



FiveFingers takes toes to where they've never been before: individually encased in something synthetic.

Barely there ‘Frog Feet’ feel great

By Chris McNamara
Special to the Tribune

Unlike American colonists in 1775 or my daughter in her Pack ‘N’ Play, my toes have never clamored for independence. Never demanded autonomy. In fact, when my big toes are separated from their subordinates by flip-flop straps, they feel vulnerable.

So when I saw ads for the bizarre sandal/shoes that accommodate each digit the way gloves do fingers, my toes curled more than they normally do. FiveFingers, produced by Vibram, fit feet snugly. According to their brochure they enable “barefooting,” defined as “the exhilarating joy of going barefoot without leaving yourself exposed.”

I love going barefoot, exposing my talon-like toes to the world. And despite my initial reticence I decided to don a pair during a weekend in Long Beach, Ind., where varied terrains would test FiveFingers’ capabilities and relative isolation would shield me from the ridicule of friends.

“Why are you wearing those?” asked my 3-year-old nephew Dan. Before I could answer, his older brother Matt had snatched the FiveFingers, renamed them Frog Feet and was hopping.

PLEASE SEE FEET, PAGE 7

Take a class, save your life

By William Hageman
Tribune staff reporter

To many of us, wellness classes are largely preventive—lessons in fitness and nutrition, for example.

For others, though, their impact is more direct: These classes are lifesavers.

After a friend suffered a debilitating stroke in 2005, Mary Cassidy and members of her bridge club got to talking.

“We made a pact around the card table,” said Cassidy, of Aurora. “If any of us looked around and saw evidence someone was having a stroke, we’d get them to the ER.”

During one of the club’s regular Sunday sessions last fall, that’s exactly what happened.

“She was in the midst of a stroke,” Cassidy said of another friend. “The corner of her mouth was down. And later she said she wondered why she had been dropping things all day.”

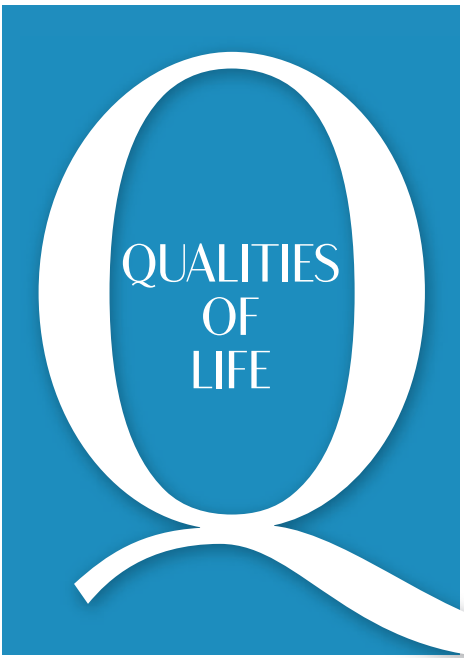
At first, though, the woman resisted her friends. Finally they convinced her it was serious and she was rushed to the hospital. She was treated quickly and today shows no evidence of the stroke.

The two incidents persuaded Cassidy to learn more about strokes, so she attended Edward Hospital’s “Stroke—Are You at Risk” class, held last fall at the Aurora YMCA.

“The big thing that stuck in my mind was that there’s more than one type of stroke,” said the 83-year-old widow.

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PEOPLE ■ PLACES ■ IDEAS
FAMILY ■ STYLE ■ HEALTH



PERHAPS TO WALK AGAIN

A father hopes his stem-cell research will help his paraplegic daughter. **HEALTH, PAGE 6**

PERFECT ‘MOMMY’ JEANS

They slim and flatter. They do not bring to mind that ‘Saturday Night Live’ skit on bulky denim and appliquéd vests. **STYLE, PAGE 4**

A PIECE OF ‘HARRY’ MAGIC

An ‘awesome’ toad, a scarf and copies of the books in a variety of languages are what make the hearts of some Harry Potter fans beat faster. **PAGE 7**



GINORMOUS TIP

Diners get grumpy when a restaurant adds a \$120 tip to a \$600 wine bill. **DALEY DRINK, PAGE 5**

‘Every time I planted something, not only was I honoring my living children. I was honoring Beau. The more I planted, the more I grew, the better I became.’ —Terry Starks



Tribune photos by José Moré

Terry Starks adds a peacock feather to her scarecrow Ike, who is designed to give the chickens pause as they peck at various plant roots.



From the earth, soul-saving grace

A mom’s organic farm helps her grow beyond her grief

By Barbara Mahany
Tribune staff reporter

WILLIAMSVILLE, Ill.—Terry Starks is stocking up on raindrops. She has a metal cattle trough collecting water at the corner of the tractor shed. And over on the other side, she has a pickle jar, a huge one, one big enough to lose a toddler in. Off every gutter, at the end of every downspout on her nearly seven-acre farm, she has some gizmo to store the rain.

Already, the fields are thirsty; the soil is showing cracks. Starks, who’s in her first summer farming, knows what she’s up against if the rains don’t come. She might be new to sowing seeds and dumping horse manure, but she knows about the drought.

Heck, she survived the worst there’ll ever be. She survived a drought of the soul.

Starks, a sun-streaked blond who is 45 and hoists a 5-gallon can of water as if it were just a

cup of coffee, came to farming the hard way. She reached out and groped the parched earth, as if her very resurrection depended on it.

Which it did.

Starks, the mother of four, lost her firstborn son, a Marine, while he was home on leave from Iraq in July 2003. She thought she would never breathe again.

“It’s just like being hung, when they pull that thing out from under you, when it finally hits you,” she recalled, rocking on her front porch swing, telling the story of the night her son Beau, Beau Robbins, a strapping, GQ-handsome just-21-year-old, died at the wheel of his great-grandma’s Ford Escort.

Drove into a pond, Starks whispered, barely loud enough to hear. Accidental drowning, according to the Sangamon County coroner. Out one country night, marking the 21st birthdays of his two best friends, when the designated driver called it time to hit the hay. Beau, left at his car to sleep it off, must have started driving, must have cranked the key too soon. Didn’t see the bend in the country road. Went straight instead of turning. Didn’t see the farmer’s pond.



Starks’ hands bear evidence of a close encounter with the soil.

Died before he could get back to Iraq. Died before his mama figured out her life’s true calling.

For two years, after the just-past-dawn ringing of the doorbell, after numbly walking into that

PLEASE SEE FARM, PAGE 3

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