

FEAR

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I imagine all living things fear something. Those with brains surely have multiple and complex fears, but I think that maybe, even amoeba have fear. It's such a universal emotion (now I know some smart person is going to argue that since amoeba don't have brains, they can't experience fear. T least they SHOULD fear 10th grade Biology students!) Anyway, for those living organisms that have the capacity, fear seems to be rather universal.



We fear lots of things: death, disability, old age, responsibility, heart disease, cauliflower, things that go bump in the night, pain, cholesterol, crabgrass, getting a traffic ticket, missing our plane, being too short, too tall, too fat, too think...too anything!

Some of our fears are perfectly logical and understandable. We may fear for our safety so we lock out doors, never walk alone in dark alleys and turn on lots of lights. We may fear for our health so we try to watch our diet, exercise and make sensible choices about living. Our fears may help us make decisions: how to invest our money, where to live, what kind of car to drive.

Some of our fears, however, are born in the imagination. They often appear to be irrational or “silly” to others. But, fear, whether based on reality or fantasy, is a powerful emotional and physical response to CHANGE.

Change, even positive change, can give birth to an “unsettled” or anxious feeling: the first day of school, the first day on a new job,

graduation, the wedding night, the birth of a baby, moving, unemployment, divorce, homelessness, death....

Change, the process of hello and good-bye, is often greeted with a feeling of fear.



Our experience or lack of experience influences our fears. Fears come and go, sometimes seemingly at random. They may sneak up on us, drenching us in sweat, sending the heart rate skyward and giving the front, but even though we can “see it coming”, our body and mind prepare to fight or to flee. I was always ready to flee from Biology. I was probably more afraid of the amoeba than they were of me.

We understand those kinds of fears. We try to prepare ourselves with rational thinking, stress reduction techniques and appropriately planned actions. All of these things help reduce our sense of helplessness, which is the foundation of fear.

We fear most of all, the loss or lack of control. Even if we don't really have control, we like to think we do and when we lose that sense of control, fears moves in.

Some are afraid of being injured, disabled or dying. Some are afraid of the dark. Some are afraid of the light. Some are afraid of living. We all fear uncertainly and the unknown.

We arm ourselves with weapons against enemies, candles against darkness, faith against the unknown. And just when we think we've got it conquered, fear comes again...invading even our memories.

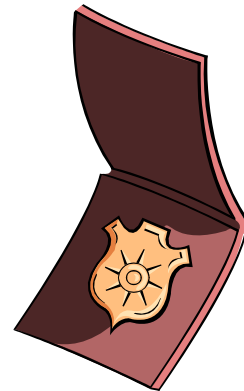


We fear we will forget. We fear we won't be able to forget. We relive, again and again, the nightmares and celebrations in our lives, the events that are etched on our souls. We recall tears and smiles, taste and smell and pain and anger and love and fear.

No matter how long ago we grieved, it lies just below the surface, waiting for fear to awaken all the memories.

Some fears have changed. Some no longer exist, but others have taken their place. I try the relaxation techniques. I try the diversion tactics, but sometimes, in the silence of night or in the glare of day, fear comes home. And I know the world grieves our universal loss of innocence.

We cannot conquer fear. We can only hope to acknowledge it, respect it and live with it. We think of those who stand in the face of fear as being courageous. Yet, we all have courage. We are all courageous. Courage is simply a matter of acknowledging and feeling the fear and still going on, knowing that you are afraid.



I am afraid of many things, but 10th grade biology class (and the amoeba) don't bother me much anymore. I use a night light in the bathroom so that's taken care of and I've even pretty much figured out how to handle those old fears that come sneaking back into my grief, sometimes.

But, it's this new yet very ancient fear that sets my "Boots a' shaking." Once again, the world holds its breath in fear...of the unknown outcome of war, of the uncertainty of battle. Once again, we grieve for the uncertainty of our loved ones, an ancient fear yet new to

every generation. We acknowledge it and continue on, just as every culture, every age of Mankind has done before us.

Courage to us all, to embrace the unknown, acknowledge the fear and not to be consumed by it.

I keep the night light on, my whistle ready and a ribbon 'round the tree outside. We're all afraid, but together we will endure. And we will live with the hope that someday, those 10th grade biology students won't have to be afraid of amoeba or of war.....

