

advice FOR LIFE

Relief for anxiety

It's been 30 years since Melbourne author and therapist **PAULINE MCKINNON**, 72, published her pioneering book *In Stillness Conquer Fear*. Since then the former agoraphobia sufferer has helped many overcome anxiety issues

HAVE you noticed how things that happen, happen for a reason, even though you may not think so at the time? Years ago I travelled trendy paths around the arts, music, good coffee or crème caramel, and even the path of meditation.

At that time I had no idea that any of these experiences were forming the course of my whole life.

When I "found" meditation I was a stressed-out young mum. For many years I was burdened by agoraphobia, the paralysing fear of leaving the safety of home. To get myself out of that, I needed to draw on the strengths from my family background.

My father's family, artistic and successful, migrated here from England into difficult circumstances. By an early age he had experienced the loss of his mother, his home and quite soon, his hearing.

My mother's early life was powered by the arts. She became a well-known young soprano, a favourite of Dame Nellie Melba and a soloist at Melba's notable funeral. Her fame ended abruptly with the death of her father, the onset of the Great Depression and later, World War II. I would guess my parents were drawn to each other due to the losses each had experienced and their creative ability for resourcefulness.

My own early training was practical — secretarial management. But I was able to combine that with classical singing and these skills have been of great assistance in my later work.

When I met my husband, Don, another resourceful character, he had just installed in his small restaurant only the sixth espresso machine in Melbourne, with a cappuccino at 1s 3d. (About 13 cents today!)

Instantly I became part of what today is a foodie environment. Our chef was an English remittance man — a crack-shot rifleman and former soldier in India who, curiously, had done his cooking training in Paris. Creative and resourceful, he taught me to run a kitchen, French cuisine and, briefly, how to fire a rifle. To make



the place more interesting we provided in-house entertainment by myself and a medley of talented friends.

Those were carefree and exciting years until my father's sudden death, the sudden deaths of several family members and a complete change of direction for us as a young couple. Those stressful events pushed me to a place of high anxiety, which hugely limited my life for almost a decade.

With fear ruling me, my confident self vanished as I struggled against recurring panic attacks, unable to freely leave the security of home for eight long years. Though life was in tatters, with my husband's support and as much familiar resourcefulness as I could rally, I was able to shield our four precious kids from any effects of that. But I knew I had to get out of that situation.

I began with the usual medical approaches but found no lasting relief. So I broadened my search — creatively — and that's how I stumbled upon meditation.

Melbourne psychiatrist Ainslie Meares initiated the skill of meditation as a natural therapy, a way to re-balance the nervous system. This distinctive scientific approach greatly appealed to me.

And very soon the changes I wanted became a reality. This kind of meditation provided me with calmness and a level of resilience that continues to support me through ups and downs.

When my story — *In Stillness Conquer Fear* — was published (and it has been now for 30 years), it pioneered public awareness of anxiety. At that time, Dr Meares kindly invited me to teach his special style of "stillness" meditation. I am proud to have maintained this amazing work for all these years. It's where naturalness meets therapy and brings powerful results.

Anxiety is widespread and affects people in different ways. One of many dramatic examples is traffic phobia, where anxiety is so strong that drivers may abandon their vehicle, overwhelmed and in panic. What we see as road rage may, in many cases, be the result of high anxiety.

Anxiety contributes to illness such as hypertension, eczema and eating disorders right through to life-threatening illness. Other powerful symptoms include insomnia, social phobia and depression.

In my work I see people from all walks of life, often in despair, and it's just wonderful to see them regain confidence. I treasure the gifts my parents gave me: creativity and resourcefulness. Though at the time anxiety was not something I wished for, without it I would never have discovered Stillness Meditation Therapy and the enrichment it brings.

Everything happens for a reason and I'm really grateful to the colourful paths I've walked, which, quite fortuitously, has helped others on their way.

stillnessmeditation.com.au

World of experience: meditation has been an important tool for Pauline McKinnon in dealing with anxiety.

Picture
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