

Idiom by Lon Yan

感同身受

gan3 tong2 shen1 shou4

A swimmer was bitten by a big fish at Deep Water Bay. The man was chatting with friends in the water when he felt a sharp pain in his right foot. He suffered a four-inch gash wound.

As he was at the time within the bathing area protected by shark net, experts believed the victim was bitten by a barracuda, a fish “known for its large size, fearsome appearance and ferocious behavior.” But it could also have been a small shark.

The man has to receive surgery to repair artery, nerves and ligaments. A skin-graft may be necessary too. After seeing a picture of the victim’s wound, someone commented on the internet that he was “感同身受” (gan3 tong2 shen1 shou4).

“感” (gan3) is “to feel,” “to sense,” “to realize,” “同” (tong2) “alike,” “same,” “身” (shen1) “a body,”

“life,” “a person,” “personally” and “受” (shou4) “to receive,” “to endure” and in this context, it refers to “感受” (gan3 shou4), meaning to experience, “to feel,” “to be affected by.”

“身受” (shen1 shou4) is “to experience personally.”

Literally, “感同身受” (gan3 tong2 shen1 shou4) is “to feel as if one were experiencing something in person,” “to feel as if it had happened to oneself.” Figuratively, the idiom means “to sympathize.”

Saying “感同身受” (gan3 tong2 shen1 shou4) is a way of expressing sympathy for someone who has suffered a misfortune. “感同身受” (gan3 tong2 shen1 shou4) is also the basis of empathy. If one can’t even imagine how others feel, it is not possible to emphasize.

Terms containing the character “受” (shou4) include:

受傷 (shou4 shang1) – to sustain injures; to get hurt

受難 (shou4 nan4) – to suffer; distress

受益 (shou4 yi4) – to derive benefit; to benefit from

受害者 (shou4 hai4 zhe3) – a victim; a sufferer