



Anxious in America: My Life with Generalized Anxiety Disorder, GAD

B. P. Meinhardt

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Anxious in America is my story. It's an account of living with persistent extreme anxiety, known as Generalized Anxiety Disorder, GAD. There are many shared traits; but GAD is unique for each person. Throughout these writings, I relate my experience with GAD. I grew-up on a cattle ranch on Lake Okeechobee in South Florida. Dad was born into a South Florida Mik-Sem (Miccosukee Seminole) tribal society. My folks worried excessively about family health, mainly dad's angina. Income was next in the hierarchy of issues. My family came of age during the Great Depression, World War II, segregation, and the nuclear threat. As did millions of other families, mine had real worries. Their anxiety was specific, not generalized. Dad's Austrian ancestors were cattle breeders and commodity traders. In 1848 they entered into an 'enterprise marriage' with the Mik-Sem. It was a 100-year agriculture business partnership, sealed by marriage. Great granddad Pal was 18 when he arrived at the German Trade Council in New Orleans. He negotiated the enterprise partnership with the Mik-Sem. Pal wanted an American adventure. Cowboy and Indian stories were popular with young Europeans in the 1800s. Pal was no exception. He kept a diary noting each book he read and developed a fantasy of marrying an American Indian princess. Amazingly, Pal made his fantasy a reality. But he noted his nervous worry at every step. Pal and great grandma Zalla formed an enterprise marriage. Pal's diary notes a marriage more of passion than enterprise. But that's another story. This is the origin of family 'nervous-worry.' Once he arrived in Florida, Pal laboriously wrote his diary in fractured English. He learned English rapidly from Zalla. Pal frequently labeled his nervöse Angst as angst. Dad said nervousness didn't run in the family, it galloped. He often said, 'Old Son, people in business have plenty to worry about, especially in the segregated South. But when you grow-up it will change. Segregation will end since it's bad for business. You look like mom. You'll easily pass.' Mom was Irish. Dad met mom when she worked as a department store model. Mom said, 'All it took was a smile. Dad looked like the gypsy prince of my dreams.' Mom said her kin were professional nervous-worriers. 'Dad's kin are amateurs compared us.' As we we're Native American on dad's side, segregation was a real worry. Violence and war, while not immediate threats, were constants in our family, clan, and tribe. Like my folks, I'm a nervous-worrier. Now it's called Generalized Anxiety Disorder, GAD. I still think of it as nervous-worry. Therapists are disturbed when I voice my preference for 'nervous-worry.' So now it's GAD, not nervous-worry. My folks had plenty of issues to worry about. Their worries and mine were neither simple nor generalized. The mental health industry transforms nervous-worry into the multi-billion dollar GAD industry. Millions of people are at least partially disabled by GAD. GAD can be a life-saving diagnosis and not to be taken lightly. There's a broad-spectrum of symptoms, and therapies. I have GAD with schizophrenic and paranoid symptoms. I insist on scrutinizing GAD, not denying it. As a lifelong seeker of hidden knowledge, I've tried to find 'where the feet grow,' as dad would say. I believe GAD can be both a fault and a feature. It can be both a beneficial challenge as well as a debilitating mental condition. Some forms of GAD sharpen the mind by focusing on specific issues. This may be the case with introverted writers and compulsive researchers like me. I believe researching 'the global family economy,' since the 1970s has relieved my anxiety. Excessive worry often interferes with daily function, as individuals with GAD may anticipate disaster, and are overly concerned about everyday matters of health, money, death, family, friendship, relationships, and work.

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