

A story from the chapter **Stop Being Your Own Worst Enemy**



Chicken Soup for the Soul[®]

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Say Goodbye to Stress



**Manage Your Problems,
Big and Small, Every Day**

Fantastic advice on how to reduce stress and restore serenity to your life. Who knew it could be so easy?
~ Dr. Amy Gagliardi

It's Not the End of the World

People say I was born standing up and haven't relaxed since. I was a nervous, worried child who often broke out in hives over things other children seemed to take in stride. I was desperately anxious to please people and failure resulted in crushing self-recrimination. When I was five years old and forced to play a difficult piece of music in a piano recital, I was terrified of not playing it well enough. I walked across the stage and became violently ill, putting an end to the recital before I'd played one note. A few years later I was in a school play and the bright footlights blinded me—I walked off the stage and took a nosedive into the audience.

I became so afraid of failing and humiliating myself in front of people that I started avoiding social events. What if I said the wrong thing, spilled something, or made a fool of myself? Something as simple as going to a birthday party would cause me so much stress that I'd hide in my bedroom to keep from going.

Early in my childhood I had decided the universe was an unfriendly place and was out to get me. I exaggerated my problems. I felt overwhelmed and unable to cope. The smallest thing could almost paralyze me.

I avoided people as much as possible because I believed

people were the cause of my stress. Of course, that didn't work. I still had stress in my life but now I was lonely as well.

One day when I was walking to the store, I tripped on the curb and fell onto my knees. An elderly man came to my aid, helped me to my feet and asked if I was hurt.

"No, I think I'm alright. I'm just shaken up and a little embarrassed," I said.

"Well, if you didn't break your knees, then it isn't the end of the world, is it? There's no reason to be embarrassed. We all fall down sometimes. You're okay now," he said, and walked away.

His words rang in my head like a big bell. I'd had a little fall, and yes, I did feel foolish, but I didn't break my knees and it wasn't the end of the world. I realized I didn't have a single problem in my life that would either break my knees or cause the world to come to an end.

Suddenly everything was put into perspective and none of my problems seemed that big anymore. Most of my problems were in the future—very few had to be faced that day or even that week.

I began writing down the things that were troubling me the most: debts, money, family problems, the funny noise under the hood of my car. No matter how big or how small the problem was, I'd write it on a piece of paper and I'd put the piece of paper into a box. On the last day of the month I'd open the box and read the list of my "terrible" problems. I found that almost all of my troubles never happened at all. Or if they had happened, they weren't as bad as I thought they would be or the situation had solved itself without any action

from me. The universe didn't need my help. It was a huge relief not to be in charge of the universe anymore. I didn't have to be perfect. It's okay to make mistakes; it's okay to be wrong; it's okay not to have all the answers. It's okay to fail; in fact, it's okay to fail magnificently, gloriously and spectacularly.

Over time, I've put fewer and fewer notes into the box, and some months the box stays empty. It isn't that I don't have problems or that I don't worry or get upset. I still get stressed over things. But I've come to realize that very few things are worth getting upset over, and nothing is ever as bad as I thought it was going to be.

When a new problem comes into my life, I ask myself if it is the end of the world or if it is going to break my knees. If the answer is "no," I write it down and put it in the box.

I'm grateful to that old man; he was only in my life for a minute or two but he changed my life forever. I feel I have cut the stress in my life by eighty percent. I've started going out more, I've made some new friends, and I feel like a new person. I recently played the piano at a party and discovered I'm really bad at it. It's okay—I made everyone laugh and I laughed with them. I'm not afraid of social events or being with people anymore. If I make a mistake or spill something or even fall flat on my face, well, we all fall down sometimes and it's NOT the end of the world!

— April Knight —