



You Are Not Alone

AN EBOOK ABOUT ANXIETY

Acknowledgements

To Gareth

I want to express my gratitude to you for being the first point of contact during my anxiety episodes. You made it more bearable by being there. My partner in combat. You've bore the brunt and still loved me and for that I will be eternally grateful. Short and sweet but you know more than anyone. Thank you for being my husband.

To my children. Mum isn't a psychopath, honestly. I know you know that, but I want to clarify! Without you lot distracting me, I think anxiety would have won a few battles. But because of you, I fight. I fight it because I want to give you the best version of me possible. You deserve that. I am so blessed to have such great kids. You just know when to leave me alone or when to cuddle me. You know when you should do something for me that will take the pressure off. Even if it's just making a cuppa. I am the luckiest mum in the world to have you three. And I love you more than words could ever express.

My own mum. I owe you everything. You'll say I don't and that it's just what mums do, and I know that because I would do it for my own kids, but mum, you have been my rock

throughout my life. You've shouted at me, you've comforted me, you've held my hand and talked me through and laughed at me (which is strangely comforting because if you aren't worried then I don't need to be either. Mum knows best hey?!). You are not just my mum but my best friend and the only person in the universe who knows me better than I know myself! I am so proud to be your daughter and the only way I can repay you is to be happy. Because that's all you want. But I want you to know that I will always be your rock too. If you ever need me, I'm your right-hand woman. And I love you squillions!

My friends. Kelly, Natalie and Cat. You all appeared at different stages of my life, but you've all impacted on me so much in different ways and will be my best friends for the rest of my life. To thank you all individually would take another book, so I want to thank you here and now. You know what you've done for me. Whether that be talking me down, putting the world to rights or just knowing when I wasn't quite myself. Thank you. I love you all.

The medical professionals. Ambulance crew, doctors and nurses. I'd love to thank each and every one individually, but I couldn't possibly remember all your names and at what particular points you have helped me. But you have. Without judgement and with empathy. I am so thankful to organisations such as the NHS. Without them we'd be a quivering wreck. So not just on my behalf, but on behalf of everyone who reads this book, thank you. Thank you, thank

you, thank you and thank you in advance for any other time we may need you. The word **thank you** doesn't seem enough somehow. But it's all I've got.

To everyone else who knows me. If you know me and know I have suffered with anxiety and panic, thank you. For checking up on me, for asking if I'm OK and for just being another human being to talk to. Whether it be about anxiety or not. You make me realise that no-one has a picture-perfect life. And that we are all unique, which actually makes us pretty damn perfect!

“Be the change you want to see in the world”

Mahatma Gandhi

Anxiety & Panic eBook

My True Story

Part One - From the beginning

****Deep Breath****

It all started when I was a nipper. I was 3 years old and completely oblivious to any feelings of anxiety. I mean, why would I know about that?! I was far too busy admiring my white sandals with strawberries on the front! My granny bought me them for my birthday. That's where we were when my life changed forever - at granny's house.

Understand that I had no idea until later in life that what I was about to witness would impact me for the rest of my life. I can only remember this part of that day. But I remember it so vividly as if it were yesterday. We were in the kitchen. By we, I mean me, my mum and my baby cousin. I think my brother may have been there too, but I can't recall. My granny's kitchen was always tidy. She had a big rug on the floor, one of those ones that was trendy at the time – but we are going back to early 80's! My baby cousin was lying on his stomach on said rug, donning some brown dungaree type outfit. Granny had a breakfast bar which was very high for a 3-year-old, and so also had the high stools to match. The

door to the kitchen was straight off the living room and was slightly ajar – I'd say 3 or 4 inches. My mum had moved a stool so that she could sit next to the door. I remember craning my neck to look up at my mum because she was so high on the stool, and seeing a tear roll down her cheek.

"Why are you crying Mummy?" I asked. She didn't answer, just stroked my hair. She looked so sad. And looking back, so young. Because she was. She was 22. The youngest of 3. She was (still is) a very pretty lady with brunette hair and green eyes. And so, so strong because at 22, I have no idea how she got through losing her mum. I am in awe of how strong she is. Perhaps she needed to be. For us kids.

I looked through the ajar kitchen door to see my granny lying down on her burgundy, velvety sofa with her eyes closed. I struggled to understand why she wanted to go to sleep when we were visiting. She was very old to me, at the time. She was 50. Of course, she was young. I realised that as I turned the corner into adulthood. She was a beautiful lady, with grey wavy hair and sharp striking features. And a sharp personality to match. She was the only one who could get me to eat mince! And soup! But I ate it because she wouldn't let me down from the table if I didn't! She'd say things like "Giddy up and drink your milk" (she was Irish) when me and my brother would be sitting on her living room floor glued to the telly! My aunt was in a spin. I just remember her urgency to call the paramedics.

My dear granny had suffered a brain haemorrhage. One minute she was fine and the next she was asleep. She clung

on to life for a few days until she couldn't fight anymore. *Rest in Peace Granny xx*

And that's it. That's the memory that will forever be etched in my mind. It stirs emotions in me that I never knew existed. Even today, 30 odd years later. The difference is that I now know that this was the catalyst for my eventual anxiety and panic attacks. I had counselling in my late 20's which was when, with the help of a therapist, I identified the above as the root cause. But more about that later!

When I was about 9 years old, I started to have recurring nightmares. In them I was a tiny person surrounded by gigantic trees and an entity that would 'come to get me!' I'd wake with a start just before the black entity engulfed me and panic so much that I would be scared to go back to sleep. This went on for years. I'm not sure how many but I was glad when they stopped! One night my mum had to lay on the floor next to my bed and hold my hand until I fell asleep. I was convinced I was going to die. So young and innocent I was then, but anxiety did not care! I still didn't understand what was happening to me. I knew I was safe though because my mum said so.

When I was 12, I used to suffer from unbearable headaches. Now, I know it was hormones, my body changing and the like. But then, I was convinced I had a terminal illness. A brain tumour. Or a haemorrhage.

Writing this is eye-opening because of all the realisation I have encountered over the years, I never did make the

connection from 3-year-old me to 12-year-old me. I know now, right now, that my incoherent fear of having something wrong in my brain stemmed from the day I watched my granny asleep on the sofa.

I remember my uncle laughing at me whilst I sat on the stairs with yet another headache, adamant that I was going to die. For years after, he would laugh and ask me 'how's the tumour?' I'm sure there was no malice and that it was his way of joking around but it made me feel humiliated and not taken seriously. But I was still oblivious aged 12 to the real culprit which was of course, anxiety. I simply just had a headache. There was no getting through to me then and this carried on into adulthood. Nothing and nobody could convince me that I wasn't a ticking time bomb! If it wasn't my head, it was my heart. And so, it carried on.

Perhaps my parents knew it was anxiety? Perhaps that's why there was no urgency to call the paramedics for me? I've read that anxiety can be hereditary. Which would make sense because I vaguely remember my dad suffering when I was young.

The years that followed were filled with odd sensations that no one could explain. I'd make little sounds in my throat which were noticeable at times. My mum used to ask me why I did it. I didn't know. And that's the truth. I had tinnitus out of nowhere. I suffered with stomach spasms, I still do! I went on to have numerous tests from the age of around 15, which all concluded that I was healthy and that no, I wasn't going to keel over and die! This was not the end of my battle. In fact, this was just the beginning.

As I started to realise that I could be referred for tests, I started to feel more symptoms. I'm not sure why it happened that way although I can explain it now. You see, when we suffer with anxiety, in particular health anxiety, we become hyper aware of every twinge we feel in our bodies. But our brains are trained, albeit by our earlier experiences, to zoom in on the pain we feel in our leg or our arm or our head, etc, etc. This leads us to start the 'convincing ourselves' process. We focus on that pain so much that we manifest it into something far worse than it is. However, we don't know the difference. We can't tell if it's the start of a life threatening disease or if it's just a trapped nerve, or whatever. My mum used to chastise me for 'wishing it upon myself'. That used to frustrate me. Why the hell would I want to wish some illness upon myself? I understand what she meant now, but back then I couldn't comprehend. The thing is, I knew that there were professionals who could reassure me from a medical point of view. I never, ever took advantage of that, but I have probably had more tests done throughout my life than the majority.

Aged 17 I had a boyfriend. It was a long-term relationship, well, 2 years! But that was long term to me! The relationship itself bears no relevance to this book but what I experienced during that time is significant. About 9 months into the relationship, his father was diagnosed with cancer. It had spread from his lungs to his bones, or the other way around, I can't quite remember but it was terminal. One night shortly after diagnosis, he was taken into hospital and the doctors decided that he needed to go into a hospice. I'm not sure

either my boyfriend or I knew what that meant. We went to visit him regularly during his short stay there. One time we went, he was sleeping. From the minute we arrived until the minute we left. We assumed he needed the rest and the nurses assured us he was doing OK. Perhaps they were pacifying us? We were young after all. The next day we arrived, his father was sitting up in bed, a great big smile on his face and he proceeded to tell us that he felt great. He'd eaten all his dinner, which was a large salad, and the future, in that moment, looked promising. The next day we visited he was sleeping. His hand was cold. The nurses said we should prepare for goodbye!

"What? How? Yesterday he was fine!"

But it was nature's way of letting him have one last meal to enjoy. If only we knew at the time. That night he took his final breath whilst my boyfriend and I held his hands. I will never forget the display of emotion from the opposite side of the bed. It was heart breaking.

There was something that made me angry when we went to the chapel of rest. We noticed that he had cotton wool in his mouth! The staff at the mortuary told us that that's what they do to preserve the look of someone who had passed. The problem was, they hadn't done it properly! He had cotton wool protruding from his face! Not acceptable! That image is one that I have carried with me through to adulthood.

**I don't mean to write this to trigger anxiety or panic attacks.
Please bear with me.**

When I was 18, I was getting ready for a night on the town. I am a late person, by the way! Not always, not when I have meetings, but when I arrange to meet friends, I am nearly always late! Its now a running joke among friends! Anyway, this night my hair wouldn't go right or some shizzle, but I'm glad it didn't. Or am I glad? See what you think... My dad was driving a taxi, a hackney carriage, at the time. I was at home with my best friend waiting patiently for me to get my arse into gear when there was a loud 'bang, bang, bang!' on the front door! Bear in mind that seconds before, my mum noticed headlights coming up the driveway at an alarming rate and stopping just before they hit the front of the house! My mum opened the front door and my dad literally fell inside! My mum shouted for one of us to get our neighbour, who incidentally was an off-duty paramedic, to come round quickly. I knew what it was. I just knew! I'd read up on the subject so many times that I knew the symptoms. I suppose the only good thing about being hyper aware with anxiety is that we are all over the signs and symptoms! In particular, the ones we are most afraid of! Mostly unjustifiably but if we ever need to use our self-acquired skill, its always there!

My dad needed the loo, but my paramedic neighbour would not let him go. I knew why then. As do I now. My poor dad was lying there in the hallway and had turned the most disturbing shade of grey! I had never seen him so vulnerable. He was stocky and full of tattoo's and we all thought he was invincible! I stayed out of the way and made sure my siblings did too. The moment he was carried out on the stretcher was

awful. He told my brother to look after us all and handed over ownership of his drum kit. He thought he was going to die. A heart attack at 42. Thankfully, the next time I saw my dad was in the hospital. He was sitting up in bed, all colour returned to normal and he was complaining that he wanted to come home! Dad was back! Thank God! A stent and some long-term medication later and he's right as rain! But the memory of that day will haunt me forever.

All of the above is the perfect manifestation ground for anxiety to breed!

My final teen years went by and into my twenties I was pretty much anxiety free. That's where it gets you. It makes you believe that it has vanished but then pounces when you least expect it! **But... there is hope. I promise!**

I went on into my twenties and met a man who I married. We went on to have 3 children. He was my rock over those next years but by his own admission, he didn't understand anxiety and panic attacks. He didn't really KNOW how to help me. But boy did he bear the brunt of my anguish at times?!! We had more ups and downs than I care to remember – a lot to do with my anxiety. It really was that bad at its peak but that comes a tiny bit later He serves Queen and Country you see. I was a military wife. We had what feels like 957 houses, (probably more like 12 or 13!!) and the kids have had equal amounts of schools. It was hard going. Change. Change plus anxiety equals disaster, in my own mind. But I did it. Over and over again. But that's the life I chose and so I stood by it.

Anxiety and panic attacks then conspired to choose a time in the very near future to really show me what they're made of!

Fast forward aged 29. I'd just had my youngest child when we were told that we were moving – to Germany! I had never been abroad before (except Ireland, but I'm not even sure if that counts!) I had no idea what to expect but I knew I was scared! But that wasn't when anxiety struck. It was biding its time! Anyway, we arrived by car ferry and were greeted by 6 inches of snow! It was January 2009. The night we arrived, we stayed in a flat as we were due to move into our house the following day. I stood on the balcony of the first floor flat and noticed two elderly ladies walking together and nattering away in German. I cried. Because I'd never heard anyone speaking their native language in their native land. And it was scary. I was scared of how I would cope in a foreign country. I wanted to go home. But I didn't. And I actually really enjoyed our time out there!

Anyway, two thirds of the way into the year, my husband got sent away on operations to Afghanistan. We'd been married 4 years by this point and aside from the odd few weeks away here and there, I'd never experienced him not being there. As you can imagine, this was emotional for me. Three children aged 9, 3 and 10 months, in a foreign country did not bode well at all. So, we said our goodbyes and off he went. I was so worried because of where he was going, I watched the news religiously! I lived for the kids obviously, but the phone calls to tell me he was fine were a constant

worry. One day I woke up with chest pain so went to see the doctor. The thing about Germany is they are so bloody efficient with everything! The doctor sent me to hospital. After a few tests the told me that they would not rule out coronary heart disease and that they had scheduled an angiogram for me on the Monday (it was Friday), and that I would have to stay in for the weekend because there was no doctor to perform the test until the Monday. I refused. Husband on ops, 3 kids at home, there was just no way I'd stay all weekend. By this point the military welfare had arranged for my mum to fly over to take care of me. I signed the relevant consent forms and they let me leave as long as returned at a specified time for my appointment, which I agreed to do. On the Saturday night, I had invited two of my friends over to have a glass of wine and a natter with my me and my mum. Everything was fine aside from the looming angiogram but I thought my brain had processed it. I sat on the kitchen side, kids in bed, chatting away happy as Larry when all of a sudden, I felt a wave of... something! I had no idea what it was. I jumped down and went into the hallway where I shouted for my mum and my legs buckled underneath me! My voice went deep (I don't actually know if it did or if my mind was playing tricks on me) and I was shaking from head to toe! The sensations that followed were awful. Just awful. Pins and needles in my hands and feet, racing heart rate, a feeling of being incontinent (although I wasn't), sweating profusely, cold then hot... I thought I was going to die.

My mum comforted and reassured me until I felt better but it left me exhausted. This was the worst panic attack I'd had to

date. Monday came and the angiogram was performed. It was amazing by the way! Seeing your own heart on a screen was very surreal but very interesting! I'm not by any means suggesting you should, but considering I was riddled with anxiety by this point, it was really unusual for me to be so intrigued by this. All tests including angiogram were fine. Life went back to normal, mum went home, and I got on with being a mum and living for those phone calls. He returned home safely thank god!

At some stage a little later, I'd had headaches. Again, the German efficiency kicked in and I was sent for a brain scan. Anxiety tipped up then too! It's like every time I am vulnerable, it laughs and sees an opportunity to get to work! Brain scan results normal. I have one! A brain that is! Yay!

During all of these episodes, I never accepted any form of medication for anxiety. I didn't want it. I refused to 'rely' on medication. I'd read too many stories about people depending on tablets and having trouble coming off them. I didn't need them. Or so I thought. I relented. And this was my first encounter with medicine for this illness. I hated that I gave in. I hated the stigma attached to this type of medication. Anti-depressants. I wasn't depressed, I know that much. I was just under constant attack from an invisible illness! It was the start of a very sketchy relationship with SSRIs. I was also referred to a counsellor. This is when the root cause of my anxiety was established. I had to go right back into my childhood, to my earliest memory. And that was it! That was clarification of where all of these horrid physical

feelings stemmed from. If I'm honest, I wasn't sure I believed it at the time because my childhood was great. Apart from the anxiety, I had a fun time as a kid.

Something my therapist said did not sit well with me and so I didn't go back after the third session! This will be explained in Part 2.

2nd July 2011. This was the day David Haye was fighting Wladimir Klitschko in Hamburg. We were still in Germany, so my husband had arranged with some friends to go to the match. I stayed home with the kids and we'd decided to have some quality time together doing something fun. My eldest had his friend staying over so we invited him too. We chose to go to a park that had water features and stuff a few miles away from our house. So off we went, me and four kids, one of which wasn't mine. We had a great time until the last part of the park. My eldest was playing on a roundabout, one of those old type ones that have a disc on top of a pole in the centre and you have to spin that in order to spin the roundabout. I had my back to him whilst holding his baby brother's hand whilst he was balancing on an oversized log, when I heard the most blood curdling scream. Instantly I turned to see my boy crouched on the roundabout looking at me crying. I thought he'd trapped his finger. I turned away just for a second so that I could lift the baby down and when I looked up again, I saw his friend. I have never seen anyone look so pale! He came towards me repeating the words "Oh my God!" It was like it was all happening in slow motion. I looked over at my boy again and saw it!! I actually saw my

child's leg snapped in two! (Apologies if you are squeamish... I know I am!!) His bones were literally hanging out of his leg and I could not go near him! I just couldn't. I couldn't see my boy in pain. So I ran. I left my baby, my 3-year-old, my son's friend and my son with his twisted-up leg and I ran. To get help. There was no-one around. I was in a German park with not one other person in it!! I ran down a hill at the side of the park screaming and shouting and crying for someone to help me. Eventually a lady came into sight. She was German but spoke very good English. She took details from me whilst already on the phone to the emergency services and reiterated to them what I'd said. We ran back up the hill. My boy was calm now. He'd gone into shock. All he wanted was a cuddle from his mum, but I couldn't give it to him! I couldn't. I was being comforted by another lady who had come to investigate when I realised 'I'd left my babies!!' Frantically searching for them I noticed they were being looked after by two teenage girls. I was so thankful to them. The ambulance came and I was taken over to my boy. I still couldn't see him like that, so I sat on the edge of the roundabout with my back to him and extended my arm around him. He was shivering and kept asking me if this was a dream. My heart literally broke. I was reassured that he was just in shock and that he was about to be sedated so they could move him. I watched as they put him in the ambulance and remember the paramedic telling me that he was in no pain now. I begged them to take care of my boy.

The lady who helped me stayed by my side throughout. She came to the hospital, translated everything the doctors said, helped me home with my two little ones and wouldn't leave

me until she knew I was OK. I gave her my home phone number because she wanted to call the next day to check on my son. True to her word, she did. But I missed it. She left a message for me and I accidentally deleted it. I never heard from her again. I only knew her first name.

Thank you, Camilla. I will never forget what you did for me.

My sons' leg was fixed by the very talented surgeons. Recovery was long but today, he is fine.

Anxiety didn't attempt to pounce then. Panic did, as you'd expect, but not anxiety. Not in the way I know it today. After such a harrowing experience (not least for my son) you'd think that it would've relished the opportunity. Nope. That came later.

A few more years went by and there were some ups and downs and changes and things you'd expect from married (military) life. Sure, anxiety reared on numerous occasions and manifested in various ways, but when I expected it to turn up, it was a no show! There were times that I look back on now and it amazes me that it didn't hit me like a blow to the head. Strange! Considering I have housed it for such a long time.

It waited. It hid from me like the cowardly cretin it is. We have good anxieties too. But I am referring to the bad. The type that makes you think you're going crazy, like you belong in a psychiatric unit! We'll talk about manifestation later.

2016 brought my father-in-law cancer diagnosis. It was terminal. **That was such a hard time.** I won't elaborate out of respect for him and for my family. But we lost him mid-2017. He was gone. *Rest in Peace RD xx*

A little later in the year things settled and life was good again. I was working and everything was tickety boo! In my (then) line of work, I had to conduct presentations. I didn't hate doing them. In fact, I loved the interaction. I'd get questions that I loved to answer confidently and that made me feel powerful. Not superior. Just powerful. I'd get the class clown throw a random remark in the mix which I'd quip at in record time and this created fun. We'd laugh. And that made for a great rapport and positive results.

Out of nowhere, during one of my presentations, I felt it. That familiar tingle in my arm. I tried to ignore it, silently fight off, but it got worse. I went hot. Very hot. Like I needed air. But I couldn't walk out of the room when all eyes were on me. I tried and tried to push it to the back of my mind, but it pushed back. I was fighting a losing battle. Which started to become apparent to the classroom full of people I was talking to. I stumbled over my words, I answered questions vaguely and I could not wait to get out of that room. I was so embarrassed. And anxiety was responsible. I went home so deflated and ashamed that I couldn't override this FEELING! Because that's what it is... a feeling! More about that later too.

It happened again during my next presentation. Whether that was because I was anticipating it, remains a mystery. This is when anxiety started to stalk me. This is when it got so

bad that I gave up my job. I just couldn't take the risk any more.

The problem with anxiety is that it can sometimes force you to make irrational decisions. This was one of mine. I felt like a failure. My husband tried to comfort me, but it didn't help. Nothing did. I'd have so many panic attacks that I'd actually get angry at it when it didn't turn up! I knew it would. I just didn't know when. This impacted on relations with my family. In particular my husband. He tried to help me, but I'd accuse him of not understanding and not caring. This wasn't true of course. But again, anxiety makes the irrational side come out. I started to feel like it was brainwashing me. Now, you might relate to this or you might not, but I started to put anxiety first. I know, I know! It made me do it. It started to seem easier to let it in and let it trample all over me and then leave me broken. I let it. Because that was the only way I could get through it. This went on for the majority of that year. The paramedics were called more than once. I took myself to the hospital and told the receptionist in no uncertain terms that I was dying. Tests, tests and more tests later concluded that I was actually fine. But Anxiety would never let me believe that. As soon as I thought for one second that I was OK, anxiety would skip in and tell me I'm not!

A bit later in the year, I felt slightly better. I started work as a home carer. I loved going to see the service users, helping them with day to day stuff. Some I didn't even do anything for. All they wanted was someone to sit and talk to them. I had done that type of work before, but this time gave me a

whole new perspective. The stories they told were intriguing and interesting. But anxiety had other ideas. It'd try to creep in whilst I was helping someone to get ready for bed. Or when I was making breakfast for someone. It was ruthless! For someone with anxiety, perhaps you might think that a job in care work is not the smartest move. But the way I saw it was that if the people I tended to could be so upbeat and positive, then I had no right not to be!

Christmas of 2017, we took the kids to Disneyland in Paris. It was magical. But anxiety hitched a ride too! I did my best to push it away, but it was there the whole time. It is a selfish illness! It does not discriminate!

In the midst of all of this, my relationship with medication was very on and off. I'd stop taking it when I felt better, partly because I believed I felt better, and partly because I didn't WANT to take it. I didn't want to put it in my body, and I didn't want anyone to know I was taking it. The shame!

At the beginning of 2018 I had an idea to document my highs and lows. I'm not sure why I chose to do it on a public page on social media?! If I had to guess now, I'd say that it was because if people were expecting to hear from me, then I would make sure I kept up with it. I could have written a journal... I guess I thought I wouldn't keep it up. Incidentally, I posted for 3 months and then stopped. Can you guess why? Anxiety and panic attacks!! Ironical eh?! I just couldn't face telling the truth about how I was suffering on a public platform. I wanted to. I just couldn't. I will share some of my early posts in Part 2.

I still write my page. It helps. A lot. It's called Living With Panic. It's a public page but I invite you to come along and have a read, if you haven't already. It might help. And if it does and you'd like to interact more with me, I also have a private group of the same name.

We moved abroad again and that's when anxiety really decided to go all out on me! It happened in the street. That was horrendous! Aside from the physical feelings of sheer panic, were feelings of shame and embarrassment. People were kind, offering me glasses of water and for me to sit down. I was so grateful to those people. It happened at home numerous times and I'd had enough! I had been back on regular medication for a while. The doctor 'upped' my dosage as anxiety tried to kick me out of my own body! The side effects from the double dose was horrible. Dry mouth was one of them. Urgh! So, I reduced back down to the original dose. I am still taking medication today. I won't stop because I've come to realise that sometimes we all need a little bit of help. Rather like taking a paracetamol for a headache. No shame required.

These are all episodes that were major contributors to my health anxiety. Sure, there were other times in my life that didn't go smoothly, as I guess we all encounter. But these experiences shaped my life and have ultimately made me who I am today.

Anyway, I vowed to get rid of this imposter forever. This is when I decided to take my life back. It's MY life. And I wanted it back!! I began to document on my page again with astounding results. People were relating to what I was

writing. People like you. This filled me full of determination to help myself heal. And that's what I've done. My posts are a part of my daily routine. Even if there's nothing to report, I will post so that I can remind you that you're not alone.

Part Two – The healing Journey

I had never known how to overcome anxiety. I just thought it was my personality. I thought I was meant to be **that** person. Only recently have I discovered that in actual fact, it is a learnt behaviour. Sure, it can be hereditary, but for the most part, our experiences have taught our minds and bodies to react the way we do. The fight or flight response. We know this to be the case but how do we heal? How do we undo the damage that has already been done over the years? Do we accept that this is who we are now, and roll over and let anxiety have its way? NO! Is the answer. Absolutely not. We show it who's boss by taking the time out to REALLY look into our souls and find out who we really are! Anxiety will never leave. Its important to know that. Its how we deal with it that will make the difference. Before I talk about the healing journey, I just want to highlight some of the earlier posts I published on my Facebook page...

I am sure there are thousands of people who relate to this extract from my page. Perhaps you do?

21 January 2018

"Last night it happened again. I went to bed and the pain started. First down my left arm and then slowly spidering into my chest. I thought my game was up! (As I always do when

my body decides to make me feel like I'm going to die!) It's real you know! And the reason I say that is because some people don't suffer, some people have no clue of the sheer fright and mental trauma we are experiencing. It's real. And it's scary. Anyway, I twisted and turned and whatever position I found myself in, was worse than the last. I felt sick. I felt incontinent (although my body didn't let go). I felt sweaty but shivery. My husband lay next to me asleep. Do I wake him? Am I being silly? Should I just 'get a grip?' I can't get a grip... No. I'll wake him. He rubbed my back at my request. I told him to stop. Because everything that I think will help, doesn't help. It controlled me for 15 minutes. The full force of panic and anxiety when I should've been at my most relaxed! I don't know about you, but I always think I'm having a heart attack. My husband said, "you know what it is, and it isn't a heart attack!" He was trying to reassure. But this brings me on to the question... Are we crying wolf? Because God forbid if I was having a cardiac episode, would he put it down to anxiety? That question makes me feel more anxious and ever so slightly makes me want to suffer in silence for fear of 'being silly'. We're not silly. We're human. We're super human in fact! We are so in touch with our bodies and minds and so 'aware' and 'cautious' about everything that we are so OUT of touch with our bodies! Does that make sense? We need to take back control. And together we will. I woke up this morning so I figured if I was having a cardiac malfunction, then I wouldn't be sitting here breathing, thinking and writing this.

I should just mention that I did google symptoms when I first got into bed! Don't do it! Google is good... but Google is also bad for your health! I'm trying to learn my lesson..."

This type of attack happened more and more over the course of last year.

I mentioned earlier that the counsellor attributed my anxiety to my earliest memory. I wasn't so sure at the time, but I do believe this now. Because the only way we can move forward, is to initially go backwards. It's the hard truth. And accepting the truth can sometimes be hurtful. But its mandatory if we want to heal.

But something else I have had to learn is to **OWN** my anxiety. Again, a bitter pill to swallow but it is **my** illness and only I can make myself better. When we are in the midst of a panic attack, we need comfort. Right? The next extract from my page is the one where the counsellor pissed me off, so I didn't go back.

13 March 2018

"Back in 2009 I had the worst panic attack I had ever suffered to date. There were reasons for it that I understood then but even more so now. I was due to have an angiogram. I was in a foreign country with my husband away on ops and 3 small children. I was thrown in the deep end. Luckily my mum was there as my support. When it happened, I was enjoying the company of two of my friends and my mum whilst the children were in bed. It hit me like a tonne of bricks from the back of beyond. My symptoms were terrifying. I was hot and cold at the same time, numb hands, tingling arms and legs, I felt as though I was doubly incontinent, and I swear I could see my heart beating through my chest. I thought I was going to die. My mum comforted me by putting my head on her lap and talking me through it - breathing techniques and the like, until it passed. Which felt like hours... it left me exhausted but

my lovely mum was there to see it off and stop it from causing her baby any more distress. Any parent would. Any loved one would. All results were fine, and life went back to normal, however it left me fearing the next unknown attack. So, I had counselling. When I explained what had happened, the CPN asked me how I got through it to which I replied that if it weren't for my mum hugging me to get me through, I don't know what I'd have done. His reaction to that astounded me. He said that was the worst thing my mum could've done! I mean, how rude?! How the heck did he know what was best for me?! How dare he criticise my mother's handling of what was such a terrible, unprovoked attack on me! I didn't go back. I was angry that he could speculate and come to such a ridiculous and insensitive conclusion! And so, life went on. I had other attacks and when I did, I wished my mum was there to comfort me like she did before. I thought of the CPN with anger every time. Fast forward to recent months and weeks. Anxiety and panic have gripped me worse than ever and I've had to deal with it again! This time I had my husband to reassure me, but I didn't feel as comforted as I had done before. That's not because it was my husband, I guess it was because these attacks were like an old, unwanted visitor so I felt like I knew the drill. They were just as scary and just as ruthless and even more frequent, and I felt like I had had enough of them ruining my life. Although I knew them, I didn't know them. I was uneducated. So, I decided to help myself by reading up! I am on meds which are helping me while I train my mind. There's no shame in that. For the first time in the 9 years since that attack when my mum comforted me, I understand why the CPN said what he said. It's true. We are allowing panic to return when we are a victim. Changing the way we respond to them is paramount to getting them to go annoy someone who deserves them!

I'm not there yet... but I am getting there. It is ME who they are attacking, and it is ME who has to fight them off. But in a clever way..."

So, you see, it is only us who can heal.

Shortly after this post, I stopped writing. I just couldn't do it anymore because of the constant attacks.

Until one day, I'd really, really had enough! There had to be more to life, surely? I was sick of being a punch bag for anxiety and panic attacks. I didn't deserve it. So, I decided to fight back. I started writing again a few months later... documenting my highs and lows once again but combining my posts with a positive message for the day. I still suffered but less frequently. I was changing my mindset. I started to believe in myself. My posts started to become more positive. The contrast from how I felt when I wrote that first post, up until now, is tremendous! I still have it, as I've said, but I've learnt to live with it. I've learnt techniques to undermine anxiety. I've learnt and am still learning to retrain my brain. It's an ongoing process and will be forever. But that's OK. My mission today is to take you on the journey with me. Let's beat anxiety. Let's be MINDFUL. Let's EMPOWER each other. Because that is the key to beating this illness.

Part 3 – Top tips

When it comes to self-help, there can be so much choice that it gets confusing. Sometimes, so much so that we just give in. Am I right? But there are simple things that you can do each day to slowly change your mindset. It will take time - Rome

wasn't built in a day, as they say! In the meantime, here are some tips you could try to help you relax:

Lavender. Do not underestimate the power of this essential oil. It can be used in a variety of ways. A few drops on your pillow at night can promote a good night's kip! Honestly, from someone who doesn't particularly like the smell of lavender, it works wonders for me. You can also pop a few drops on your clothes so that you can take the benefits with you wherever you go. You can use it in a warmer in your bedroom if you're not a fan of putting it on your pillow. You can even rub a drop in each pulse point to help keep you calm. You can buy lavender essential oil at health stores.

NB. Always do a skin test first!

Yoga Nidra. Now you may roll your eyes if you aren't familiar but let me tell you what it is. It's a lie down. Whilst listening to guided meditation and following the instructions, i.e. concentrating on and relaxing certain parts of the body. I find this really useful at bedtime. So, drop your lavender on your pillow or in your warmer, hop into bed and play your chosen Yoga Nidra session. (There are an abundance to choose from on YouTube). I did this and had the most restful nights sleep in a long time. Perhaps it will work for you too. Doing it this way is free but if you prefer, you can look for classes in your local area.

Breathing. Good old breathing! If you are feeling the first pangs of a panic attack, now is the time to concentrate on breathing. It's a control thing! And WE are in control, right?! Deep long inhale, hold for 5 seconds, deep long exhale. Panic

likes to take the wheel when it comes to our breathing. We need to take back the wheel and steer ourselves away from panic. Breathing is something we take for granted but practicing in this way may help to curb the attack but also works as a de-stressing tool too. Try doing it for one minute to start with, slowly increasing to 5 minutes as time goes on.

Exercise. I know. You've heard this a million times before. But it works! It doesn't have to be vigorous. Just enough to get the heart pumping and to release those happy hormones! Personally, I like Pilates. Especially the 10-minute solution Pilates (find on YouTube). Because you can do as much or as 50 minutes if you do all 5 segments, or as little as 10 minutes if you just fancy the stretching, for instance. The bottom line is that exercise makes us feel good. The hard part is finding the motivation to do it. You HAVE the motivation already. You're reading this.

Taking time out for you! Its really, really important to take time out for yourself. You're probably reading this and thinking "Yeah right! I'm far too busy to be doing something that isn't productive!" Or "You try taking time out when you have kids to tend to and a house to run and school runs and dinners to cook...!" Stop. It IS productive to spend time on you. Because how can you offer the very best version of you if you are burnt out? Burn out, in my experience, is a breeding ground for anxiety. So, stop. Just for an hour. What do you like doing? Sitting with a cuppa reading a mag? Going roller-skating in the rain? Taking a nice bath with a good book? Whatever it is, whether you want to feel exhilarated or relaxed, make sure you take the time out for YOU.

These are simple things that we often don't pay attention to. So, forgive me if I sound patronising, I just wanted to remind you to look after yourself. And you can do that by implementing one or all of these things into your day at a cost of nothing but your time. I think you'll agree that you are worth your time.

I have come a long way on my journey to self-healing. It's ongoing. It's a long-term change. And it's bloody hard work. But we're worth the effort. I want to help you begin your journey to self-healing. If I remind you that you are valuable, that you are unique and deserve more than to be harassed by anxiety and panic, then join me in this journey.

All that's left to say is today I feel better. And I want you to feel better. Because there is no nicer feeling than the realisation that you don't have to suffer with anxiety. It's a real illness but we have the power to heal ourselves. It's in there. You just have to find it.

Lots of Love

Lil

xoxo

In affiliation with Living With Panic

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