

The F Word

Written by Katherine Tandy Brown
Tuesday, 01 September 2020 13:49



No, not *that* “F word.” Not the one that I heard so often while working on the thoroughbred racetrack in my 20’s from people who punctuated their sentences with the expression as a matter of course. In order to sound tough, I guess. But as a visualizer, I jumped nearly every time I heard it because the “movie” of that “activity” replayed in my brain. I could live the rest of my days without that word entering my ears and be perfectly, delightfully happy.

Enough digressing. What I’m addressing is the *other* four-letter F word. The one that’s currently running rampant in our society, our country and the world at large. Fear. And that one can be so insidious, so disguised, that identifying it as a root cause of suffering, of anger, of shame, can be tricky, if not nigh impossible. Fear can govern our lives without our knowing it. Did you realize that the three aforementioned emotional states all can be born from fear?

I believe that two forms of fear exist. The first roars in as the result of perceived danger, and can evoke the fight or flight response. The standard example of that type of fear is the oncoming train, and if you should find yourself in that situation, by all means, take flight. Get off those tracks pronto.

Just this morning, I was about to turn right onto Ribaut Road at the Bay Street/Depot Road/Ribaut stoplight on a green signal. Fortunately, I took one more look and saw a car approaching the light from my left at speed. *She has a red signal,* I thought. *She’ll stop.* But she never did. Simply flew right on through that major intersection without a thought of slowing down. Another two or three seconds and you’d be reading this in my epitaph. Whew! Fear definitely came up for me at that close call. Then relief. Then yes, anger. All to be expected.

Though I've mentioned this in previous columns, it's worth repeating, that the pandemic has triggered widespread fear on many levels and for good reason. It can be deadly for you and/or loved ones. The perpetrator – the Covid-19 virus – is a smart, sneaky little sucker. The medical and scientific communities are trying to nail its behavior patterns so those experts can inform the public what to be on the lookout for. My heartfelt wishes go out to them. May they find solutions soon. But until that time, each of us is making decisions based on what we feel is right for us and for our families . . . and hopefully, for our fellow man, i.e. mask-wearing in public.

What I find personally during these uncertain times is that my fear level can change from day to day. Not a follower of hard news, I avoid major stories and incessant pundit speculations about political, economic and pandemic issues. Yep. Just call me Ostrich. However, occasionally, a piece of news will sneak past my don't-tell-me-unless-a-hurricane's-on-the-way radar, and I can fall right into fear. Which can get *big*. Often much larger than the issue deserves. Not unlike a dog when its hackles rise to make it look bigger or a bear when it stands up to threaten. Once my mind gloms onto it, fear can take time and focus to shrink back to size.

To quote visionary pioneer in women's health, Dr. Christiane Northrup, "Your mind can be a dangerous neighborhood where you shouldn't go alone at night."

Meditating, reading or listening to a soul-soothing book or music, chatting with a friend, walking or biking on the Spanish Moss Trail can return my brain to a far-safer neighborhood.

That said, however, most days, living in the Lowcountry is enough to counteract any fear that comes my way. Good heavens, all you have to do is walk outside and look around at the exquisite vistas. What an up – mighty, graceful live oaks with icicles of Spanish moss and rain-fed clumps of resurrection fern; glorious expanses of marshlands that reflect every vivid hue in VanGogh's palette at sunset; the ever-changing skies just as wide as those in Big Sky Country; fascinating wildlife . . . magnificent wood storks and pelicans, skulking gators, elusive marsh hens, Gullah "shrimps;" and then, the water. Ah, the water. If you ever have the opportunity to fly over our Lowcountry, jump on it. Veins of salty water thread through the land like blue highways across a map.

The second kind of fear is the kind that may seem massive, that may make you want to run from it and/or stick your head in the sand. It's Ostrich again. Essentially, it's the fear of change,

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the fear of trying something new, of testing out a new behavior, of breaking a habit or addiction that you may have been escaping behind for years, perhaps even the fear of succeeding at something you really want.

Confronting these fears, standing toe-to-toe with them head on can start you on the road to new behavior. Identify the fear, claim it and call it out. Then choose a method to resolve the issue. Above all, don't hesitate to get help if you need it. During my last move – this one across town from one house to a smaller one – I found myself so overwhelmed by the amount of packing and pitching I still had left to do before the movers arrived in four days that I was in a complete panic. Pure fear that I'd never get it all done in time. So I called a friend who's a professional organizer, and she gave me the name of a woman who could help. The minute this efficient lady walked in my door each day, I'd feel calmer. I dubbed her my "packing coach," and we worked together under her directions. I swear I could never have moved without her.

As I was leaving home for my freshman year in college, my mom gave me a spot-on piece of advice that I still use when needed. "You'll always be fine if you have an alternative." Words to remember, as there usually is one.

As for the other F word, perhaps someone near and dear to you has gently – or firmly – "suggested" that you cut that expression out of your collection of frequent go-to swear-words. Maybe Covid isolation has led to introspection, and you'd like to clean up a few things in your life that aren't working for you anymore, that make you feel bad about yourself and/or waste time – overeating, not exercising, staying up too late and not getting enough sleep. If excessive cursing happens to be one of those habits you want to break, you have two choices, both the brainchildren of swearing expert (Who knew?) James V. O'Connor. You can attend The Cuss Control Academy in Northbrook IL. Or pour yourself a stiff one and snuggle up to *Cuss Control: The Complete Book on How to Curb Your Cursing*.¹

Really. The book has been featured and reviewed on hundreds of media outlets the likes of *TIME*²

magazine, The Oprah Show, the *New York Times*, and the O'Reilly Factor.

If you try either of the above and the process works, we want you as a *Wholly Holistics*³ guest columnist for the download on your experience!