

The Opposite Of Fear

Rain drops pattered on the ground as I splashed through a puddle, walking my dog Summer to my house. I looked left and right for any suspicious people. *Whew!* There was nobody.

Wait a minute, let me start from the beginning. I'm Jessica. I'm 11. And, I have anxiety. It started at the age of 9. Now, I get panic attacks every week or so.

I have a single dad who is a doctor and has to work long hours. He comes home only at 9:30 pm and leaves for work at 4:00 am. I have three sisters: Selina, Lillian, and Kelly. My fear is of troublesome people breaking into the house. Since my dad is gone most of the time, Selina (the oldest) helps me with my anxiety.

Back to the story. I opened the door to my house and took the leash off of Summer. He ran into the living room and greeted my sisters. I went into the living room and sat there with my siblings without saying a word.

"Hi Jessica! How was your day? Is your anxiety better? How are you doing? You haven't said anything," said my irritating, sister Lillian.

"Kelly! Help me here!" I said. But she was too busy having fun with Summer.

"Dinner time!" Selina called from the dining table. We all sat down and ate our food in silence. The garage suddenly opened, and there was my dad in his usual outfit. A white doctor shirt, with a red stethoscope around his neck, and a big warm smile across his face.

"Daaaaaad!" we all exclaimed as Summer jumped up in enthusiasm doing a twirl in the air.

"Hi kiddos, hey Summer," dad said. "Why are you home so early?" I asked in a puzzled tone.

"I got done early," dad replied. "Now let's have some fun!" We all spent dinner time together with dad, and I forgot all about troublesome people.

But in bed, it all came back. I tossed and turned. I wondered if someone was going to break in tonight. The thought of that made me shiver, and I started to tense up. I got up, my bare feet making the cold floor creak. I looked outside at the lonely starless sky and, after a long time, I fell asleep by the window.

Beep! Beep! Beep! My alarm! Time to wake up! But when I got up, I felt faint. I could sense something was wrong today. I pushed myself to eat breakfast until it was time to go to school. “Have a great day Jessica!” said Selina. “Bye,” I said, not feeling good.

I was walking down the sparkling bright halls of Greenwood School, when suddenly I stopped and felt my heart. Oh no. I was about to have a panic attack in front of the whole school! I couldn’t breathe, so I had to take multiple deep breaths. I sat down, wheezing, choking, and panting. *Okay, wiggle your hands and feet and take deep breaths.*

People were staring at me, laughing at me, and looking at me like I was the oddest person in the whole wide world. People even took videos of me. Embarrassment splashed over me, making my cheeks go red like fresh roses. Soon, everyone had gone to their classes. And I was left in the halls, embarrassed and alone.

Half an hour flew by. I was still sitting on the hard floor breathing deeply and heavily. But then my teacher sprinted through the halls rapidly. She knows I have anxiety, so she quickly took me to the nurse’s office and explained what had happened to the nurse and called dad instantly.

So, dad had to call Selina, and she had to delay her class so she could pick me up. See how much chaos a panic attack can cause?

It turned out that when we got back to the house, Kelly, Lillian, and Summer were already there. I slammed the front door shut and made a furious face. “Is everything fine?” asked Selina.

“You’re seriously asking me that?!” I shouted. “I had a panic attack in front of the whole school. It was totally humiliating. I mean, everyone saw that. They laughed at me and took videos. Of course, everything isn’t fine!” I yelled. With that, I stomped up the stairs and shut my bedroom door hard.

Selina opened my door and said in a gentle voice “I know you’re furious and ashamed, but panic attacks are a part of who you are. And I bet someone else in your school also has panic attacks and anxiety. There is nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Yeah,” I said. “But when that happened, I just felt like, you know, embarrassed and depressed that they all laughed at me.”

“That’s their loss. They don’t know what’s going on in your life, but then again we don’t know

what's going on in their life. That's the thing, you always have to think about other people's perspectives. Because who knows, maybe something is going on in their family, or maybe they are having a difficult time in school."

I stared at her.

"What I'm trying to say is you never know what other people are experiencing in life," said Selina again.

"That's ridiculous. Who thinks like that?" I asked.

"I do," Selina said firmly. "And, it's about time you think like that too." She walked to the door, then turned to me, and said, "You have to stop being negative." She then stormed out of the room.

That night, I skipped dinner. As I was lying in bed, a cloud of thoughts shot out of my mind and started to pour out on me like rain. I could actually hear thunder in my mind. *Why do I have to think about other people's perspectives? If people have something going on in their life shouldn't they just say what it is?*

Summer soon ran upstairs to my room and jumped in the bed to snuggle in my lap. That helped. A lot. It gave me more time to think about what happened today. But suddenly, a thought struck me, which made me panic. Yes, panic again! My thought was *Is there going to be more bad stuff coming in the way tonight?* And you know, I wouldn't find the answer to my question until tonight, which made it worse.

Too much was going on, making the cloud of thoughts swirl into one giant tornado in my mind. Selina's argument with me, the panic attack in front of the school, and worrying about the future, which was out of my hands.

I soon heard the door open and Kelly interrupted my thought tornado. "Here is dinner!" she said gleefully "Oh, and I just wanted to let you know that dad is coming home at 10:30 instead of 9:30." Then she skipped outside the room and started humming her favorite tune.

10:30? Huh! The day is becoming worse! But someone might be really sick in the hospital and dad has to stay till late.

The next couple of hours zoomed by. I didn't dare to go downstairs and face Selina, so instead I played with Kelly, Lillian, and Summer. An hour before bed I was feeling better. Actually, way better. "So? What do you want to do?" I asked Lillian and Kelly, flopping on the bed. "Tell scary stories? Jump on the bed? Do a fake talent show?" "I don't know, but we should probably get to bed because it's near bedtime," said Kelly. "I agree, because I'm exhausted and even though dad will come home only later, I think we should go to bed," said Lillian. "Fine," I said rolling my eyes.

Selina tucked all three of us into bed. But with me, she just put the blanket on and did not say good night. When dad got home, he asked me why I was still awake. So I explained what had happened. Dad was more patient, he sat with me till I slept.

Beep! Beep! Beep! Time to wake up? Already?

But this alarm was different. Not the one that you use to wake up, but the one that tells you that someone broke in. Summer started to bark his head off because he could sense the intruder. My body completely froze, and I didn't feel warm at all even though it was a warm night. My nervousness started to build up. I saw my dad and siblings going down the stairs, leaving Summer in his crate.

"No! Don't go downstairs, the cruel person could harm you!" I exclaimed.

"We have to. I want to know what's going on," said dad.

"Okay but wait for me," I said.

"Are you sure? This is your fear," dad said.

"I'm sure, I have to face my fear and be fearless in order to get rid of anxiety," I said. But as I went downstairs I felt a chill crawling up my spine, spreading on my arms, and leaving a trail of goosebumps.

When we went down, I caught a glimpse of a lady. She had a long blue dress, black hair gleaming in the light, a yellow hairclip, green eyeshadow, and red high heels.

"What are you doing?" asked my dad.

"Breaking into your house and stealing. What do you think?" said the thief. As she said this,

sweat trailed down my neck. But for the first time, I didn't get a panic attack in the scariest situation ever possible. Could that mean I was not afraid?

I was doing what my therapist told me to do. I was wiggling my feet and hands, taking deep breaths, and counting backward by 3's from 100. 97, 94, 91, 88... This actually helped a lot this time and was partly the reason why I wasn't terrified.

All of a sudden, Selina asked the thief "Why did you want to rob this house?" I thought to myself *What kind of a question is that?* But then I realized what she was doing. *You always have to think about other people's perspective... Because you never know what they are experiencing.*

"Cause I want to rob it. Duh!" the thief said in an unpleasant tone.

We were all in the dining room and the thief wasn't doing anything at all. In a minute of silence, I was hit with an idea. The tenseness drained out of me, and I stood up boldly. "What she meant to ask was is there something going on in your life?" I spoke confidently. "If there is something going on in your life and you don't want to share it that's fine, but it might help you to get your emotions out if you talk about it."

The lady looked at me for one long minute, and sighed. "I didn't grow up with a good family. You see, they made me do everything for them and every time what I did for them was well done, I would not get any credit for it. As a few years passed I didn't feel right with my family. So, I ran away. But then I became homeless and poor. Tonight, I decided to break in, so I could get some food and money."

"Woah," I said in a dramatic way.

The next day fluttered by in a blur. I told everyone about my anxiety and the break-in. And in the evening, the doorbell rang and there was the lady in blue, stopping by to have dinner – a deal we made with her until she found a job.

In bed, I thought to myself: *I am not afraid anymore. Because there are always many perspectives to be told for any story. Thanks to Selina for teaching me that lesson.*

Because now I am the opposite of fear.