



# No One Escapes Fear

By Briggs Cheney

As I begin this, I am set for trial in a case which has been pending for almost four years. The opposing counsel are two of the best; one is a lawyer I practiced with and mentored years ago and who left our firm to make his name in the plaintiff's world, and he has made it big with more fast cars than I have fears to prove it.

I am scared. I am afraid. It is a significant and difficult case. Should my client prevail? I don't know. But what if we don't? what if I don't do a good job? What if I make a mistake? What if these really good lawyers *hand me my head on a platter*? What if that lawyer I mentored, humiliates me? I could go on with *what ifs*. I am afraid.

What I am feeling - just 40 days out from trial - comes and goes in intensity and can be described by the three acronyms of **FEAR**. There are moments of "**F**...k **E**verything **A**nd **R**un" when I feel physically scared and almost in a state of panic. On those occasions, I am overwhelmed by "**F**uture **E**vents **A**ppearing **R**eal."

I want to run, but I am a lawyer. I have practiced 49 years; I can't be afraid. I am not supposed to be afraid. But there is no escaping it, I am afraid.

In those moments - and they come and go - I force myself to remember the third acronym of fear. "**F**orgetting **E**verything's **A**ll **R**ight."

Confronting fear is a uniquely personal adventure. Each of us has to find our own way. Sometimes it helps to see how others have managed and found their way through fear.

More than twenty-five years ago, I was called by a lawyer I had never met, Meg Davidson, asking a favor - if I would meet with her and her friend. A very small favor. Little did I know at the time that Meg would repay that favor with one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.

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Meg was a lovely human being and a great lawyer; a partner with Keleher and McLeod. Not all that long after meeting with Meg and her friend, Meg was diagnosed with cancer, and she started her battle with that disease. A friendship had been kindled out of that small favor she asked of me and we met and talked not infrequently following her

diagnosis. It is important to note that Meg had so many friends - she didn't let herself be alone.

Meg was a spiritual person and she shared with me the story behind a simple bracelet she had discovered in a wonderful *hole in the wall* jewelry store just off the Plaza in Santa Fe - a chord that passed through a one-inch tubular charm. On one end of the charm was a raised male lion and on the other end were two raised crouching female lions. Engraved on the charm in between the male and female lions was the prey. The charm has a name - *Run Toward the Roar*.

The story goes that when lions hunt, the male lion separates from the female lions and when the male lion roars, the prey, in fear, run away from the roar and into the clutches of the female lions that do the killing. The lesson - run toward what scares you.

Meg spent more than five years running toward her cancer and doing so with such grace before she left us in March of 2003. We all miss her.

Not long after meeting Meg, I met *Biker Steve* in a twelve-step meeting. Biker Steve is gone too, but he was known for many pieces of wisdom in the recovery world, and a favorite for me was his mantra, "Feel Deal Heal." I didn't understand it at first, and it was some years into my own recovery before I realized the part *fear* had played in my life and the meaning behind *Biker's* mantra.

Whatever is scaring you, let yourself *feel* it and when you let yourself *feel* it, then you *deal with it* - you find a small sense of freedom and strength in sitting in the fear - you get better, you can *heal*.

Just recently - as I have been writing this piece - I met a young man, twenty-one and a Canadian. We'll call him *Josh*. Josh and a close friend's daughter met at McGill University in Montreal and Josh was visiting Albuquerque. After a fun dinner in Corrales where we talked about all matters of things in life and as we were driving home, from the back seat Josh asked me, "what piece of wisdom would you share with me." I enjoy young folks and had many questions for them over dinner about their lives, where they hoped to go in life, their hopes and dreams, so Josh's question of me was a fair one, but not an easy one *out of left field* (actually from the back seat). My answer was okay under the circumstances, but the next morning as I sipped my first cup of coffee and found stillness, my answer from the evening before found some clarity. I texted Josh the following: "Don't do life alone. Find a *Something Else*. Embrace ambiguity and the Joy of not knowing."

Where did that moment of clarity come from? It was a particularly good cup of coffee - a blend of one-third *Café du Mond* with chicory from New Orleans and two-thirds *New Mexico Pinion Coffee* vanilla/bourbon from 4<sup>th</sup> Street right here in the Q. Or maybe it was *Something Else*. Here is where it gets personal.

No one escapes fear. It is how we choose to manage fear; or fear will manage us.

If you are "doing life alone", if **you** are **in charge** and **responsible** for outcomes in your life - for how your life plays out - then ambiguity and the unknown is **your fear**.

There is no reason to debate the reality that **none** of us control that much in our lives. Some things, yes, but the majority of what goes on in and around our lives is beyond our control.

How does one embrace ambiguity and find joy in not knowing? Do you want to know **when** and **how** you are going to die? Some people will answer that question "yes" and that is not an irrational answer. I prefer *Delicious Ambiguity* (Google "Gilda Radner and ambiguity").

If we can admit we are not in control of the majority of what goes on in and around our lives, then who is? *Something Else*?

Yes, I am afraid and scared about how my case will play out. But *Biker Steve* taught me to feel that fear and Meg's lesson for me was to run toward that fear. *Something Else* takes it from there. *Delicious Ambiguity*.

### ***Briggs Cheney:***

*Not by design but happenstance, Briggs' career in the law has been that of being a lawyer's lawyer.*

*Following graduation from law school at UNM and for the better part of his 49 years of practice, Briggs has had the honor of helping lawyers throughout New Mexico - defending them in the civil arena and guiding them through the disciplinary process. Briggs has been recognized for his legal skills in representing lawyers and he has been a leader in local, state and national bars. He has tirelessly helped the struggling and suffering lawyer as others helped him.*

