

## **Stronger Than Ever Before**

*By: Ayzee Kirchhofer*

Many have a fear of the dark, but is it really the dark that they're afraid of, or is it what they believe may be there when they cannot see it? What if you were to feel this way about every day life? What if you feared the unknowns in life as some fear the dark? For those with anxiety, there is a fear, an often constant fear, a darkness in the back of their mind that blankets rational thoughts with a plethora of "what ifs?" However, you must understand that *there is no such thing as darkness, for in reality, darkness is merely the absence of light*. Once something is pitch black, it is impossible for it to get darker; therefore, when one feels that they are in the darkest place in life imaginable, in the depths of fear, pain and frustration, it must be remembered that there is a limit to where the darkness can reach. In time, with effort, a sense of direction can be restored once again; it is only a matter of creating light.

Anxiety can be compared to the infamous "monster under the bed" that many children are afraid of; the one that hides in the dark, and feeds off of their fear of the unknown. As one with anxiety goes about their life trying to accomplish tasks or face certain situations, it may feel as though this anxiety "monster" is keeping them cornered in a pitch black room because it knows that they are afraid and uncertain of what might be around them or of what might be waiting when they step away from the wall. Anxiety creates sounds, and feelings, and shares troubling thoughts that keep you where you are because anxiety thinks its fun to watch you squirm. The longer you stay paralyzed with fear, the longer it has to learn what scares you the most, and in turn, uses those things to keep you trapped there, in a seemingly endless cycle of dread. For some, even though they don't enjoy how anxiety makes them feel, they'd rather stay in the corner listening to the words it offers because it is more predictable and comfortable than the courage that would be needed in order to venture out and away from the "safety" of the corner. Over time, if you allow it to, a world that is vast and full of possibilities may begin to shrink until you're unable to see beyond the darkness that you feel anxiety has trapped you in. This being said, though the feelings of fear that it causes you to experience are very real, you must realize that this "anxiety monster" is not dangerous at all; this is why it hides in the dark, because if you were to realize what it actually looked like, it wouldn't have the same power over you. The only *real* danger anxiety possesses, is the potential to keep you from living the best life you can, and from doing the things you enjoy with the people you care about. This is why you must confront and conquer anxiety: not because it is life threatening, but because it is *lifestyle threatening*. You deserve to live with confidence and with the ability to overcome challenges with courage; which is not to say without fear, but in spite of fear. It is human nature to have worries and concerns, but you must learn to distinguish between difficulty, and actual danger.

Overcoming something that so greatly affects your life is not a simple task, and it can be overwhelming to consider how many changes need to be made, or how many fears need to be faced, but as Lao Tzu once said: “A Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. Just as you don’t need to know what will happen in fifty years from now in order to live for today, you don’t need to know what is on the other side of the pitch black room in order to take a step, all you need to know is what is directly in front of you. Tip toe if you must, but push yourself to take the step. In the darkest cavern, even the tiniest flame can light the way and help you to tip toe in a better direction. So, if you imagine your inner strength and confidence as a flame, as your confidence grows, so will the fire, and soon your surroundings will be bright enough to see that there was never anything holding you back in the corner all that time, except for the fear that your mind created.

Life is about finding balance: for every piece of darkness there is light, for every pain there is comfort. You would not know light if you had never experienced darkness, you would not know courage without having been afraid. If you learn to understand the feelings you experience rather than fear them, it will give you so much more power and control over your own mind and body. Accept the anxiety you may feel and allow yourself to acknowledge it for what it is, and understand how it affects you without running away in panic. We don’t necessarily need to lead a life without anxiety and without worries, but we must learn to manage them and take strides to progress beyond them to teach ourselves the ability we have to overcome our greatest challenges.

Now, to every individual who has ever experienced or been challenged by anxiety: Do not allow yourself to feel as though anxiety is all you are. You are so much more than your anxiety; it may simply be a part of you such as your love of the outdoors or your fascination with music. Do not play the victim. You are a fighter, and you are a flame, and you are bright enough to burn your way through your darkest hours. Your challenges do not define you; it is the choices you make and the actions that you take to move beyond them that truly speak of your character. Focus on what brings you joy. Focus on your passions. Focus on your triumphs. Focus on the future you wish to create and make it so. Know that you are capable, and strong, and worthy of leading the life you choose. From adversity you grow, and to grow is to gain strength of all kinds. After all is said and done, the night may feel long and be dark as the corners of the universe, but no matter how long the night may be, with time and with patience, it is inevitable that you will find yourself standing in the light of the morning once again, and standing stronger than ever before.