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On fate versus free will

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At the end of the movie "Forrest Gump," the main character tries to resolve whether his mother's belief in divine intervention can be squared with Lt. Dan's earlier protestations to God that we're all just being tossed around at random like feathers in the wind.

Gump ultimately comes to grips with the possibility that answer lies in both, meaning we benefit, and suffer, from random acts over which we have no control, simultaneously benefiting from the choices that we make through life.

Of course, some choices we make seem to be anything but beneficial. Still, the basic idea is the same, and Gump eventually recognizes that the two concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

This gives us the ability to blame random chance when things aren't going well, while simultaneously taking credit for various successes even though, in some instances, we deserve credit for being only at the right place at the right time.

Underneath it all, it seems we're better off taking responsibility for both the good and bad; we don't really have much choice considering the fact that one of the mysteries of life is the inherent mystery itself.

I think part of what keeps us going every day is the fact that we're just not sure what's around the next corner. It may be a lucky break, and it may be one of those times when we get hit with a senseless tragedy that we must overcome, or help a loved one to overcome.

So it would seem as though the best way to react to the part of life that is nothing more than a feather being blown around randomly in the wind, is to always recognize that our choices in life do make a big difference. This is especially important in that we must remember that the choices we make have a ripple effect, which actually can make a difference in the lives of many of those around us, perhaps even in the lives of those we don't know.

By the way, maybe we also have to be aware of the fact that when we feel a little bit too full of ourselves some of it may just have been the product of good, old-fashioned dumb luck.

Robert L. Brenna Jr. is a partner in the Rochester law firm of Brenna, Brenna & Boyce PLLC, which his father founded. He is president of the New York State Academy of Trial Lawyers and concentrates his practice in the areas of catastrophic personal injury and trusts and estates. Brenna also hosts a Sunday morning radio program entitled "The Brenna & Brenna Law Forum," on WHAM 1180 AM at 8 a.m., online at www.wham1180.com.

