



## **My Scary (and Emotional) Journey**

By M.J. Clark, M.A., APR

What's the scariest thing to you? I find that most people are scared of things that don't necessarily scare a lot of other people. Some people are afraid of flying, public speaking or snakes. Others are not. In fact, I'm not scared of any of those things.

My biggest fear has been losing weight. I'm guessing this doesn't sound scary to you. Am I right? The reason I find this scary is because I was a Weight Watchers member about 10 years ago, and I felt that I failed in my weight loss attempt. The fact is, I actually did succeed in losing the weight. I reached, and surpassed, my goal weight. At my thinnest, my friends told me I was "now scary thin." They encouraged me to eat just a little more. I slowly, over all these years, gained the weight back. In fact, I surpassed the weight at which I first joined Weight Watchers! So although I conquered the weight loss, I failed at keeping it off.

Last summer, I started to try a little harder at this weight loss thing. I was losing only a pound or so a month, and I did begin to feel the fear that I would ultimately fail. When I had my annual review earlier this year with my boss, Steve, he challenged me to get a bit more serious about my effort. I shared with him my fear about losing all the weight and then keeping it off. He backed up his challenge to me with a financial incentive. He offered to pay my Weight Watcher fees each week, and he added an extra incentive. I told him I was planning to join a gym and hire a personal trainer. His extra incentive was that for every 10 pounds I lose, he would pay half the cost of the trainer sessions I had completed up to that point.

So with Steve's support and encouragement, I signed up for Weight Watchers, joined a local gym and started working out with a trainer the last week of February this year. I also joined a weekly spinning class that first week. I must say that I have never been a gym member, have never worked with a trainer, and had never tried a spinning class so these things were also a bit scary for me. I wasn't sure what to expect.

I was weak, of course, when I started working with my trainer, Kelly. One day, in the middle of a workout, she asked me to do something called a "skull crusher," where I was on my back, on an incline, with my head low, and I was asked to take the weight from in front of me to the front of my head and back while keeping my arms in tight. I did one, and felt it was nearly impossible. Then I started to cry. Tears just streamed down my face. These tears completely shocked me! Kelly looked at me and said, "You can do this! Get out of your head!" I needed to hear the short lecture that followed, but I also needed her explanation. She told me that she was working me to muscle failure, so there *should* be a point at which I can't do it. This was how I would get stronger. But she could tell I was not yet in muscle failure, and she assured me she would know when I was and would not let that weight fall on my head. Talk about a lesson in trust! I learned that day that I was still struggling with a little bit of perfectionism, a dear, old friend of mine. I hadn't seen perfectionism in a while, probably because I wasn't challenging myself in a way that would bring her out. But boy did it bother me that I couldn't physically do what the trainer asked that day!

After the first spinning class, which I spent just trying to keep peddling, gasping for air, and marveling at all the amazing things the others were doing that I was physically too weak to do, I felt awful. I felt unworthy to have taken up one of the precious seats when some people who came after me were turned away. They were clearly in better shape and deserved a seat so they could get a good workout. When I shared this with Kelly at our next session, she assured me I had as much right to be there as anyone else with a gym membership. I continued to show up for class each week. It took many, many spinning classes and much positive self-talk for me to feel worthy.

I cried at another workout with Kelly, a couple weeks after the first time, but I am proud to say I've said good bye to the workout tears. I'm more powerful than ever before, thanks to Kelly's great coaching, and I believe I can do whatever she throws at me. When I feel scared that I can't, I say to myself, "I am powerful. I can do this!" I trust that she will not give me too much, and she has my back if my muscles fail.

Kelly knew I was going to Weight Watchers too, and that my first goal was just to lose 10 pounds, so she asked me to text her each week at the meeting to let her know how much weight I lost. Some weeks I would lose a little, and some weeks I gained just a little. Overall, I was making progress. Slow progress. You would not know it from my very high level of frustration. Kelly did her best to reassure me I was on the right path, and I certainly was losing inches, but I would leave some Weight Watchers meetings feeling very, very hopeless and maybe even depressed.

I want to share with all of you that today I earned my "I Lost 10 Pounds" ribbon at the Weight Watchers meeting. I normally don't share my weight losses at the meetings, I don't collect the stickers they hand out, and I didn't think I cared about a silly ribbon. In fact, I didn't even know I would get a ribbon. But the whole way home in my car, I cried. I REALLY cried! I cried because of all the hard work I've done so far on this journey to get healthier. I cried because of my deep gratitude to Steve and Kelly, my great co-workers, and my supportive family, who continued to reassure me to stay focused, despite the slow weight loss, and I would eventually get there. I cried because I'm really proud of myself. I know I still have a long way to go, but that shiny blue ribbon is a sign that I can get there if I just keep up the hard work.