

Leap of Faith

By Jeanne Supin

During college summers I was a lifeguard and swim teacher. (Nothing *Bay Watch* sexy, mind you; this was a municipal pool adjacent Garside Junior High in the cement strewn suburbs of Las Vegas). One year a little boy, maybe 6 or 7 years old, spent almost the entire summer longing -- but too afraid -- to jump off the diving board. He did everything right: he loved the water, he followed the rules, he practiced until he could complete the required swim across the pool's length. And every single afternoon he climbed the steps to the end of the board and tried to gather up the nerve to jump off. We'd all cheer him on, standing on the pool's edge or treading water below offering typical encouragement. "You can do it!" "It's fun!" "It's easy!" "Don't be scared - you'll love it!" But every day he'd eventually turn around and go back down the way he came. Finally, as the late August shadows fell across the water I realized we needed something new before the pool closed for the season. Before he lost his chance. So I joined him on the end of the board for a chat.

"Are you ready to jump today?"

"I want to, but I'm scared."

"Ya know what? You're right. It is scary. We've been telling you all along it's not, but standing up here I realize it is. But you have to jump. Sometimes no matter how scared you are, you have to do it anyway." So we held hands and we jumped.

© 2007 Jeanne Supin. May be distributed if it is distributed in full, full credit is given to the author, the URL www.supin.com is included in the distribution, and it is distributed on a non-commercial, no charge basis.

That little boy was genuinely scared, even though the rest of us knew he could do it, knew he'd love it, in fact. That's the weird thing about fears – to most observers they seem so unnecessary. But they feel so damn *real* to the person having them. Certainly there are real instances of potential harm that result from genuine threats outside our control. But they're rare for most of us. Even violent acts that are disturbingly common, like rape, don't actually make us wring sweaty hands day-to-day. Nope, we grown-ups usually fear other things. One friend is afraid to drive at night, even though nothing bad has ever happened to her. Another worries her smart delightful well-behaved daughter will get into some vague, undefined "trouble." Delightful singles are certain they will never be truly good enough to find a partner. Otherwise brilliant happily married folks momentarily fear their wildly devoted spouses are having an affair. Competent people fret they'll lose their jobs. Healthy people fear they'll die.

My fears, the things that wake me breathless some nights, are poverty and being too cold, rational, and responsible to have real passions. Twenty-five years of steady professional success don't matter. Genuinely loving my family, my friends, my work, and my life is irrelevant. The moment I feel tired or sick or under the simplest of stress I become immediately certain I won't be able to pay my mortgage and I'm as cold as a stone. Sometimes I fear so deeply it blends into my very existence, and becomes *me*.

Yet to an objective eye, another's fear seems pretty odd. Kind of ridiculous, in fact. When I express worry about occasional slumps in business my best friend rolls her eyes and reminds me I've had the same unwarranted worry every year she's known me. My husband thinks the whole cold, rational, passion-less thing is just bizarre. But when I'm in them I'm truly paralyzed, unable to walk, let alone jump. Runaway emotions take hold, and I usually spin around like a top, lashing out about everything under the sun, at everyone close by. But if I take a deep breath ... if I can remember to step back from my own panic just a little, I notice that my own fears aren't actually the same as my reality, even though they dress alike. If I'm brave enough to back-up two steps, I turn my fears into productive motivation. Three steps and I can actually laugh. These days I'm trying to bypass them altogether, laugh *before* the panic sets in and let the fears drift off behind me.

© 2007 Jeanne Supin. May be distributed if it is distributed in full, full credit is given to the author, the URL www.supin.com is included in the distribution, and it is distributed on a non-commercial, no charge basis.

Eckhart Tolle observes that most of the time absolutely nothing is wrong at this precise moment. Most of our fears reflect one view of our past and one possibility for our future. And we can change those things. Technically we can't alter our past, but we can certainly re-interpret it. Forgive. Let go. Commit to desired ways we expect to be treated, new ways to engage and behave. Creating our future is a bit trickier, but doable. Be intentional about the future we want. Guide those things we can, and stop fretting about everything else. It really is true that all we have is the present. We can only actually live now. Fearlessly. Leaping full into the moment as wisely as we can, and then trust it'll turn out alright. Believing our life is actually as lovely as our friends say it is.

Twenty-six years later and I still think about that little boy. I don't know where my insight and his courage came from. It just sort of flowed through us, a message from somewhere else, a lesson I've cherished ever since. He spent the rest of the summer leaping off the diving board, over and over again, in sheer bliss. So when I'm really scared I remember him. And I jump.