

Chapter 2
FALLING INTO DARKNESS

*“Had I not fallen, I would not have arisen,
Had I not been subject to darkness,
I could not have seen the light”*

—Midrash

With our big accomplishment, the genome centre was growing fast and by the end of 2003 the bioinformatics team had moved to a new location that had more space, about a 30 minute walk west of the BC Cancer Agency and where I lived. We hired more brilliant minds to work with us and my team grew to the point that I had 10 staff reporting to me.

Although I had a parking spot at this location, I had started having problems with my car. My 19-year old Mazda 626 started making all kinds of weird sounds when I drove it that appeared to be getting worse every day. So I started walking to and from work. On January 4, 2004, I was walking home after work on Broadway, and a man ran awkwardly towards me carrying what appeared to be a cash register.

“Stop thief!” a woman screamed as she ran out of the Toys 'R' Us store.

I looked back and saw the man turn at the end of the block and immediately ran after him. As I turned the corner he was beside a white car with one hand in his pocket, presumably searching for his keys. I jumped on him and the cash register hit the ground and bills and coins fell all over the place. As we struggled, I heard a

woman on the phone.

“Two men are fighting!”

The man reached into his pocket and at that point I felt I was in danger, so I bolted to the other side of the car thinking he possibly was going to pull out a weapon. It became apparent that he was just grabbing his keys to get away. So while he was starting the ignition, I opened the door and we struggled some more, before I let go to avoid having my hands crushed. I assumed that the police would have what they need to catch the thief, as I could hear the woman continue on the phone, reading out the license plate. Eventually, the police showed up.

They told me that although brave, it wasn't wise of me to chase the thief in case he was in fact armed, while I was wondering why I hadn't made better use of my taekwondo skills. The police collected my information and a week later, they showed up at my place. I reviewed a photo lineup to identify the culprit, and later was told that I was very helpful.

Eventually, I couldn't even get my car to start. This was fine as I just wanted to get rid of it; probably because it constantly reminded me of my ex-girlfriend. Every-time I got in the car, I'd visualize her sitting beside me, dancing in her seat to Sarah McLaughlin playing on a cassette tape, and a cool breeze coming in from the open windows. Noam was going to lend me his car while he was away in the States for post-doctoral interviews, but his car got side-swiped and was in the repair shop.

Not driving my car did nothing to distract me from the void in my life. Later that month, I told myself that I just needed a bigger change, to get away, clear my head and reboot my system and start anew. To start my new path in life, I booked a flight to India thinking I just needed a jolt of energy in a new environment. I was to meet my good friend Jag, my roommate during some of my time at Simon Fraser University. He was visiting family there, and we planned to meet up north. I was 29 at the time. Apparently at 29, Buddha left his family, sat under a tree, and was enlightened, so I decided I would go sit under the same tree and be enlightened.

Before the trip to India, I figured my work trip in Florida in the first week of February would be a perfect start of a new life without my ex in my brain. Myself and a number of other colleagues were scheduled to go to a cancer genomics conference, Advances in Genome and Biology and Technology (AGBT) in Marco Island.

On the Wednesday morning of the flight, I woke up and panicked realizing I only had half an hour to get to the flight and I hadn't even started packing. I've always wondered what was going on in my head to put myself in that situation. It should have been clear to me that I had to pack and be fully ready for the flight the day before as Tuesday evenings were typically quite busy: after work, Noam and I would meet up for yoga, then taekwondo, and finished off the evening playing drop-in ice hockey. After a couple post-game beers, I'd get home at 1 or 2am.

At the airport they said the next flight to Florida was the following morning. That was not acceptable and I asked for any flight that would take me closer to Florida. Fortunately, there was an afternoon flight to Minnesota and from there I found a very late flight to Florida. In the limousine on the way to the hotel, I kept asking me myself why I hadn't packed. Thankfully, in a tired state, I was able to make it to the start of the conference the next morning. Steve smiled and no one asked why I wasn't at the airport the previous morning of the booked flight.

During one of the breaks between lectures, I went for a run on the beautiful white sandy beach in the hot sun. At one point, however, my right leg suddenly felt like Jello. It was a feeling I hadn't experienced before and I made a mental note that I would see the doctor when I got home.

The getaway in Florida wasn't enough to remove the fog in my brain though and I then realized a trip to another country, just going to a different place was not going to solve my intense inner stress. Running away from the problem wouldn't make it disappear and that I just needed more time. I didn't run the half-marathon I had registered for fear it would not be good for my leg and I canceled my trip to India.



Feb 21, 2004. It was a Saturday night, and we played our last game of the season for the Sasquatch, the recreational ice hockey team I created in 1997. We had yet to win a championship. However, it was clear that we had a good shot this year as we finished the regular season strong. In the last game, I scored 5 goals—the most I had ever scored in a game and we finished with an 11-4 win. I had my best line mates, Jeff on left-wing and Noam on right-wing and everything clicked that night. With Noam's car repaired, he drove me home that night.

Feb 22, 2004. My dad picked me up from my apartment in Vancouver and we headed to a used car dealership. We found another Mazda of my liking and the

plan was to look up the vehicle history before making the purchase. My whole family came out that Sunday night to celebrate my younger sister's birthday. Kinney, living at the time at my parents' home with her boyfriend Rob, was four years younger than Noam and I. We went to Applebees in Maple Ridge that evening to celebrate.

Noam's girlfriend came along and planned to head back that night while Noam and I would stay overnight at my parents. The whole family would be together; a rarity those days with all of us being so busy. My dad would drive us to the car dealership the next morning; I'd get my car and drop Noam off at the university before heading to work.

Feb 23, 2004. We planned to leave after breakfast; however, I felt a little off and needed to lie down for a bit before we headed out. I told my dad and brother that I'd be ready to leave soon. I hadn't informed my work that I'd be a little late.

"Yaron?" my dad said as he knocked.

I slowly got up and awkwardly made my way to the door.

"What's the password for the website where I can look up the vehicle history for the car we looked at yesterday?" my dad asks.

"Ah, eh, eh, meh..."

I stood looking at him. I couldn't speak.

I just couldn't convert what was clear in my head, my thoughts, to speech other than some gibberish. My dad looked confused and squinted while he moved a little closer and peered into my eyes. Clearly something was wrong. I was just as confused as he was.

That's when I then collapsed in a grand mal seizure and woke up two days later at the hospital.