

Being Afraid

Eleanor Roosevelt once claimed we should do one thing every day that scares us. So I went skydiving.

Actually, it wasn't something that scared me. I had wanted to jump since I was a young girl and I finally found the time to do it. It terrified my jump partner though. I caught her in a weak moment and convinced her it would be a great way to conquer her fear of heights.

After a brief training session we crammed into a Cessna 182 with our twenty-four year old pilot, a videographer and two tandem jump instructors. We reached 10,500 feet and the door to the airplane opened.

My jump partner inched forward, putting one leg, then two, through the open door. Then she looked down. In an abrupt change of heart, she locked her hands in a death-grip on the doorframe, head-butted her tandem instructor and tried to push him back in.

These professionals are well trained for this sort of reaction. He calmly, yet quickly readjusted his helmet and goggles, reassuringly pried her hands from the door and knowing she was securely fastened to him, he jumped with her in tow.

Although in that moment she did not love the experience, she did it. She jumped from an airplane. A couple weeks have passed and finally she is able to marvel at the enormity of her accomplishment. I am immensely proud of her for conquering her fear.

Doing scary things doesn't always have to involve near-death, high-adrenalin activities. Sometimes it can be as simple as having to apologize for our actions.

When my children were young I told them life would hold them accountable for everything they did or said. One time my son did something at a friend's house that initiated a phone call from the mother. It wasn't terrible, or life-threatening, just a minor boyish antic.

Still, I felt he needed to apologize to her. On his own. Without me. After practicing his apology a few times, I walked him over to the house, remained standing on the sidewalk, and sent him up to the front door alone.

He was terrified. His eyes were wide, and he was gulping obsessively to steady his stomach. He looked at me one last time, pleadingly, hoping I would change my mind. I shook my head, he turned and off he trudged.

It was a proud moment for me. That my son, at age eight, was willing to be held accountable for his actions and no matter how afraid he was of apologizing in person to an adult, he did it. He conquered his fear that day.

Many years later the same son got into more boyish antics with a few friends. This time at our home. Still feeling strongly about accountability, I insisted that the friends involved pay me the respect by coming over to the house and apologizing to me in person.

These were nineteen year old boys that had pretty much grown up in my home and we always had a mutual respect for one another. Still, I could smell the fear as each of them arrived to deliver their personal apology. Being held accountable for our actions can be terrifying, regardless of our age.

We all live with fear. Every single day. We fear the economy tanking even further causing us to lose our jobs, homes, and security.

We fear being accountable for our actions and we've seen the results as CEO's of corporate America have been brought to justice regardless of how hard they may have tried to cover up their indiscretions.

We even fear change.

Moving from one city or country to the next can be terrifying. Watching your children grow and leave the comfort of the nest can create worry-based fear for any parent.

For some of you, change is really a fear of the unknown. Wondering what will happen after you leave your job, after the marriage ends or after the kids grow up and move on.

More often than not, people will stay in a miserable job or miserable marriage just because it is familiar. It becomes safer to stay put rather than conquer the fear by taking a risk.

This is the lesson for today. Fear will never go away as long as the human race exists. Some are certainly better than others at releasing their fears and moving forward, but even at that, all of us are afraid of something.

It all boils down to trust.

My skydiving partner had to trust that I wouldn't lead her astray. She had to trust that the pilot, in all of his youthful twenty-four years, could fly a plane. She had to trust the tandem jump instructors wanted to survive the experience just as much as she did.

My son, at age eight had to trust that I would be there for him if the apology didn't work out the way we had hoped. He had to trust that the words would come and in the end it would be okay.

His friends, all those years later had to risk embarrassment and trust that being held accountable for their actions by apologizing was the right thing to do. Some of the corporate America CEO's missed out on trusting and were held accountable anyway. Probably not the way they had hoped.

Learning to trust is one of the most difficult lessons each of us will face in this journey of life. Especially in those moments when we're unsure of what it is we should be trusting.

This is exactly the time you need to calm yourself, breathe and listen for your intuition to guide you. We are all meant to live happy, fulfilling and content lives. Sometimes we just need to get out of our own way, be accountable for everything we say and do and trust that the stars will align to our benefit, moving us gently in the direction we were meant to go.

Enjoy the journey,
Louise

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