

# Skating on Thin Ice

By Karel Murray

For some reason, I've noticed recently that high anxiety rules! I'm not just talking the type of anxious feeling that bubbles up when you have to take an open book test and you feel like you might be the only person in the group that fails to answer the questions properly because the reference material now reads like Greek and you don't understand that language at all!

I'm referring to the nail biting, hand wringing nervous twitch type of emotion that is barely contained behind a façade of pleasant interest. Eyes darting in several directions at once, no ability to concentrate on the current conversation, and all of their focus on the crisis looming in front of them.

Alfred Hitchcock type of High Anxiety and it's beginning to affect me!

Now, I'm not a Mary Poppins personality with the "spoon full of sugar makes the medicine go down" type of attitude. My husband can vouch for times when I've reached a level of frustration or panic that only a brief, sharp yelp into a down pillow brought temporary relief. Quite frankly, my cats hate it when I do that...their naps violently disrupted with loud muffled curses. Two furry faces stare at me with complete contempt for my lack of ability to handle the current situation with aplomb. A look that shouts "just handle it or pretend as if you are in complete control." They are the ultimate Zen masters.

I hate them sometimes.

Leslie has just returned from her divorce trial where her 25 year marriage came to an unexpected end. She hasn't worked full time in six months, has lost 45 pounds, suffered major surgery to her leg and is desperately trying to figure out what she is to do with her life now. Her sons are unable to assist her, this is her self image and identity! This was NEVER in the picture.

Harry is debating stomach stapling because he is 150 pounds overweight. His own family has trouble even looking at him. Because this brings on despair, Harry is isolating himself and limiting interaction with others. He knows this only compounds his problems because until recently, he was a jovial, fun loving personality. He just wants to be accepted for who he is. Is that so much to ask?

Sickness has invaded Susan's household. Violent cramps, nausea, and headaches surge through the bodies of all four family members. The adults can't go to work and the children are fighting off 106 degree temperatures. The sheer

fear in Susan's voice makes her words tremble... and then her conversation erupts into a wail of frustration at her inability to take care of her family because she is so ill herself.

Dick is extremely worried about his father who is spending his hard earned savings on items like a new convertible car - Dad always wanted to feel the wind ruffle his hair (what hair?) and a computer which his father doesn't know how to operate but everyone has one so why shouldn't he? What's e-mail again? Dick's major concern is that his father will outlive his savings. But he is caught between the dilemma that his 90 year old father can spend his money in any manner he feels is right and his desire to make sure his father is taken care of properly when his health fails.

Starting to feel a bit of the anxiety yourself? Sorry... I guess it's rubbing off.

Not having psychology training, I can only rely upon my instincts. And here is what I've come up with... I think I have two choices:

Cover my ears and sing to myself loudly an obnoxious holiday song

Or

Help.

I pick "Help". If that means spending time on the phone or inviting another to a quiet lunch where we can explore alternatives, so be it. Maybe it's something as simple as a hand written card that let's them know I'm thinking about them. It is a choice and I've decided that this burden of friendship is one I will gladly bear.

If you find yourself enmeshed in personal problems, try looking outside of your circumstances. Holidays are a potent time where misery and joy can converge. It's a matter of perspective and learning that no matter what the challenge, this too shall pass. I guess it's about hope and belief that we can survive what comes our way. The human condition is built on strength. As a friend, we can help others find their strength and renew their hope.

A gift that is priceless.

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