

# **Face your Fear on Paper**

by Elle Garfield, LMSW, ACSW

## **Nancy's Story**

Nancy (not her real name) woke up most mornings gripped with fear. The weight of the dark murky feeling made it hard for her to even get out of bed. Sheer willpower got her up and she pushed herself to get into the shower and get dressed for the day. Even though Nancy, retired now, had lots of opportunities to be active with friends and family most days were spent feeling frozen, unable to will herself to do the things she really wanted to do. Her logic told her she had nothing to fear. She was physically healthy. She had a wonderful life, filled with successes and a supportive family she adored. Still the emotional pain she felt almost on a daily basis was real. After seeing my brochure at a routine chiropractic visit Nancy decided to make an appointment with me.

When Nancy came to see me she was exhausted, using all the energy she had to resist her anxiety. When I asked Nancy what she thought her fear was about her answer was, "I don't know, I just feel afraid and I want it to go away!"

## **Getting a Handle on Fear**

A fear journal is a tool you can use to help you clarify your fears. When our fear and anxiety are vague, cloudy and murky we have a tendency to feel even more powerless over it. When we are able to "get a handle" on it we begin to see choices we have for our own reactions to fear.

By writing down your experience (e.g. there is a tightness in my throat), your thoughts (e.g. I'm thinking this is a familiar feeling) and then naming your fear (e.g. I'm afraid I won't be OK) you begin to shine a light on what was once cloudy and vague. Soon you can begin to look at the fear with curiosity and openness. This leads to being able to accept our fear and lovingly take care of ourselves through it.

## **It's Simple**

Starting your journal is simple. Just buy a journal or plain notebook. Commit to picking it up when fear comes up. The next time you feel the tension that comes with feeling fear get your journal out and start writing.

First, ask yourself, "What sensations am I feeling in my body? What is happening with my breath?" It may help to close your eyes for a moment and check in with your body.

Then ask, "What was I thinking before this feeling came on?" It's OK if you don't know or don't remember. Again it may help to close your eyes and "see" what information is there for you. You may have a memory or a picture or a color that you can make note of in your journal. There are no wrong answers to these questions.

Then ask, “What am I afraid of?” Keep writing down what comes to mind even if it seems silly or unreasonable. Keep going until you are satisfied you have exhausted all possibilities. Often when we face our fear, feelings shift and we may become aware of sadness, anger or even joy.

If you are feeling apprehensive about getting this up close and personal with your anxiety you are not alone. Or you could be thinking that’s fine for someone else but my fear is too overwhelming. Many people avoid fear thinking that facing it will only make it worse.

What I have found in my own experience and in working with people with anxiety is that as we make our fears more clear our feelings shift and change. We begin to feel empowered instead of victimized by it. Most of our fears turn out to be False Evidence Appearing Real. It isn’t until we investigate with a quality of curiosity, openness to learn, and a willingness to accept ourselves and our feelings with love that we begin to feel a shift. As the light of awareness shines, our fear tends to get smaller and more manageable.

Nancy was surprised by her ability to face something she had spent so much time trying to be rid of. Writing down her fears, she was able to see more clearly what she was reacting to and begin to take steps toward starting her day with enthusiasm and joy. Her family and friends started noticing that she had more energy and was able to join them in activities they knew she loved but had been avoiding.

### **Let’s review the key points.**

- A fear journal is a tool you can use that can help you get a “handle” on your fear.
- Clarifying your fear leads to empowerment and freedom from the limiting effects of being fearful.
- Getting started is easy. Just get a notebook and start writing. There are no wrong answers.

### **Now you are ready for the next step.**

- First buy a journal or notebook.
- Commit to writing down an inquiry of what you are feeling and thinking when you feel the tension that comes from fear.
- Get the notebook out when you are feeling limited by fear.

- Begin an inquiry of your experience: thoughts, sensations and feelings.

If you feel too overwhelmed to start, reach out for the support you need. Seek professional help when needed.

**Contact information:**

**Elle Garfield, ACSW**

**Awareness Counseling**

**248-961-4081**

**egarfield10@gmail.com**