



BodyWork

A s s o c i a t e s

Dealing in Crisis Mode- Welcome to the Lily Pond By Douglas Nelson

“What happens to people who never have this kind of work done?” I have been asked this question more often than I could ever count. Two concepts are embedded in this question. First, I want to address ‘this’ kind of work. For many years, BWA was in a position of defining what massage therapy was to Champaign-Urbana. As massage has become more popular, many other massage practitioners have appeared on the scene. Many clients have also received massages on a cruise or a vacation. Often these sessions are pleasant, but our clients tell us that general massage is not at all in the same league as what we do at BWA. This is because our work is rooted in Precision Neuromuscular Therapy (PNMT), work that is very targeted and focused and grounded in results. Massage in a spa setting is great, but has a completely different purpose than PNMT.

The second part of the question refers to allowing ‘nature’ to take its course. What does happen when aches and pains are left untreated? About the only thing that permanently goes away if you ignore it is your spouse. Aches and pain become internalized as ‘normal’ by the nervous system. Over time, the problem area slowly gets worse, largely unnoticed by the host. At some point, crisis happens and drastic measures are needed. These measures are often expensive and somewhat dangerous, but often the only resort left. Practitioners of these drastic measures exclaim that only their methods are effective against such maladies, which is true if the process is allowed to escalate to such a degree. This does not address the possibility that the whole mess could have been averted by proactive measures. How does this happen? Why is it so common?

The real problem here is chronology. As the ancient Chinese philosopher said, “He who solves a problem before it surfaces, who calls that clever?” Why is there such a tendency to wait until crisis happens? While I have talked about this issue for years in my classes, mentioned it to countless clients and colleagues, I did not really get it until a few weeks ago listening to someone describe a scenario with a lily pond. Strangely, I marvel at how what we think we know suddenly reaches a new understanding, understanding that is visceral as well as cognitive.

In the lily pond story, imagine a five-acre pond with a lily or two in one corner. Of course, lilies are pretty and decorative and a couple in your pond is OK. The problem is they grow prolifically. (In this instance, the lilies double every day and fill the pond in one month.) Where there was one, there are now two, two then four, four then eight. The owner of the pond is still unmoved; eight lily pads in the pond is hardly a big deal. Since the owner of the pond hardly pays attention, the lily pads go unnoticed. Only when the pond is seemingly suddenly overtaken by lily pads and the owner realizes there is a problem, does the owner call for a service to eliminate the lily pads. The problem is, at day 29 with the pond half full with lily pads, the lily pads are one day away from taking over the pond completely. If the pond service is delayed at all, it will be too late. If they

arrive immediately, the actions taken are severe and expensive. The owner is resentful that the service was so expensive and they killed other vegetation and fish in the process. He/she would probably not recommend them to anyone else because it was too expensive and they were a bit careless. Is this fair?

When we wait until day twenty-nine, not much good happens. Actions taken are drastic and painful. The problem is that all the motivation for intervention is at day twenty-nine, not at day ten. Perhaps we must do a better job of teaching our clients to address the underlying causes before they become big problems. You can bet that the pond owner doesn't need to be reminded to keep the lily pad population under control. We learn to change our furnace filters, get our teeth cleaned, and change the oil in our cars every 3000 miles or so. The time to address the soft-tissue problems with massage therapy at BWA is before there is a painful crisis. Massage Therapy is certainly not as effective during a crisis as more drastic measures. Does this mean that manual therapy is not as effective as other strategies? Clearly that is not what should be surmised. Real wisdom is not how to deal with crisis. Real wisdom is avoiding crisis. If we did this the cost (in both dollars and suffering) would be reduced substantially.