

## Welcome to Quiet Courage – November 2009

The online newsletter helping you live your life from a place of courage, intention and gratitude from Catalyst for Courage and Mary Ann Bailey, MC.

### Feature Article: Are Comfort Zones Really That Comfortable?

A term used a lot in personal development work is "comfort zone". Our comfort zone is the space in which we live our lives that we perceive to be safe, secure and free from danger. Most of us don't even realize that we are in this space until we decide to make a change or experience something new in our lives.

Making any kind of change in our life dictates that we step out of our comfort zone; and when we do that, one of two things will happen. We will either keep moving forward and pursue our goal despite the fear, or we will get overwhelmed by the uncertainty of this new and uncharted territory and quickly retreat to what we think of as the safety and security of our comfort zone.

Example:

Kathy and Janet are both thinking about volunteering with a local nonprofit that travels to Kenya each summer to build schools. Both women have attended the orientation sessions and are excited about being a part of such a worthwhile project.

However, as the time approaches to actually put down their money, get their shots and finalize their plans, Janet starts to get cold feet. She finds herself focusing on all the things that could go wrong: the diseases she might pick up, the cost of the trip, and the time she would have to spend away from her family. She discusses these issues with her family and friends and many of them agree that this might not be the right trip for her.

Kathy also has her doubts about the trip, as she has never done anything like it before. But as her fears and doubts come up, she takes her questions directly to the nonprofit and gets accurate and realistic answers. She also talks with other people who were past volunteers and gets their perspective on the trip. She learns that everyone had their own set of fears, but most of their fears were never realized and the experience itself was so incredible that no one regretted their decision to go.

In the end, Kathy decided to risk it and ventured off on an experience which changed her life; whereas Janet decided to stay home in her comfort zone where life was familiar and safe. But comfort zones are not always that comfortable, nor are they that forgiving.

Soon after the group had left, Janet started to get down on herself up for not having the courage to go. The voices in her head told her that she lacked confidence and would never be able to do anything exciting; and the more they berated her, the more she believed them.

Janet had traded her fears about the trip for the critical voices that beat her up not being strong enough or brave enough. And although she didn't have to deal with her fears of traveling to a Third World country, she was having to face her feelings of anger and disappointment for not making the trip.

Our comfort zones are tricky places. First, we are lured back into them because part of us doesn't want to make a change. Then we are criticized for being weak in making that decision. It is a no-win situation.

Janet saw Kathy when she returned and asked her about the trip and how she dealt with the fear and uncertainty. Kathy said that it had been a long time since she had been so far out of her comfort zone. She told Janet that everyday brought something new and unknown and there certainly times when she felt apprehensive and uncertain.

But facing her fears, and realizing that 99% of them existed only in her head, gave her a sense of confidence and empowerment that she had never felt before. She also said that the experience really helped her see how easy it is to get stuck in our safe place. If we allow ourselves to focus only on the dangers and not the rewards, we could live our whole life inside that small, cramped space.

The term "comfort zone" can be very misleading. It is not always a space that gives us comfort. In fact, it is usually a space that keeps us confined and feeling small and impotent. It is the space that our critical voices would like us to live in because then they would have more ammunition with which to beat us up.

In reality, our true comfort zone incorporates that new experience, that new class or that new project that is just a little outside our normal reach. Our comfort zone is the space we experience at the end of the day when we know we have challenged ourselves to expand our lives and learn something new.

It doesn't matter whether we have been completely successful or not. What makes us feel at ease with ourselves is experiencing the confidence, the excitement and the power that comes from stepping out and stretching our boundaries in ways we never thought we could.

Are you ready to step out of your comfort zone?

Until next time,  
Mary Ann Bailey, MC

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