

# Face It

Making Peace with Fear

Written and Illustrated by  
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A Book with Verve  
*thewordverve inc*

**Face It: Making Peace with Fear**

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# Dedication

This book is for the thirty percent of people who have Parkinson's disease who also must manage anxiety. It is also for their children and grandchildren who love them and want to help.

This book is dedicated to Frank, Clark, Sandy, and Dexter, with love. You have each helped me and taught me ways to manage my own anxiety. I am grateful.

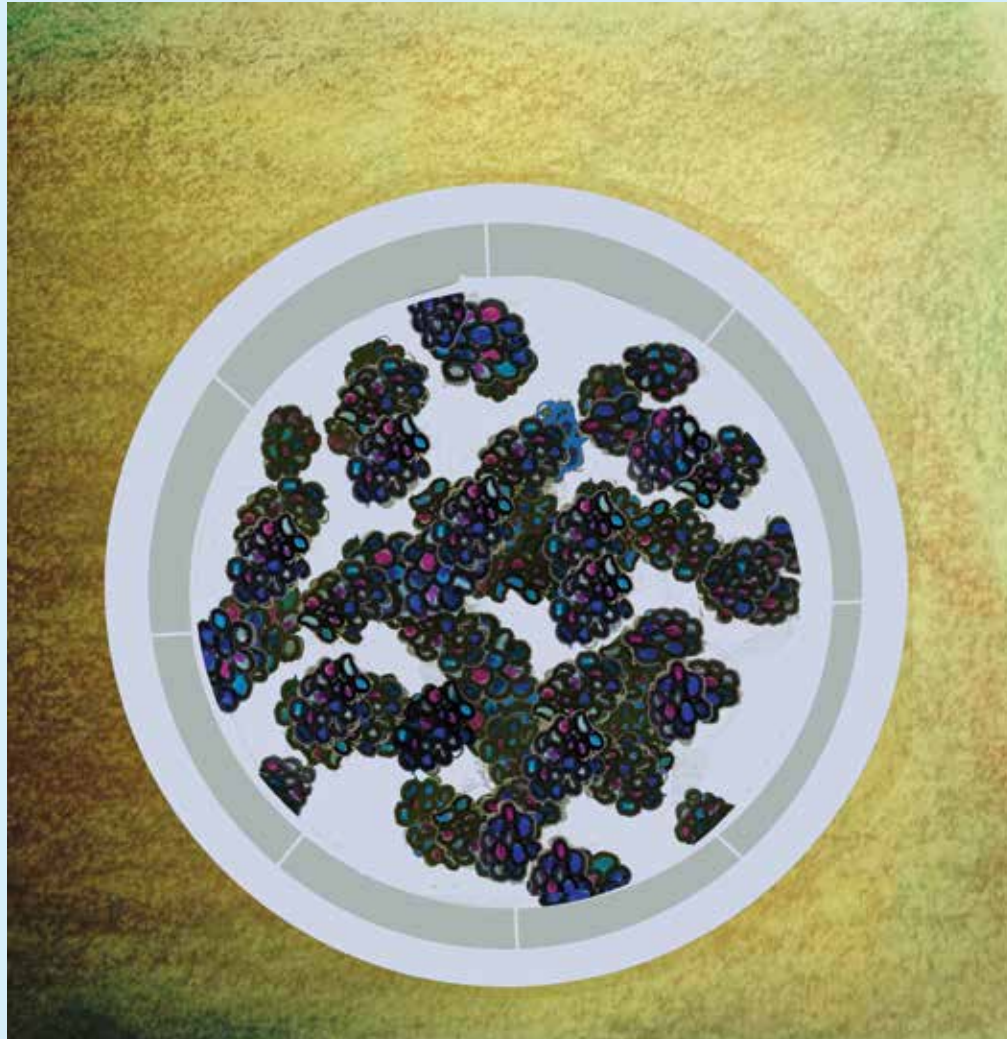
With profound thanks.



*Plink. Plink.* The berries barely covered the bottom of the bucket, and Mark and his mother were so hot.

“Mom,” said the young man. “Remind me of how big the blackberries were when you were a girl.”

Michelle wiped her forehead with her sleeve. She smiled at her son and then shook her head ruefully when her eyes landed on the contents of the bucket. “Well, they certainly were larger than these are.”



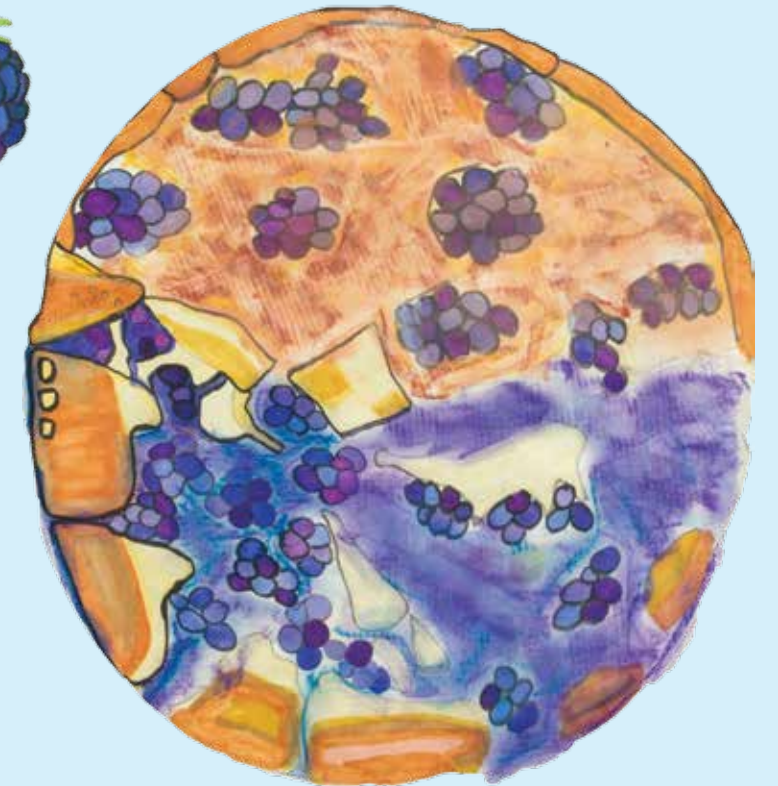
“When I was a girl, I was called Shelly by everybody who loved me.”  
Michelle closed her eyes and began to share her memories.

When Shelly was a young girl, her family lived on an Army post. Behind her neighborhood, there was a big bluff. From Shelly’s home, she could hear big booms that echoed off the bluff. Those explosions did not frighten her. They were the sounds the soldiers made when they were practicing. If she had been older, or understood more about war, she might have been frightened.



But the sounds of the big guns, fast helicopters, and jets that broke the sound barrier were part of her daily background noise, so she was not afraid.

The bluff was Shelly's favorite place to go in the summer because she could walk there by herself, and because each summer, the bluff side was covered with fat, juicy, ripe blackberries.



Shelly could take her bucket and walk up the dirt road to the blackberry patch and pick blackberries until her bucket was heavy. She felt full of pride when her mother would bake a cobbler with the berries she had picked.



Shelly had other childhood joys as well. One was her love for scary tales. She sought every opportunity to feel frightened deep in her stomach. She was not a daredevil, pursuing risky physical challenges, but books, movies, and campfire stories scared Shelly just enough. This was years and years before R.L Stine published the *Goosebumps* series and before the rise of cable television. No one had even heard of renting or streaming movies. Shelly read books by Edgar Allan Poe or the story *Dracula*, or watched a late-night horror movie on TV. Sometimes, she'd even scare herself by letting her mind wander.



That was the other thing about the bluff. Beyond the blackberry patch and a little deeper in the woods, there was a pet cemetery. Shelly did not exactly have permission from her mother and father to go there, but she'd never been told specifically NOT to go there either.

She'd only visited the pet cemetery three or four times, but every time she felt a mixture of sadness from the memorials, excitement from exploring something new, and dread from knowing that her parents did not know exactly where she was. It all combined to give her a delicious feeling of fear.



Michelle looked Mark in the eyes.

“When I was young,” she said, “fear was my friend.”

“What changed?” asked Mark. His eyes were wide with curiosity. He really wanted to understand what his mom was saying.

His mom was silent for a moment then said, “I think it was the first way Parkinson’s disease changed me. This was a long time before I knew I had it. You know how I am now? Whenever I am feeling stressed out, I have a much more difficult time moving. Scary books and horror movies stopped being fun for me. They began to frighten me too badly. I would have nightmares. Finally, when I was in my twenties, I stopped reading or watching them altogether.

“You know, Mark,” Michelle told her son, “when you were five years old, you gave me something that has helped me manage that kind of fear.”

## Breathe In Your Courage

Isaac Meriwether

Isaac Meriwether

$\text{♩} = 120$

Breathe in your cour - age and blow out your fear. -

Breathe in your cour - age and blow out your fear.

For God is watch ing o - ver you, so

-breathe in - your cour - age and blow out your fear.

“One day, we were talking to a person who could not calm herself down, no matter what I did or said. You were little, but you saw and felt the anxiety in us. You made up a song on the spot. Your voice filled the car and settled everyone’s nerves. You sang:

*Breathe in your courage and blow out your fear.  
Breathe in your courage and blow out your fear.  
For God is watching over you, so  
Breathe in your courage and blow out your fear.*

“I thought it was a song you had learned from a video. I looked nearly everywhere to find it. Eventually I realized that the song was your creation.”

Mark kept picking berries. His ears were a little red. He said, “Mom, I know you like it, but that story always makes me feel kind of embarrassed. You can tell it, but what if you used a pseudonym for me? Say it was written by Isaac Meriwether.”

Michelle laughed. Ruffling his hair, she agreed. “Isaac Meriwether it is.”



She said, “Son, I have wondered how you understood about courage and breathing. Then I realized it was probably from your training in Tae Kwon Do. You started it only a year before your dad and I did, but oh, how quickly you already understood that breathing is related to courage and to fear.

“It isn’t everything, but sometimes standing up straight and breathing is enough to make the difference—at least for me, it’s the difference between collapsing in tears or walking away serenely.”

Mark said, “Sometimes, though, you still seem frightened.”

“Sometimes, I still am.”

Michelle moved next to Mark. They continued picking.

She said, “I seem to save most of my fear for my Parkinson’s disease though. When you were little and I was first diagnosed with Parkinson’s, it did not really bother me. Actually, back then, it explained so much that had been going wrong with me, it provided a kind of relief. For a few years, I used to joke that the medicines I took were far harder to deal with than the Parkinson’s itself. Except . . .” Her voice trailed off.

“Except?” asked Mark.



She drew a deep breath and started again, “I would have thought I was nearly all right except for the way the doctors described the disease to me: incurable and progressive. So it never gets better and it always gets a little worse.

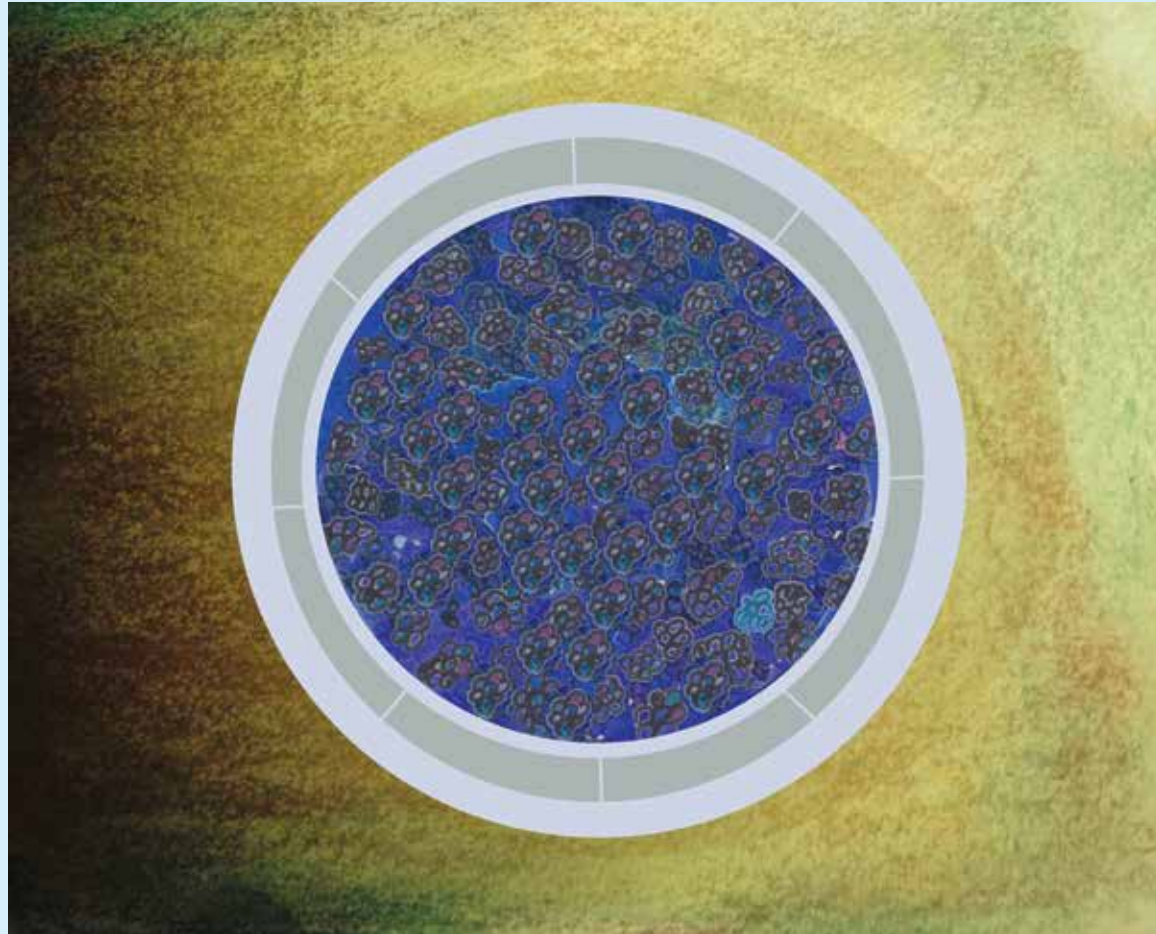
“Finding out you have Parkinson’s disease is like being stalked. Silently, ruthlessly, and relentlessly. At first you look back and see a little speck in the distance. The disease is always present, but it does not really change anything drastically. Things change so slowly that you think you can ignore the disease and how scared it makes you feel.”

“The more you ignore the disease, the more you fear it. After just a little more time, you see that it is not a speck at all. It is a hungry monster made of fear, and it is growing, and it is chasing YOU.”

She took another deep breath. “You go as fast as you can, trying to get away from the monster. You don’t want to know how bad the disease is. You find yourself feeling terribly afraid.”

Michelle took a drink from her water bottle and calmed down.





She looked at their bucket. It was full enough to bake two blackberry cobblers. “ I think we have enough blackberries. What do you think?”

Mark agreed. They turned and headed for their bicycles. They began to strap on their helmets.

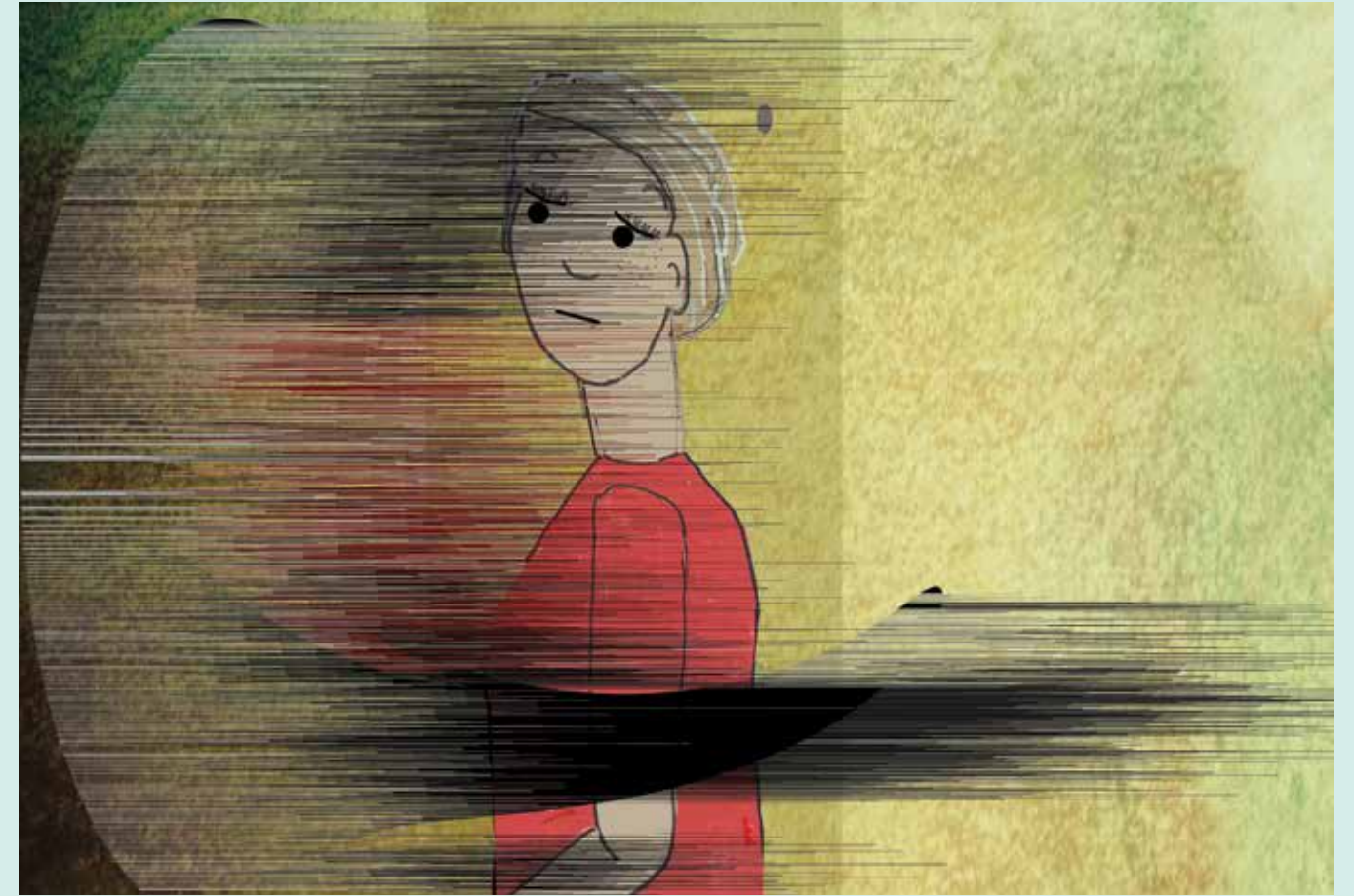


“Then I remember what our martial arts teacher said,” Michelle told Mark. “He always said: ‘Fear is afraid. If you face your fear, it will run away.’”



Michelle added, "He was right."

She started to sit down on her recumbent trike. When she was safely on the seat, Mark got on his bike too.



Michelle said, "Thank you for riding out here with me today. Riding this trike is the best weapon I have in my battle with Parkinson's. Sometimes, going on a trike ride is the only way I can stop myself from crying. Sometimes, it is the way I look at the monster. When I do, the monster crumbles into dust and blows away. Then I realize that even though the disease has gotten worse than it had been, my fear has grown all out of proportion to the disease itself."

She paused. Then she said, “I think the last time I really felt as free as when I am riding my trike was when I was eight or nine years old in that blackberry patch.”

“Thanks, Mom,” said Mark. “Thanks for the stories.”

“You’re welcome, Mark. I think if we remember to breathe and look our fears in the eye, we can get through whatever anxious feelings we have. Then we can deal with our real problems.”

Michelle started pedaling, and Mark did too. They rode away, together.



“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but  
nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

— James Baldwin

# Acknowledgements

Sometimes friendship is inexplicable in its generosity. I am blessed with several extraordinary people in my life who love me and let me know in very practical ways.

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Isaac Meriwether is a pseudonym for my son Clark, who has always been an extraordinary person. He composed the song in this book and gave me permission to use it here.

Master Dexter Grove was my martial arts instructor when I lived in Illinois. He really did say those things about fear. I use them here with his permission. He is a wonderful teacher. When I asked him to teach Tae Kwon Do to me, a forty-year old woman with Parkinson’s disease, he agreed without hesitation. He teaches children and adults Tae Kwon Do and much more at Rising Star Martial Arts in Midlothian, Illinois. Thank you, Master Grove.

