

Moving beyond fear

Brooke Broadbent

At the age of 58 I learned what a huge role fear was playing in my life. My life has been richer since I learned to cope with fear.



I was in Northern California on a leadership retreat. Twelve of us were participating in a ‘trust fall’. We were to walk to the end of a log, turn and fall into the arms of 11 community members below. I started by catching others. As I did this my stomach burned. I felt anxious and afraid. I realized that I was experiencing the same feeling of fear that I had as a teenage hockey player before most games. In those days I was so upset before playing hockey that I was nauseous. Today, as the people fell into my arms I felt the same nausea. I also felt and heard the slap of bodies against my arms as I caught people and I recalled stories about the snap of people’s necks when they are hanged. My mind and body had collapsed trust, fear and death.

When it came my time to walk the log I was very anxious yet determined. I told everyone below how badly I wanted to trust them, to fall into their outstretched arms. The program leaders were taking videos and they captured my forlorn face and frustration as I turned my back and prepared myself to fall. But I could not do it. My personal fear was stronger than my trust in community. Later, I was moved by the kindness of fellow participants who told me how much they had wanted to catch me. As I write about the scene now I feel some of the fear that was in my body that day. I also feel the love of the community of fellow participants in the leadership program.

My inability to complete the trust fall convinced me that I should learn more about the role of fear in my life. I engaged the services of a fellow-participant who specializes in coaching people about their fears. Melissa Randall and I spoke and she asked me to think about how fear had held me back in my life. I realized that I had left loving relationships because I feared they would fall apart. Rather than seeking solutions, in a state of fear I bolted. After leaving, I feared that I would grow old with no friends. Fear has held me back in my choice of career and it has curbed my passion for living. I’m reminded of President Roosevelt’s famous speech as he tried to help Americans cope with the Great Depression. “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” I was indeed beginning to fear fear.

To deal with my fear I took the following steps.: (1) I learned to recognize the feeling in my body when I was fearful, (2) I shared with others how fear had played a huge role in my life, (3) I learned to stop listening to the internal voices that told me I was going to mess up (4) I learned to practice mindfulness to deal with fear, (5) I learned to not fear fear, just to accept it as part of me.

My path of facing my fear and dealing with it positively took the steps of explaining my fear to others, and making use of some outstanding resources. At Thanksgiving of 2003 I

gathered together my daughters and their partners as well as my former wife and I explained to them the huge role that fear was playing in my life. I was amazed to find that they also told me that fear was playing a big role in their lives. I took a program in mindfulness with a psychologist, based on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and Thich Nhat Hanh and I learned to relax when I was beset by anxiety. I listened to meditation CDs by Kabat-Zinn and I've learned to focus on my breath when I feel fear in my body. Breathing through my nose and concentrating on my breath as it enters and leaves my nostrils helps me to relax. My fear has not gone away but I've learned to identify fear and to detach myself from it. As Kabat-Zinn says "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." I took a workshop called the "Inner Journey" and there I helped design an initiation rite for male participants that included a trust fall. This time I went first so that I was sure to do it. And others told me that my action inspired them to complete their trust fall.

Our world is dominated by fear and it undermines relationships in families and all communities. Fear fosters greed, war, poverty, racism, drug addiction, disease, apathy, and anxiety. At the same time we can address fear successfully by being intentional.

What role does fear play in your life? Does it cause you to jettison relationships, play small, and hide your passion, love and brilliance? The good news is that we get to choose whether we live a life of fear or move beyond fear to trust and love. It's truly amazing. When we stop fearing fear and start accepting it, good things start to happen in our lives.

Brooke Broadbent, MA is a personal coach and author. His latest book is *Living from the Heart*. He is coordinating the workshop "Beyond Fear Recapturing Your Life©" at Centrepointe House on June 4-5, 2005. This workshop is designed to provide new tools and insights for moving beyond fear. For more information see www.brookebroadbent.com.

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