



My Back Hurts!

For more than three decades I have been experiencing pain flare-ups in my lower back without being able to pin-point the initial cause or the reason for any current pain. I used to contribute the origins of my pain to a 'sports injury' when I was in my early 20's. In later life I blamed the type of work and physical effort of the job, as contributing to the initial and ongoing pain.

For most of my adult life I have worked in health, in both clinical and research settings. I often dealt with people in pain but never dealt with my own pain.

In 2010, while attempting to move a plastic office chair, my back went into spasm and I fell to ground, unable to get up. I landed up in the emergency rooms and unable to work for ten days, needing prescription medication to dull the pain. Just like the previous and following flare-up, this pain episode did resolve.

During the Covid crisis of 2020/21, being part of the health workforce, I soldiered on traveling to work on public transport and dealing with increased demands from the public, co-workers and health system. My back pain flared up again and despite having access to both an ergonomic office desk and chair, I could no longer carry on. What was it that I could not carry on with?

On the 22nd March 2022, I entered a ten-day Vipassana, silent, meditation course in the idyllic Blue Mountains. This was the most difficult, yet the most valuable experience of my life! On the last day when we were encouraged to speak and share our experience with other course attendees, my first words were '*I don't want to return to my life*'. I also realised that I was the only one who could change that. At this point I was still not connecting my pain flare-up to 'my life', but that was soon to change.

Seeking a cure for my back pain, which was still present on an almost daily basis, I sought help from a spine surgeon (James) who works in collaboration with a physiotherapist (Johnny) and a psychologist (Annalisa). With their encouragement and guidance, I started reading and learning about *pain*. Especially *my* pain. Yes, pain is very complex and abnormalities detected on CT or MRI investigation, does not always indicate, explain or point to the area of pain or possible ways to remedy it. Most people will have bony or soft tissue abnormalities on diagnostic imaging, but most (+/- 50%) will not experience pain. So where was my pain coming from and why?

On the job front, I knew I needed to get out of a system which was globally in crisis. What would I do...? I have always found value in healing touch and was often complimented by friends who received a scalp or shoulder massage from me. I was given a space on a Reflexology course (an interest I wanted to pursue pre Covid) and found it not only therapeutic as the giver of a foot treatment, but also beneficial with regards to pain relief, when on the receiving end. It was then, combining my mediation and reflexology exposure when I realised what needed to change. It was my world view, that needed to broaden.

I needed to look outside the box, and so I did. I have integrated Mediation into my life and offer a Body Scan Reflexology approach to managing pain. Through meditation I am learning not to *'think clearly, but to experience life more clearly'* (Sam Harris).

There are many wonders of Traditional Chines Medicine we currently can't explain using the Western Scientific approach, but several researchers are looking for the link regarding Meridian Lines and Fascia. The search continues to determine how stimulating Fascia in one part of the body, for example, the feet, can effect Fascia in distant organs, vessels or soft tissue.

Although I still have pain flare-ups and I still rely on medical intervention and visits to the physiotherapist and psychologist, I have gotten to know my pain. I know what it means and understand that it is telling me more what is happening *in my life* rather than what is happening *in my body*.

'When we change the way, we look at things, the things we look at change' – Wayne Dyer

