

LYNN TELFORD-SAHL

joy

Intentional

How to Turn Stress, Fear and
Addiction into Freedom

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To Dave, my heart

To all my clients, past and present,
who have touched me deeply and
taught me oh so much. It's been my privilege.

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Foreword

“And Everything Will Be All Right?”

by Bill Manville, author of *Cool, Hip & Sober: 88 Ways to Beat Booze & Drugs*

NOT LONG AGO, a guest on my radio show, Addictions & Answers, walked into the studio eating a candy bar. I asked her to leave it outside, knowing that talking with her mouth full would make her hard to understand and the sound of crinkling wrapping paper would be distracting. As she put it down, she said sadly, “I hope I won’t be too nervous. Whenever I unwrap a Hershey Bar, I have this feeling that nothing bad can happen to me while I eat it.”

Don’t laugh. It’s a symptom of today’s obesity addiction in America. Calling it a “public health nightmare,” the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted that . . . “Servings have grown exponentially in recent years; 7-ounce muffins, for example, are equal to 7 slices of bread . . . At the movies, patrons typically consume huge 64-ounce soft drinks (500-900 calories) with half-gallon buckets of buttered popcorn.”

Nor is overeating our only plague. Every day, millions of Americans—overwhelmed and exhausted—distract themselves with nostrums that advertisers say will give “relief.” But the anxiety goes on. My own feeling is that the mantra “Will everything be all

right?” comes closer to being our national anthem than “The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.”

One thing my years as an alcoholic (long over now, thank you very much) taught me is this: If you try to fill the hole in your stomach (which means the hole in your life and soul) with the wrong stuff, you can never get enough. What’s the wrong stuff? Food, money (ah there, Enron), TV, dope, sex, work, religion, shopping, gambling, cars, entertainment, gin, applause, game, and too many marriages or roller coaster rides.

Lynn Telford-Sahl has appeared frequently on my radio show as a guest expert with impeccable credentials. But what I especially like about Lynn is that she doesn’t play the superior doctor, cool and aloof, removed from the fray. When she talks about overeating, overdrinking, overworking, or living in a wretched family, she makes no bones about it—she’s been there herself. It’s a quality that I think gives her book *Intentional JOY* its unique power. Whoever created the slogan, Doctor Cure Thyself! must have had Lynn in mind. And in these pages, she tells you how you can Cure Thyself! too.

* * *

Bill Manville writes the column “Addictions & Answers” for the *New York Daily News*. In addition to being a radio talk show host, he’s been a columnist for New York’s *Village Voice* and contributing editor for *Cosmopolitan*. His novel *Good-bye* was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Currently living in California, Bill says his hobbies are “maligning my friends and working on a new novel—or is that the same thing?”

“ If you can't **control**
your emotional state, you're
addicted to it. ”

- What the Bleep Do We Know Anyway

CHAPTER ONE

Chapter One:

What The Bleep Do We Know Anyway?!

THANK GOD, I woke up next to my husband Dave. My head was pounding, fuzzy. Images of the night before flooded in: Dancing with some loser guy who Dave and I'd met at a bar—drinking too much, doing one line of coke, and another, and more later—Dave finally telling me “we’re going home” and making sure I got in the car.

Lying in bed that morning, I knew I'd crossed a line that I hadn't crossed before. I also knew I'd made an ass of myself with that stranger—couldn't even remember his name—dancing and flirting with him—my husband looking on. The guy even told Dave, “I think your wife wants to go home with me.” That's when we left.

I felt scared, ashamed, and finally, resolute. I was used to feeling bad about myself, but this was the deepest level of misery ever. I knew I'd hurt Dave badly. So before he woke up, I made a decision—one that I finally kept. *I would find a way to quit running and start facing what I was most afraid of—myself.*

My Epiphany

That moment of truth occurred more than 25 years ago. That's when I began getting honest about how miserable I felt and how much I loathed myself.

At first it was slow-going because self-hatred kept me searching outside of myself—looking to everyone else to see if I was doing it right. I couldn't look within for direction; there wasn't a rudder inside me. Honestly, I felt too bruised and beaten and ashamed to be able to realistically look at who I really was.

Little by little, I gained the courage to pull back the covers and trust that I wouldn't die if I admitted I was far from perfect—if I admitted I was angry, guilty, and full of shame. I took stock of how out of balance everything in my life had become, although from the outside it looked pretty good. I sweated out the answers—worked and reworked them—to heal from the fear I felt inside. Because fear is what drives all addictive behavior.

I could see that as a child, I longed to be like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, my favorite childhood movie. While I may have looked like the original blonde Dorothy of L. Frank Baum's book, Dorothy's tornado happened in Kansas while my childhood *was* the tornado. I landed not in friendly, magical Munchkinland wearing ruby red slippers, but in the dark forest totally terrified of the wicked witch.

"Heh, heh, heh, heh, heh. I'll get you, my pretty," cackled the Wicked Witch of the West. My best friend Victoria used to tease me with that line, which made me cringe whenever I heard it. Now I know why it bothered me so. The Wicked Witch, whom I both hated and feared, lived inside me. Facing the witchy places inside myself (and seeing how I'd always avoided those places) was the magic that brought me home—not to Kansas, but to the natural, loving, loveable self I'd left behind in my childhood.

For years I lived in extremes. The face I showed at work, in my relationships, and at home (for the most part) was a happy, fairly together, little flighty from time to time, busy

young wife and mother. The face I showed the world was the good girl doing what was expected, what she thought she *should* do to make others happy.

The other me lived mostly inside where I was so disconnected from my real feelings, I felt numb—except when I got angry. And I got angry and then depressed, quite a lot. I didn't know (and wouldn't have admitted it anyway) that I was afraid. I lived behind a façade made up of survival—a fine line of survival—because I didn't have much inner strength to lean on.

Good Girl/Bad Girl

My parents used to joke that I was like the little girl in the poem about the girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead - “when she was good, she was very, very good and when she was bad, she was horrid.”

I now know that living in the extremes is a set-up for addiction, but I didn't then. Until I hit 14, I was the perfect good girl—good grades, compliant, sweet, available for everyone else. Then I flipped to the other extreme—the bad girl, sexually acting out, experimenting with alcohol and drugs, smoking cigarettes, running away, spending time in juvenile hall, getting pregnant.

At 19 when I got married, I flipped back to being the good girl. Throughout my 20s, I mostly maintained the external image of the good girl—married, working, going to school, cleaning house, raising our son. But inside was the witchy, bad girl who lived like the troll under the bridge, waiting for her time. The bad girl would take over once in a while. She'd stay up late drinking with her girlfriends, playing pool, dancing, or raging at her husband or son. Then, feeling guilty and ashamed, back underground she'd go.

It's said that a girl's self-esteem is assured if her dad

adores her and sees the best in her—the good girl. My dad usually saw the worst in me—the bad girl.

With an angry voice and a look on his face that blared disappointment, Dad simply had to accuse me of something and I'd flush and feel guilty—whether I was guilty or not. In contrast, Grandmother and Mom always noticed the best in me. They saw the good girl.

Before my moment of epiphany, I was only aware that I was unhappy and missing *something*, but didn't know *what*. I had all the externals that are supposed to make us happy—loving partner, home, child, and career. I eventually realized that the emptiness inside could never be satisfied with “stuff.” It could only heal by being like Dorothy, and finding the path home to myself rather than Kansas.

If we're lucky, we'd have one or more positive guiding forces just as Dorothy did with her guides—the scarecrow, tin man, and lion along with the Good Witch Glinda—all available to oversee our journey. If we're not lucky, we struggle the best we can, leaking stuffing, rusting up from time to time, and puffing up our chests to convince the world we're fearless. Mostly, we quake inside and feel guilty and ashamed.

And we hide.

The Pony Man

My mother told me that before the age of seven I was a contented child, interested in everyone and everything. That all changed when I, who was crazy about horses, met the “pony photographer” who visited our suburban neighborhood. A trail of children followed this man with the camera, hoping to pet his ponies or maybe even ride one. He seemed to like me especially and allowed me to ride one of his ponies. He talked to my mother who gave permission for me to ride with him as he made his rounds in the area.

But what started as a joyful experience became terrifying as he molested me in a drainage ditch and left me unconscious. When I woke up, it was dark and I didn't quite know where I was. I made it home on my own, wandering until I found my way.

IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

As you read about my experience, perhaps you're thinking, "I wasn't molested so I don't think this book is for me." First let me say I'm happy you weren't. Research shows that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have been molested, and that most abuse is initiated by people we know, not by strangers, as happened to me. Beware: While molestation is an extreme example of fear that changes our thinking and feeling, many smaller fears occur in "normal" childhood that you may likely relate to.

When I walked in the door, Mom was furious that I was out late. I couldn't tell her what had happened. She sent me to bed. I fell asleep and when I woke the next morning, I didn't remember a thing about it—until 30 years later.

I was in my 30s when I told my mother I'd been molested. As any mother would, she felt guilty and responsible for not knowing. Looking back, though, she recalled that I changed at that time. Today I know that I disconnected from myself and that's what she could see without understanding why.

When a certain level of trauma happens, we shut down emotionally. We block out our feelings because they're so scary or so uncomfortable. We sense that they won't make someone else happy or we simply don't know what to do with them. Robert Bly, poet and author of *A Little Book on the Human Shadow*, says that by age 18, children are no longer the golden, dynamic orb of energy they were at birth.¹ Rather, they're full

of holes, having given parts of themselves away during their childhood. Somewhere between the extremes of teaching our children to be safe or scaring them into abandoning themselves, there must be a balance point.

The rebellion of my teen years finished off what little self-esteem I had left. When these years are filled with pain and confusion, teens run as fast as they can into adulthood and slam the door shut. Perhaps you decided that if you couldn't feel good about yourself, you could at least *look* as if you did—like I did.

Yes, I bought into the façade of perfection and held it up in front of myself like a shield. That shield kept me from seeking help until I was in my early 30s. Like Marilyn Monroe—who looked like a goddess but felt like a fake—too many in our culture believe we will never be smart enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, or certainly thin enough. As for me, I lived with the unconscious fear that I would never be loved or accepted as I was. I didn't believe I deserved to be loved, anyway. So not really knowing how to live, I'd get out my list of shoulds, can'ts, and judgments that disconnected me from myself and from the relationships I longed for.

It's common to forget that the human condition is “perfectly imperfect” (in the words of author and substance abuse counselor Pia Mellody). We're like Dorothy and her friends, all searching for the piece of our “self” that will make us whole again.

Now I know. It's not outside us but within us. It has been all along.

Stretched to the Limit

Since my click of recognition described at the beginning of this chapter, our culture has had another 20 plus years to refine the extremes. By now, more people have gotten the drift

that we're out of balance, but we're not sure how to change it! Why? Because our addictive parts don't want to give up the adrenaline rush sparked by a substance like caffeine or the mellowing effect of whatever we're using to make us feel better—temporarily.

DO YOU EVER FEEL STRESSED?

I don't mean a little stressed; I mean overwhelmingly stressed, exhausted, helpless? Has your stress gone on and on with no relief in sight? Have you ever become ill and said, "Thank God. Now I can stay home for a couple of days." Have you ever reached for a glass of wine to help take an edge off your stress? Or taken out your credit card to buy something, believing it will reward you because "after all, I work so hard."

I remember coming home and ritually drinking a glass of wine while I fixed dinner. I remember my mother doing that, too. Except in the back of my mind, I could envision her years later living in a skid-row, single-room-only walk up, penniless, cut off from family, and near death. That vision—and the misery she existed in for years—led me to find other ways to cope with my baggage of fears and stresses.

In the 1970s, researchers predicted that, by the turn of the century, we would work a lot less—perhaps only 32 hours a week. Today, the average person works just over 50 hours a week and has less buying power than people did 30 years ago. In fact, Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor under President Bill Clinton in the 1990s, states in his book *The Future of Success* that the average American works 350 more hours a year than the typical European, ". . . more hours than the notoriously industrious Japanese."² In material goods, the United States is the second wealthiest nation on earth (only Norway has a higher standard of living) but emotionally we're like the national debt—stretched to the limit. The old ways of just

ignoring the problem no longer work; the new ways of paying attention to how we feel and what we need haven't gained enough credibility.

Fear—It's Like Breathing Air

Fear, and the negativity it inspires, insidiously becomes the under-the-surface motivating force in our lives. Spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle, in *The Power of Now*, says we're not talking about the fear we need to avoid danger, but psychological fear that shows itself as "...worry, anxiety, nervousness, tension, dread, phobia, the psychological fear that something *might* happen, not of something that is happening now."³

Living with a background of fear dulls our senses and dampens our aliveness. Like the drone of traffic for new city dwellers, we cringe at first but adjust over time, although our bodies pay the price with stress, illness, and addictions. It's easy to forget we are whole beings comprised of a mind, body, emotions, and—for many—an awareness of a spiritual element.

Many in this culture have become out of balance, top heavy. It's as if we carry around a huge head on our out-of-shape and (likely) overweight body. Thousands of thoughts pour out of our heads every day about what needs to be done and by when. We curse what will happen if it's not done. The feeling is one of pressure and worry. To cope, thinking, thinking, thinking has become the main way we experience the world.

Escape, Over-thinking, and Anxiety

I often hear from clients how they'd like to "turn off the mind" or "escape from thinking." Ads for Lunesta, a sleep drug introduced in 2005, touts its ability to turn off thinking so

you can get a good-night's sleep. It must work; the American public spends \$650 million a year on sleeping pills.⁴ A guest on *The Today Show*⁵ reported that 42 million prescriptions were written in the previous year for the three main sleeping pills: Lunesta, Ambien, and Sonata. Are we really more sleep deprived or are we influenced by advertisements, or both?

HOW CONNECTED DO YOU FEEL?

Take a moment to ask, "How connected do I feel to my own body and emotions?" Do you have a daily practice of meditating, or checking in, so you can pay attention to your feelings and deep thoughts? Is your mind telling you that you don't have time for quiet or to meditate?

Does it criticize you because you don't know how?

Harvard research scientist Dr. Gregg Jacobs, author of *The Ancestral Mind*, writes that over-thinking and anxiety are linked to what he calls the "Thinking Mind," which is the verbal, analytical, detached-from-experience and socially conditioned part of the self.⁶ He explained that the human brain developed in three parts. The oldest part of the brain, which he calls the Ancestral Mind, is the brain stem or reptilian, instinctual brain. The next part of the brain to develop was the mammalian or emotional brain. The newest part is the neocortex, the reasoning part of the brain in which abstract thinking takes place.⁷ Dr. Jacobs states that the Thinking Mind's future orientation and constant worrying makes adults more fearful than children. It also produces chronic anxiety and has led to an explosion in depression, social isolation, and an over-reliance on money as the key to happiness.⁸

We're not born with the Thinking Mind as our dominant brain. When we observe babies and toddlers, we see that

most are born with loving hearts, curious, open minds, and extremely forgiving natures. Our well-meaning parents train children in what's right/wrong, good/bad, important/trivial (often based on the question "what will the neighbors think?"). These become a framework for how we "should" think and behave. What we actually "do" think, feel, or believe takes a back seat, it seems.

Our parents naturally socialize us as they'd been socialized by their parents, using warnings and criticisms to keep us safe and mold our characters. As training continues through childhood, we often get the message (spoken and/or modeled) that the world is a frightening place and there's little we can do about it—except get good grades and go to a good school and land a good job and grow up to have a successful life. That means we get trained to use the Thinking Mind in an attempt to control everything. While this kind of training isn't wrong *per se*, how does it connect today with our overly scheduled, stressful, and increasingly addictive lives? Is this really the best we can do?

Making the Mind-Body Connection

We're born with the awareness of the Ancestral Mind—the emotional, intuitive, non-verbal, present-in-the-here-and-now part of our brain. It's what Robert Bly meant by the "golden orb" of awareness children naturally have at birth in *A Little Book on the Human Shadow*.⁹ After 18 months or so, the Thinking Mind starts to come into play.

Naturally we don't want to get rid of the Thinking Mind and its critical, analytical nature. Rather, we want this part of ourselves to balance with our hearts (mammalian brain, emotional self) and our bodies (reptilian brain, instinctual awareness). That means feeding our Thinking Mind less and our Ancestral Mind more through the practices presented

in this book. This creates what scientist Dr. Candace Pert¹⁰ coined the bodymind connection. Specific skills like conscious breathing, emotional awareness, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), and imagery serve to reconnect our bodies with our bodies. These practices support our nervous systems to stay balanced, allowing us to manage demands of hectic living more easily and making addiction less appealing. (See Chapter 10 for more on EFT and Chapter 11 for Imagery.)

Children get trained away from their Ancestral Mind through criticism and negativity. My husband has told me more than once, “Lynn, you’re so critical.” I replied, “I had a great teacher, my dad.” Like bees fleeing a broken hive, my criticisms would escape my mouth and hurt Dave, hurt our relationship. Dad was a sweetheart to outsiders, but filled with judgment and anger toward his family. Until age seven, my emotional reservoir was full of enough love to counter Dad’s “be carefuls” and guilt-inducing accusations. I’m not sure when his fears overwhelmed my adventurous nature, but by age eight or nine, I started holding back my energy around him. I’d look to see if he approved before I’d play softball with the boys (he’d say no) or I’d read (he’d say yes). After a while, I had no protection from Dad’s criticisms. His rejection picked away at my self-esteem. On the outside, I’d look like I didn’t take him seriously, but to do that, I had to get small and quiet so I wouldn’t be noticed.

Is the Sky Falling?

When we look at survivors of abuse (whether it’s physical, emotional, or sexual), it makes sense that fear results from the traumas experienced. As mentioned earlier, beyond the big traumas, it’s the day-to-day negativity—the criticisms, perfectionism, irrational expectations—that push us to abandon ourselves. Our once-trusty inner compass gets steered by an

invisible web of fear that makes us tune out our own intuition and needs.

That's what is so damaging and pervasive.

That's what we don't want to face as a society.

You see, if we admit the sky is falling, *we might have to address it*. Kids are the ones who'll say the emperor has no clothes, but we adults teach them to pretend, just as we were taught. Eventually those parts of ourselves that we give up create a vulnerability to fear, an emptiness we try to fill, and a false need for ever more stimulation or a need to escape. This addictive coping may come in the form of hard drugs and alcohol or appear subtly as a constant need for entertainment, food, glamour, sugar, diet sodas, or caffeine.

Fear stresses and overloads our mind and body systems. It makes us more vulnerable to illness and less able to tune in to our needs for rest, relaxation, and replenishment—and our need for joy. Fear causes us to believe the addictive illusions of constant advertising. It makes us afraid to unplug because we feel uncomfortable being quiet and listening to the call of our hearts and souls.

What I've Always Wanted

At five, I knew what I wanted. I wanted to dance. I started dance lessons with Percy Venable, 80, of Chinese descent, with a thin, downward curling mustache. He had worked with some of Hollywood's best hoofers. He'd hobble in on his cane when it came time to teach a new routine, then hand the cane to his assistant and demonstrate the new steps. For a few moments, he'd float across the floor, magically lithe and I'd imagine how he looked at 20. Mr. Venable had presence and conveyed his respect and love of the art through his kind words of encouragement. I blossomed under his wise tutelage and worked hard at perfecting my performances. For a year and a

half, I looked forward to Saturday morning class and practices during the week. Then, we moved and my next instructor was like a dime store imitation of Neiman Marcus. I didn't like this new instructor and she didn't like me. I quit. By then, I was eight and had lost that part of myself that believed I could be graceful and special. Although I was coordinated, I came to think of myself as being a klutz. I forgot I loved to dance and was good at it. I forgot the part of me that was totally in the moment, vivacious, thrilled to be alive.

WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT? WHAT DO YOU MOST WANT OUT OF LIFE?

After the basics are taken care of, most of us want love, belongingness, meaning or a sense of purpose. We also want to enjoy life and make a contribution. We certainly don't *plan* on living in fear or getting trapped in our emotional pasts.

Too many of us do.

The joy that came from feeling powerful and performing well had fed my soul during that time. I'd felt wildly interested in everything. But, fear and negativity chipped away at my enthusiasm and belief in the goodness of life. Today, I realize this is an unconscious process; a child doesn't realize what's happening and adults are often too conditioned to realize that what's wrong is not only an individual problem but a cultural limitation.

Transforming Our Relationship to Fear

It wasn't until my 30s that I was able to melt away the fear that drove my life—like the Wicked Witch melted when Dorothy threw water on her. I re-trained my thoughts and

feelings by moving *into* my fears rather than avoiding or denying them.

Despite the fears constantly being broadcast out into the world and those we feel inside, fear is really about perception. Fear is only as powerful as we allow it to be.

We're not going to eradicate fear, but we can create a different relationship with it. We do this by tuning up our heart-strings to rebalance our mind and body and reclaim the energy, vitality, and passion we once had. We can learn to choose how much we allow fear to dominate our lives. We can heal the bodymind split that sets us up for addiction.

Bruce Lipton M.D., a cellular biologist and author of *The Biology of Belief*, says we're always *either* growing and changing *or* protecting ourselves, but we can't do both at the same time.¹¹ The good that comes when we switch our focus from fear and negativity to love and optimism are astounding. However, first we have to recognize the grip that fear can have over us.

EMBRACE THE FEAR

As you do the exercises in this book, you will realize it's easier than you think to embrace fear. By going into your feelings, you regain the energy, vitality, and aliveness you desire. As you accept the imperfectness of yourself and humanity, you become more loving and compassionate. The Thinking Mind relaxes its hold on you.

Most important, once you learn to manage fear and negativity, you can focus on what you want: more joy, peace, hope, creativity, and vitality. And guess what? Love and optimism promote your growth rather than allow you to stagnate.