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DARE

THE NEW WAY TO **END ANXIETY**
AND STOP PANIC ATTACKS

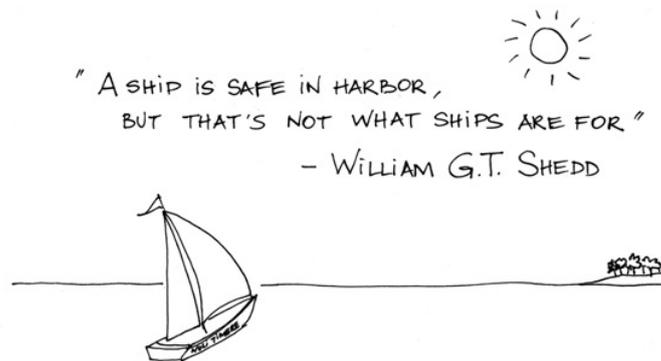
BARRY McDONAGH

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF PANIC AWAY

DARE

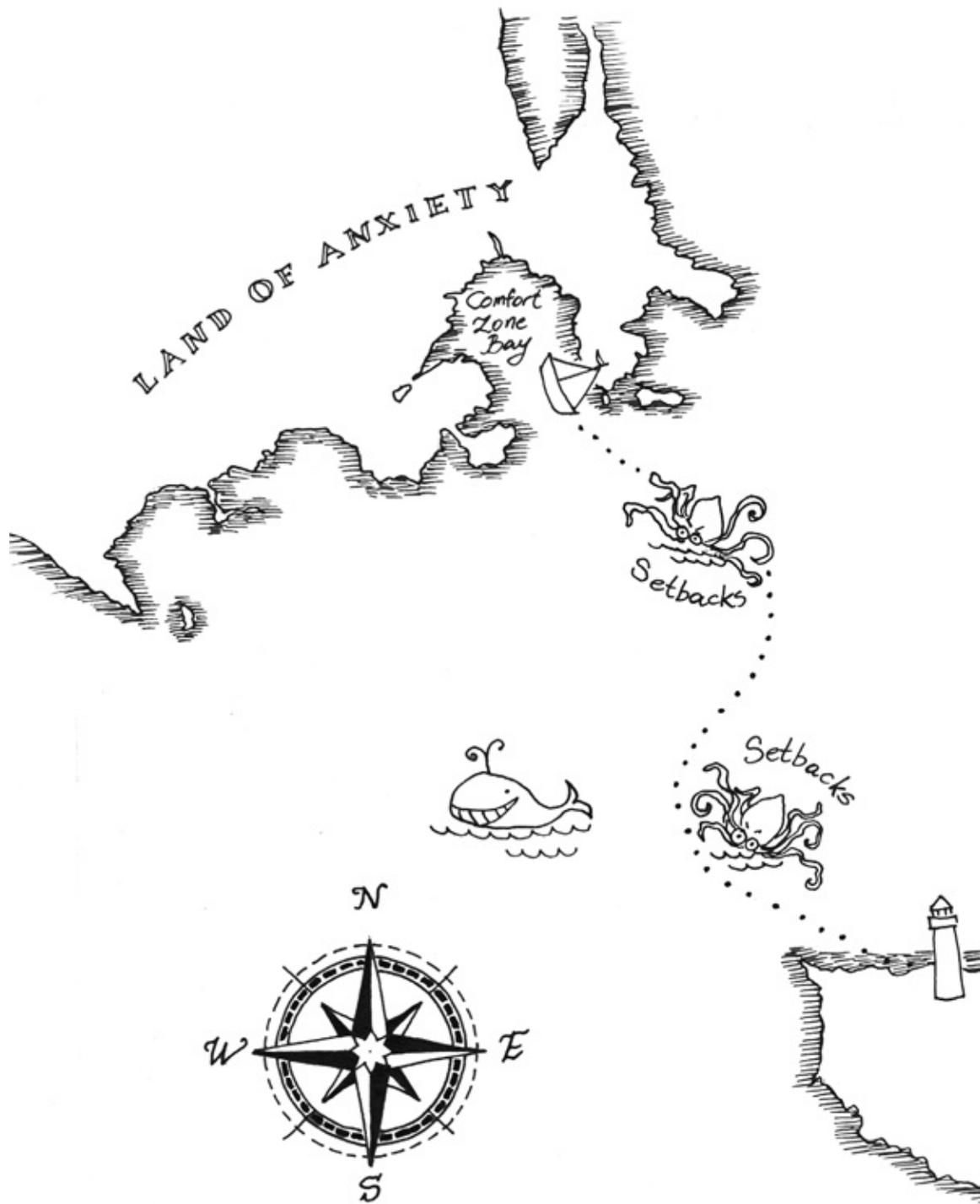
THE NEW WAY TO BREAKFREE FROM ANXIETY AND PANIC ATTACKS

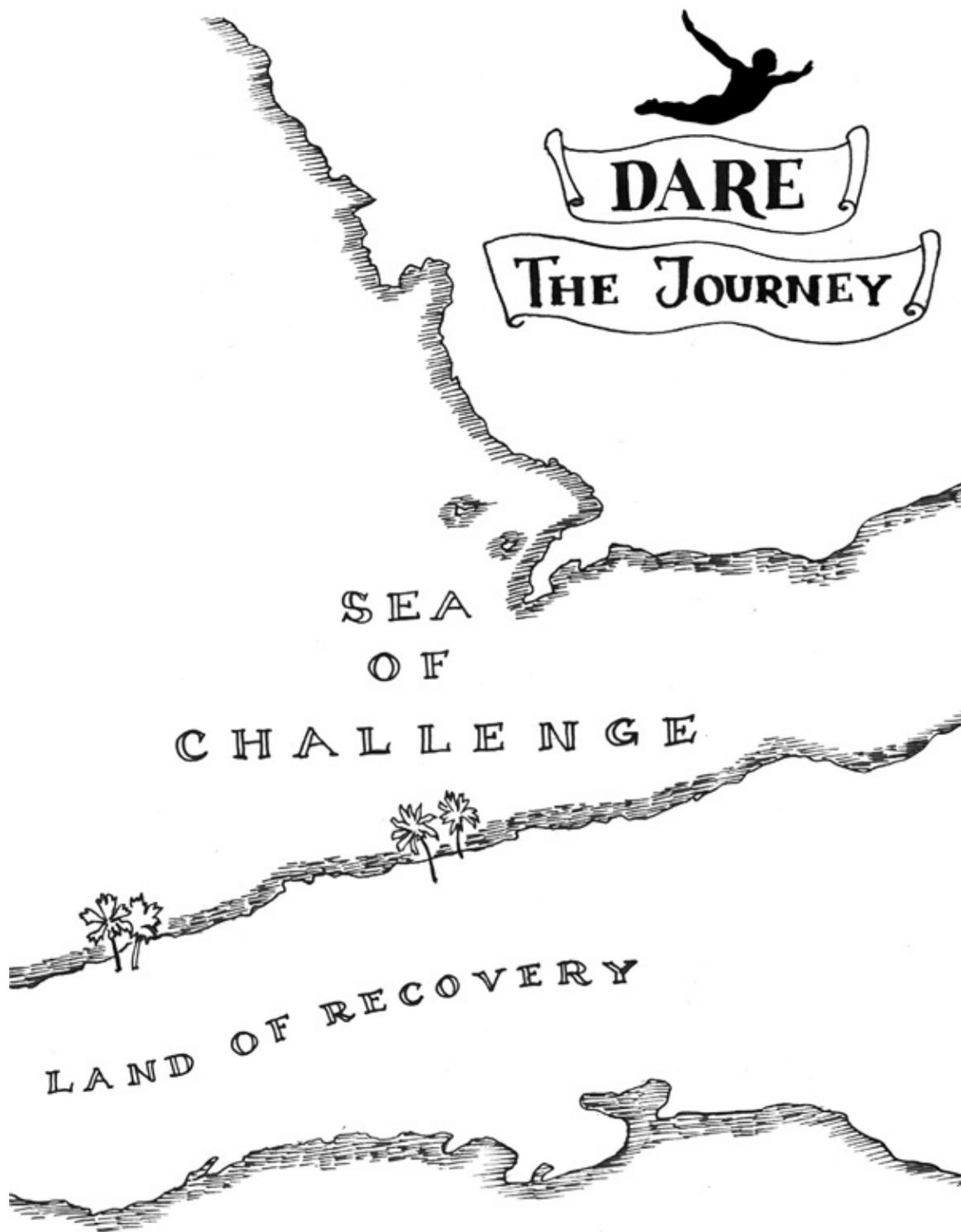
Barry McDonagh



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A message from the main sponsor of this Book

Let me tell you the story of two very different men. The first man lost control over his business and personal life because of the anxiety he experienced. He quickly became unhappy and unsuccessful as the anxiety disrupted his life on a daily basis.

The second man experienced the same problem with anxiety but learned to transform it into personal power. He fought hard and eventually won over his anxiety. He went on to marry the love of his life and built a dream life for them together which they now share with their son (and dog) in Austria.

I was that first man for four long years. I then transformed into the second man after discovering the Panic Away Program. Barry's work gave me the foundation to recover.

Let me tell you here and now, by taking this book in your hands you too can transform your life. You too can triumph over your anxiety. If you dare...

Szilard Koos
Future IT Solutions -Design and Development
(www.fitsolutions.at)

PRAISE FOR PANIC AWAY

“Funny; you know, of all the ‘medical professionals’ that I have been to over the years, alternate and mainstream, not one of them suggested your approach to the problem, yet it is so simple!”

“I never understood anxiety until it hit me 24/7. It was horrifying beyond words. I learned, through the program and the support of the wonderful people in your network, how to work through the anxiety. Not only have I learned to be me again, I have learned to take on wonderful challenges in my life and take chances toward a new life. I have moved to Florida, taken on a new job, and am now pursuing something I have always wanted to do. I would have never taken chances before anxiety. ... I stayed right in my little comfort zone. Words of thanks are not enough!”

“I honestly never thought I would be able to overcome my fears and anxieties; they had clouded my existence for so long. But the last two years have been unbelievable. I am now able to live my life to the full; every morning is like a new beginning. Every day seems so precious and I am making sure I do not miss one minute of it. I am 75 on Wednesday ... shshsh ... but I feel about 50 now that I am able to do all the things I have always dreaded doing. See what you’ve done, my husband can hardly keep up with me these days ... it’s great!”

“I have suffered with panic attacks for 15 years and all the counseling, medication and books I have purchased within the 15 years just masked the fear, but never eliminated it for good. Your book was amazing from the first page to the last. Your knowledge has put me at peace and your wording was clear and understanding. Perfect.”

“I am in tears (of joy) as I write this. I feel that I am no longer living in a mental prison. Yesterday, and today, I drove my car in traffic; traffic was my biggest fear, other than crowded places, and I did not panic. I am so happy about this.”

“I feel pretty strongly about this book and what it has done for me after years and years of trying all sorts of different things from hypnotherapy to meditation to sheer ‘mind-over-matter.’ No more days and nights consumed by thoughts of panic attacks—it’s just bliss. I love it.”

“I cannot believe what an impact your program has made on my life. I have lived with OCD since I was in junior high and have had severe general anxiety my whole life. Your program has given me so much. I cannot believe how quickly it worked.”

“Before taking your course I was drowned in general anxiety and panic attacks every time I left my house to the point that I never wanted to leave home. Now I

am a happier person, a much better mom and my surroundings have changed incredibly. I never want to stay home and I will never send someone else to the grocery store again.”

“I’ve suffered from GAD and claustrophobia for 18 years. I was using drugs and alcohol to get through flights. I felt very skeptical using this program at first but today I no longer need crutches to fly and no longer fear holidays! It has changed my life.”

“I would drive around, anxious of what might happen. I was scared to go to work, and I was prohibiting myself from enjoying the outgoing life that I had once had. That has all changed; the daytime anxious feelings are now extremely rare, and panic is no longer a terror for me. Thank you for showing me the natural way out.”

“My nervous system was shot after 33 years of alcohol & drugs. My psychiatrist (after telling me there was nothing wrong with me and I wasn’t going mad), handed me a piece of paper with Panic Away scribbled on it. I went online immediately and ordered it. Long story short, it worked. Immediate results. Hope restored, journey continuing. Who would have thought God would use an Irishman to help me.”

“A single panic attack I had at work one day stemmed into constant anxiety and body pains that I could not shake, until I received the help I needed from Barry McDonagh. As I write this, I find it so hard to believe I suffered from general anxiety the way I did. I’m doing things now that six years ago I would either have to really push myself to do, or I just wouldn’t do at all. Simple pleasures like driving a car, going on vacation, speaking in front of a large group, going to New York City, or just simply talking one on one with a girl on a date.”

“I have suffered from anxiety/panic disorder since I was 8 years old. I was diagnosed when I was in my mid to late 30s. My anxiety was making me a prisoner in my own home. I felt like I could not go out and do things because, ‘What if I have a panic attack?’ I’m now able to go out and do things with my husband that I never would have dreamed of doing a few years ago. I’m off of my anxiety medication and I feel wonderful. You were the one that put me on the path that I’m on now, and I thank you so much for it!”

“It’s been 6 years now and your Panic Away program has been such a changing force in my life! My anxiety/panic was getting so bad that I had to quit my job that I loved! Thanks to you and your program, I have learned to work through my anxiety ... and not let it overtake me ever again! My husband was there with me and learned the program too, to help me if I ever need a nudge :) We have helped so many people over the years who have anxiety/panic pointing them to your program. It works. Thank you from all of us!”

“I suffered from anxiety and panic attacks for 36 years. I had my first on the day of my eldest son’s 2nd birthday party. It hit like a bolt out of the blue. I thought I was dying. I missed a lot of my children’s activities. I had excuses for everything. Every time I was asked to a function I made up excuses as to why I couldn’t go. Finally I found Panic

Away some years ago. My life has since changed dramatically. I went to my son's wedding and started going out again. Not white knuckling it but really enjoying myself. I had my own business for a time, secured a high paying job with the Government and attended university. I am very grateful to have my life back and cannot thank Barry enough."

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Much of this book is based on the way I healed my own anxiety disorder, but a great deal also comes from the many people I have had the good fortune of coaching over the years.

I have incorporated so much of their wisdom and insight into this new book that I really see it as collective effort rather than *my* book. I owe special thanks to Michelle Cavanaugh who has run my coaching program for the past several years. She has a unique way of explaining complex psychological topics so that everyone can grasp them quickly. She also suggested using the acronym DARE. I also want to thank everyone who has participated on my forum and in the group calls that I run. Their openness, insight, and eventual healing has inspired me to keep spreading the word that all anxiety can be healed no matter how long a person has been suffering.

I want to thank my developmental editor Stuart Horwitz, my copy editor Sharon Honeycutt as well as Shane Nestor for his encouragement to bring more fun and personal stories into the writing. Thank you Dr. Jay Polmar for the layout design and Yevgenia Watts for her unique artwork. I'd also like to thank Dr. Joan Swart, PsyD for her research on the empirical evidence behind The DARE Response.

A big thank you to the following people for giving me insightful feedback during the writing process: Michelle Cavanaugh, Patrick Touhey, Padraig McCarthy, Ian Fergie, Elise Monte, Sue Booth, William Fernandez, Cameron Fancourt, Sarah Anderson, Alan Brady, Gil Yoh, and Alessandro Maltese. Lastly to my wife and family for their patience as I wrote this. Their support makes it possible. Thank you everyone for everything.

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PREFACE

There is nothing worse than wanting to run away and escape your own self. When you want to escape your own mind and body, it feels like there's nowhere to run. I know how that feels. I've been there.

I also know that right now you might feel like a small boat facing into a storm of anxiety and that just trying to concentrate on reading this book is an enormous challenge.

The first thing you must know is that it's going to be okay! You're going to get through this. In fact, not only are you going to get through this, but with the help of this book, you can journey to a place of full recovery and become a stronger person because of it. Anxiety is not a life sentence. It is absolutely curable.

A new era is dawning for people who suffer from anxiety, and this book is part of that movement. I'm going to share a truly transformative way to heal anxiety. This approach, called "The DARE Response," came about as a result of my own personal experience with healing anxiety. Its roots are in the new wave of positive psychology and the mindfulness movement that have become so popular in the last five to ten years. It's an approach that seeks to do away with the old model of simply managing and coping with anxiety; it seeks instead to heal the problem for good.

No matter how trapped and distraught you feel right now, this process can really work miracles for you as long as you commit to it. Your perseverance will navigate you through this storm and ensure you reach full recovery.

I'm not saying this journey is for everyone. I'm also not saying this will be easy. What I am saying is that if you stay the course, the rewards will be worth it. Together we'll fight to win back your peace of mind, your strength of will, and your joy in life.

INTRODUCTION

dare : v.

To confront boldly; brave

Anxiety is unpleasant. It often feels as if you're separated from ordinary life by a pane of glass. The doubt and confusion it causes are the hardest to deal with:

“Why is this happening to me?”

“Am I going mad?”

“Is my brain damaged?”

“Will this last forever?”

An anxiety disorder is difficult to understand unless you've experienced it firsthand. An anxiety disorder is not the kind of garden-variety stress everyone loves to talk about.

You hear people remark, “Yeah, I'm so stressed too” and “Hey, who isn't anxious—why are you complaining?” There's a *big* difference between anxiety and that kind of stress, and most people don't understand how all-consuming anxiety can be. They have no idea how terrifying a panic attack can feel or how uncomfortable a sensation like unreality can be. Your doctor may have a sympathetic ear, but unless they have experienced anxiety, they may never really ‘get’ what you are going through.

People who don't understand can often lose patience. They might say things like, “Come on, pull yourself together!” or “Just snap out of it!”

You try to explain to your very best friend that you can't make the wedding, and they think you're being selfish or you're not thinking of them on their big day. Your buddies want to go on a short hike, but you know that it's *way* too far out of your safe zone. They don't understand that you feel so shaken by anxiety that it's hard enough to think about leaving your house, not to mention having to walk in the wilderness, miles from a hospital.

In these situations, you want your companions to understand you're not avoiding them, but unfortunately, that's how it comes across. You need someone to understand how scary this damn thing feels, someone who can reassure you that you're not losing your mind.

It can be very hard to admit you have anxiety. How do you share with someone that sometimes you feel so out of control? That sometimes your mind fills with bizarre and

shocking thoughts. You worry that if anyone knew what was going on in your head, they would call to have you locked up and your kids sent to a foster home.

So you make another excuse to get out of a social engagement, and in the meantime your sense of self-worth really takes a thrashing. You beat yourself up over it constantly:

“I mean really ... what the heck is wrong with me?! Why can't I just get up in the morning and not obsess about this anxiety and the day ahead? I used to be so carefree, and now I worry about having to sit still while getting my hair cut!”

I'm not going to go on about this. You already know exactly how it feels. I mention it just to point out that it's perfectly normal to feel this way. You're not alone. You're not “losing it,” and you don't have a serious health problem. Anxiety can play tricks on your mind. Of course, if you do have a health concern, *please* make sure you get all the necessary examinations so that you can rule out those conditions.

But chances are excellent you're “simply” suffering from anxiety. I know you wish the doctor would just find some subtropical disease to explain all these sensations. At least then you could go about treating this or that disease.

If, on the other hand, you've been diagnosed with anxiety, then in all likelihood that really is what it is. Trust that diagnosis and don't second-guess it, fearing it might be something much worse.

You feel the way you do because of high levels of stress hormones in your system. We'll go through this in more detail later in this book, but basically our body's fight-or-flight response has gone a bit trigger-happy and is wreaking mental and emotional havoc.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS

I know you might think your anxiety is very unique and singular to you, but I'm sorry to burst your bubble. It isn't. It's not one bit unique at all. In fact, it's as boring, ordinary, and common as everyone else's anxiety.

There are literally millions of perfectly sane, normal people who have the exact same problem you do. (In the United States alone, approximately 40 million American adults aged eighteen and older are estimated to have an anxiety disorder.) *So if you suffer from anxiety, you're actually quite normal.*

No matter how deranged and shocking your anxious thoughts are, I guarantee you there's someone close to you who is also suffering in silence. No matter how bad your panic attacks are, there are millions of people that experience them in the exact same manner—with the exact same unusual sensations—as you. Millions of perfectly sane people suffer in silence because stress hormones cause an oversensitized nervous system.

“BUT I FEEL LIKE I’M LOSING IT!”

You’re not going nuts. If you could flick a magic switch that caused an immediate reduction of all the stress hormones floating through your bloodstream, you would suddenly feel a whole lot more normal again. The sense of unreality would end and so would the tornado of anxious thoughts tearing through your mind.

Have you ever heard the saying, if you think you’re going nuts, you probably aren’t? One of the goals of this book is to assure you that you’re perfectly okay and that you can indeed end your anxiety problem.

The fact is anxiety is incredibly treatable, but very few people tell you that! I’ve been teaching people how to end anxiety issues for over ten years, and I can’t stress enough that this problem is entirely curable. All it takes is the *right* guidance and your commitment to get better. This book outlines exactly how you can end your anxiety problem and move toward a greater sense of personal freedom. Getting you back to your old, carefree self again is the goal.

Let me briefly explain how it happened for me. My anxiety problem started with a panic attack. If you’ve experienced panic attacks, I bet you remember your first. Mine was on a Sunday afternoon in a church in Dublin. I was eighteen years old and had been out celebrating my final school exams the night before.

I was desperately hung over, sitting a few deep in the church pew, when a series of really intense bodily sensations suddenly overcame me. My heart was pounding through my chest. I couldn’t catch my breath, and pins and needles started to spread down the side of my chest and arms. It was the most alarming series of bodily sensations I had ever experienced. My first thought was, “What if I’m having a heart attack?” As soon as I had that thought, my anxiety spiked into a state of panic! The fear I felt was like an electrical shock to my stomach.

I needed to get outside, so I excused myself and rushed toward the exit at the back of the church. Standing outside, the physical sensations lessened slightly, and I thought the worst had passed. Then another wave of panic and fear hit me even harder.

I wanted desperately to ask someone for help, but what would I say to them? I looked for a friendly face, but no one made eye contact. Would asking for help just make me feel more helpless and afraid? Would they even know what to do? I paced up and down, thinking about how far I was from the nearest hospital, when I felt the sensations lessen slightly. I decided to try to make it home. I got my bike and walked it slowly back home, carefully trying not to aggravate the sensations again.

When I eventually got home, I told no one and hid in my house for days. That was week one. What followed were about 500 more days of really high general anxiety as well as additional panic attacks. I went from being a young man who could travel the world with ease to someone who became afraid to leave his house. During that period of time, I experienced just about every anxious sensation possible. It was like a crash course in anxiety disorders. You name it, I felt it, from strange bodily sensations to intrusive thoughts and depersonalization.

The turning point came one evening. I remember it clearly. I had really hit rock bottom and was lying on the floor of my bedroom, wishing the anxiety would end, when this flash of insight came to me. It was like seeing my thought processes from a distance. For the first time, I could clearly see how I had been approaching this all *wrong*. I was fueling my anxiety problem by the way I was responding to each and every anxious thought that crossed my mind.

That one insight eventually led to the end of my panic attacks and constant anxiety! It was like a complete *retooling* of my thought process related to anxiety from a wrong way, to a daring, new way. The illusion of fear that the anxiety held me under was shattered, and from that point forward I started to win back my freedom.

I wanted to share that insight with others, so I eventually wrote it all down and posted it online. The response was almost immediate. People told me they were making massive improvements in their anxiety from the insights I shared. Now I had validation that this same approach could work for other people too. From there I wrote my first book, *Panic Away*, which later went on to become an international best seller. That was ten years ago, and since then I have had the privilege of coaching people from every walk of life. I have taught CEOs and soccer moms, famous celebrities and military personnel.

What makes my approach unique is the speed of recovery that people achieve. The lessons and insights I share are simple and get results fast. For example:

- People who could not leave their homes are now flying on holidays overseas.
- People who could not drive to the end of their roads are now driving across the country.
- TV presenters and entertainers who were about to quit their jobs are now doing their best work yet.
- Mothers and fathers who could not attend their kids' school plays are now participating fully in their children's lives.

You name it, if anxiety is the problem, I've seen it and helped someone somewhere overcome it. It has been a privilege to be able to play a part in thousands of people's recovery from anxiety. Helping them get their life back after years of unnecessary anxiety and fear is rewarding work. Over the course of the past decade, the route to healing anxiety for good became clearer and clearer to me and motivated me to write this book you're holding.

In this book, you'll discover how to:

- put an end to anxious and intrusive thoughts
- stop the occurrence of panic attacks and end general anxiety
- face any anxious situation you've been avoiding—driving, shopping, flying, socializing, etc.

- regain your confidence and feel like your old self again, no matter how long you've been suffering

The insights I'll share with you really can undo years of anxiety—and here's what truly sets this book apart: You'll not only learn how to end your anxiety problem, but you'll also *discover how to turn this problem into a personal triumph*. You'll have the opportunity to discover the meaning in this struggle and develop a new hidden strength within yourself.

People who eventually find me usually do so after they've gone through a wide range of therapies and treatments, everything from alternative therapies to the more traditional route of anti-anxiety medications. I'm sure you've tried an exhaustive list of things already. Because we lead complicated lives, we often expect the solutions to our problems to be expensive and complicated too. In fact, we trust expensive, complicated solutions over simple ones, even when most approaches overcomplicate recovery. The approach I teach, called The DARE Response, does the opposite for you. It simplifies recovery.

The reason that many of these other approaches fail is that they're based on an old model of "anxiety management." The culture of anxiety management is so pervasive in today's society that medication and distraction techniques are the only solutions people know. Managing anxiety, however, is not a real long-term solution. The name itself gives you a clue to its impact: you learn to manage anxiety but not to heal it. You might get temporary relief, but the anxiety inevitably returns, and you haven't developed the confidence to deal with it.

I don't teach anxiety management. I teach people how to heal their anxiety *so they can get back to living their life again to its fullest*.

Anxiety causes you to become stuck in a stagnant state of fear. Learning how to skillfully move with the anxious discomfort that you feel removes you from that state of fear. Moving *with* anxiety places you back into a state of flow, which eventually frees you from an anxious state. The DARE Response teaches you that simple movement.

The unusual thing about The DARE Response is that it's not designed to get rid of your anxiety; it's designed to *get rid of your fear of the anxiety*. It's your resistance to and struggle with anxiety that keeps you trapped. A bit like quicksand, the more you struggle, the deeper you sink. When you employ The DARE Response, your anxious mind is taken out of the way, allowing your nervous system to desensitize.

I'm not suggesting that once you master this approach you'll never experience anxiety again. That's unrealistic. Life has its challenges that will cause anxiety to rise up again at times just like it does for me. The difference, however, is that you won't get trapped in that anxious state any longer. Instead, you'll pass through it with ease.

Although the insights I had during my own recovery were unique to me, I don't for a moment claim to be the originator of this new approach. I call it the "new approach" for healing anxiety because up until just a few short years ago, almost every

therapeutic treatment for anxiety was based on that old model of managing the problem indefinitely. Thankfully in recent years, a quiet revolution has been happening in psychology, and now we're starting to see new therapies emerge that truly address anxiety and heal it at its core. Some examples of these therapies include mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

It's not that these new psychological approaches were just developed. In fact, many great doctors and psychiatrists in the 1950s and 1960s, such as the late Drs. Viktor Frankl and Claire Weekes, advocated tirelessly for them as the only truly effective treatments for anxiety. Unfortunately back then, the dominant thinking was that anxiety was a permanent condition that had to be managed or medicated away.

I believe over the next ten years this new approach will become the mainstream therapeutic approach for healing all anxiety because of the efficiency of results it achieves and the speed at which those results occur. My contribution is to help make this approach as simple and easy to apply as possible. (You can read all about the hard science behind The DARE Response in the appendix of this book.)

You see, when people are anxious or in the grip of a panic attack, they need really simple and clear instructions. The DARE Response is simple if nothing else. It's an approach that can be applied to all manifestations of anxiety be it general anxiety, panic attacks, OCD or social anxiety.

“You can only take people as far as you have gone” Old English Proverb

Often times the best insights and breakthroughs can come from outside the world of academia. While I have graduated in psychology, I am not a clinical psychologist, therapist or doctor. My unique understanding and skill in this area comes from direct personal experience of ending my own anxiety. What I feel makes me more than qualified to help you is my ten-year track record of helping countless people end their anxiety disorders.

Before we get into the details of The DARE Response, I would like you to think of this book as a journey we're taking together. I'm going to be asking you to leave the safe haven of your comfort zone and travel with me to full recovery. This won't always be an easy journey. There will be times when you'll feel like quitting, but please don't. I know you have what it takes to get there.