

Playing with Fears

I am just back from my morning swim, and I have to tell you what happened. I was presented with a writing prompt too perfect to pass over. That topic would be fear. What makes it even more interesting is that the topic of fear has come up several times in different ways this week. I would like to explore with you the idea that facing our fears must be really daunting and oppressive. Is that really true? Are there ever times when facing your fears wasn't a negative experience? Might it be possible to reframe that story? Is it possible you could lean into your fears in a playful way? That's a good question that I had been pondering when along came this experience. Of course, it would happen while I was engaged in one of my most favorite ever activities, swimming.

So what was the scary challenge? It had to do with a five-letter word that begins with S.

Living in Texas has forced me to come to terms with the snake population that I happen to share this beautiful region with. I get it. If I am going to engage with nature here, I am probably going to see some snakes... sometimes more, depending on the time of year. This is all fine and well, but swimming with snakes does push me out of my comfort zone in a big way.

What I find interesting is how my deep relationship with the San Marcos River has helped me take my fears down a notch at a time. The first fear being that I would end up being carried away to the Gulf of Mexico! Back to the snakes.

It is actually pretty cool to watch a snake move down the river when I am sitting on a rock watching. It is also fine to encounter one up ahead of me. Today however, was a new twist. As I hit the midpoint on my journey upstream, swimming under a series of low hanging pecan tree limbs, I caught a glimpse of a 6-foot long ribbon snake uncoiling from a high branch and

slithering into the water just an arm's distance away. Ha! What to do? Well, there actually was part of me that was a bit mesmerized by its graceful beauty. Then there was the other part that really did not want to share my water space with this guy, especially now that I knew he was there. So I had a choice, to turn back and miss my swim or keep going. That's when I had a little talk with myself. That talk addressed the fact that I know that this river has snakes in it and yet I swim in it every single day. So clearly I've been playing a game called "what I don't see can't hurt me." That's a mental game that doesn't really work with my belief systems I apply to other areas of my life. So now that the snake has shown itself, what has changed? Not a thing.

Please know this isn't to encourage you to jump into a river of snakes, but rather to spark your reflecting on your own fears. Is there anything you love doing with all your heart, but you have allowed your fears to limit your enjoyment? Play with completing this statement, I love _____ as long as _____ doesn't happen. How many of those statements can you write about different activities? What might it be like for you to play with just one, letting that limit or restriction you have set crumble away?

Oh, and in case you are wondering what I did? After a few moments of consideration, I continued on upstream with my newly acknowledged swim partner.