

# Anxiety is a Mystery

## *Jeff's\* Story*

*“Listen Doctor Jacob I need to let you know I am not afraid of anything. As a matter of fact, I am known for how fearless I am. You see, I am a competitive surfer and overall a jock. I played every kind of sport in school and I still workout and surf. I use to freak out my Mom when I was a little kid because of the big waves I would ride.”*

*“The problem is that I get literally sick flying. I use to just sweat and my heart would pound. I could deal with that. I started taking an extra shirt. Now I am starting to throw up. I start sweating just making reservations to fly. This is ridiculous; whatever you do, we need to do it fast. I fly as part of my job. I am on a plane and out of here in six weeks.”*

*“I can't believe I am doing this. No offense but I do not really believe in this therapy stuff. I am not one of those whiners who complain about their childhood and that kind of thing. I have always thought those guys should just suck it up and move on.”*

*“My wife, Mary, thinks I am loosing it. This is all she needs. We are going to have a kid soon, a boy. I guess I have been kind of an ass lately. I am not about to tell her that I am pretty sure I am going to die in a plane soon. She would think I was really nuts. She thinks I am messed up over becoming a Dad. That is crazy but really I am not going to tell my pregnant wife about this. I really need to fix this. I do not want anyone hearing about this mess.”*

## **So, We Began...**

I asked Jeff to tell me a little about himself and to think back to when this flying problem began.

Jeff was a young professional business man. He was very successful and moving up in his company. He had always been an athlete but truly loved surfing. Jeff admitted he was kind of a screw up when he was young. He was only into surfing. That had been his life. Finally his folks got him to go to college. He met Mary, a terrific girl, and got serious. He went on and received an M.B.A.

Jeff's Dad was a very successful business man. His connection helped Jeff get started and he took off in business from that point. Jeff had no problem working with customers. He was competitive and always did well. In the last year the flying thing had gotten unmanageable.

Jeff claimed to have two great parents who were both professionals. He had an affluent childhood. He lived near the beach, went to great schools, played sports and surfed daily. He was good and had won several surfing competitions. Jeff had a great deal of respect for his father. He was trying to do the things his Dad did for his family. Jeff was determined to be successful as a husband, father and business man. When Jeff put his mind to things he accomplished them. The problem was Jeff could not face flying. He felt angry and humiliated but mostly confused.

## **Detective work**

Many times therapy starts with some detective work. Jeff and I needed to work together to find out what was triggering his fear of flying. This was a puzzle.

### **The facts**

- Jeff was very much in love with his wife.
- He worked hard to prepare to be a good Dad.
- Jeff wanted his son to have what Jeff's father had given him.
- Jeff had been a bit of a rebel surfer kid in school.
- He did not take things seriously until he met Mary in college.
- Jeff wanted to give her the best.
- He received an M.B.A. with honors.
- He enjoyed his clients and excelled at work.

### **Clues**

- Jeff was soon to have a son
- Jeff's parents' life style was his model for being a good husband and father
- Jeff wanted to give his family everything his parents provided him
- Jeff talked a great deal about his passion for surfing
- Jeff had become the man he thought Mary deserved.

## **Good Questions**

### **Doesn't the anxiety of flying have to directly be related to flying?**

No, the anxiety is rarely directly related to flying.

### **What about his belief he would die flying. Could this be some kind of warning that is meant to protect him?**

I cannot say for sure but my experience is that once the problem is solved the anxiety and fear goes away. No one I know has ever died flying.

### **Can the anxiety happen to just normal people?**

Yes, the anxiety has nothing to do with normal. It can happen to anyone.

### **Wasn't Jeff just under too much stress?**

Yes, Jeff was under incredible stress. His symptoms sounded like a great deal more than just life cycle change stressors.

## What happened to Jeff?

Jeff and I used some specialized techniques to trace his fear. We needed to solve the mystery. Jeff figured out that while he thought highly of his Dad. He was not his Dad. Once the marriage, mortgage and now a child were a reality, he feared he was stuck forever in his father's life. He panicked because he thought there was only one way to do things. He felt like part of him was dying. He was letting go of his dream.

Jeff needed help changing his perception. He believed if he did not live the way his father did he was a failure. That made him sweat.

Jeff quit his job. He still had an M.B.A., a good business head and a commitment to providing for his family and being a good father to his new son. Jeff is got a loan and started a business advertising surf gear. He is successful and comfortably flies to market his gear. His parents did not understand at first.

Mary certainly did. She knew something was very wrong. She was delighted it was not about her or the baby. Jeff still surfs and is part of the surf world.

Sometimes it takes some good detective work in a comfortable environment to figure out the mystery. It is not so difficult to figure out what to do once the problem is clear. Jeff and I only worked together for six weeks. He makes an appointment occasionally when he cannot figure things out. Jeff can be really hard on himself.

## Is Your Anxiety a Mystery?

Do you feel confused and frustrated?

You may need the help of a good therapist detective. [Give me a call.](#)

*\* Note: "Jeff" is not this client's real name. In fact, several facts about his name have been changed to protect confidentiality. If you work with me, you never have to worry about your privacy being compromised in any way.*