is more common in adolescent boys, ages 10 to 15 years than girls and appears more often in African Caribbean patients than Caucasian patients. The state-of-the-art interventions at the time were traction (using weights and pulleys to put tension on a displaced bone or joint), body casts (to restrict movement) and surgical screws (to connect the femoral head with the femur bone).



(Picture reproduced from [here](#)).

From a biopsychosocial perspective, physical pain is the central nervous system's method of preserving the integrity and functionality of the body. To prevent harm or disability, pain becomes an alert signal to other systems within the body that something is wrong or malfunctioning. Pain forced me to call my orthopedic surgeon and beg for relief. Anyone who has experienced arthritic pain can empathize with me. I am sharing my orthopedic problems with you because I believe my experiences provides an allegory of America's congenital and hereditary relationship with racism and race.

After my successful hip surgery and in my initial meeting with my physical therapist, I was told, "This (physical therapy) is going to hurt! However, it will hurt less every day you continue with your therapy." He insisted that my physical recovery was up to me and to avoid physical therapy, basically to avoid the pain, would be counterproductive to the healing process. The basic premise or philosophy of physical therapy is that the patient and the therapist work in collaboration, to permit oneself to become uncomfortable and experience discomfort, and to actively participate in the process of achieving enhanced physical abilities and wellness, heightened psychological functioning, and improved overall quality of life.

Conversations about the heinous history of racism in America is going to hurt! Race and racism are difficult conversations. However, to avoid the discussions, basically to avoid the pain, discomfort and confrontation, is counterproductive to the healing, wellness, and improved quality of life for most Americans.

As Rep. Hakeem Jefferies, (D-N.Y.), stated, "Systemic racism has been in the soil of America since 1619. America was founded on high ideals, but at the same time America experienced a birth defect, a genetic imperfection on the question of race. It took the form of chattel slavery, one of the worst crimes in humanity in the history of world.[2] Ta-Nehisi Coates asserts,[3] "Race is the child of racism, not the father." From Coates' perspective, the etiology of race was created and embedded in structural racist and oppressive institutions and micro-organizations designed to advantage or privilege white individuals and groups over all other non-white groups.

America does not need more traumatic events! We don't need another Civil War, Emmitt Till and the Civil Rights Movement nor another insurrection of the U.S. Capitol, Mr. Tyree Nichols, and Black Lives Matter to force us to confront the congenital defects of racism. The chronic pain embedded in the soil and soul of America is so unrelenting, so excruciating that it has brought tears to the eyes of our nation – "America is weeping as a nation and as a people [4]."

However, to avoid the pain of the difficult discussions by banning books, identities, and histories is counterproductive to the healing process of America. When we engage in the necessary discussions at all community levels, let each of

us remain cognizant and remind the other that, initially, these discussions are going to hurt! But the conversations will hurt less each day that we remain engaged.

Pain is progress.

[1] [Here](#)

[2] Bookings Institution. (February, 6, 2020). Addressing structural racism in America's public policy institutions: A fireside chat with Rep. Hakeem Jefferies, (D-N.Y.). [Here](#)

[3] Coates, T.-N. (2015). *Between the world and me*. New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau.

[4] Baker, P.J. (June 2020). Jefferson Report. A pain-filled, polarized America: Reflections, recommendations on racism in U.S., Erie. *Jefferson Education Society*. [Here](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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