

Imagine feeling extremely uncomfortable and out of place no matter where you go where there are people - panicked to the point you're immobilized and unable to speak. Your only thought is that of fleeing to somewhere you can be alone and yet, when you get there, you can't stand to be alone. This is Daniela Grazia's detailed account of living with Social Anxiety Disorder and accepting her sexuality after 30 years of silence.

On the Outside Looking In - My Life with Social Anxiety Disorder

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4964.html?s=pdf>

On The Outside Looking In



MY LIFE WITH SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

Daniela Grazia

Copyright © 2010 Daniela Grazia

ISBN 978-1-60910-455-9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2010

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
My Childhood	11
High School.....	17
Inherited Traits.....	25
Teenage Torture.....	28
Standing Still.....	33
An Unexpected Friend.....	35
Breaking Down	39
Trying to Move On	49
Living a Secret Life.....	54
Added Hurdles.....	61
Ray.....	68
Family or Not, It Doesn't Matter	75
I'm Not Alone	78
Striving for a "Normal" Life	82
Letting Go and Regret	88
January 25, 2001 – Journal Entry	95

On the Outside Looking In

Desperate for Help	97
A Living Hell	100
August 2003 – Journal Entry.....	109
Hanging On	112
July 2004 – Journal Entry.....	119
August 24, 2004 – Journal Entry.....	120
New Beginnings	124
June 29, 2005 – Autobiography/Narrative.....	128
Finally, Some Help	132
Forging Ahead	138
Getting Stronger	149
Hard to Say Good-Bye	156
Making the Best of Each Day.....	161

Introduction

“It is a feeling that comes over me often, an old menace that stubbornly refuses to die. In classes, in coffee shops, in political meetings, in almost any activity where surrounded by potential friends. It is the profound feeling of alienness.

At any moment in the group conversation, something in me snaps. I look around the table at the other people blissfully talking, and I do not feel like one of them. I am not one of them. I am different, a foreigner, an alien, a stranger in a strange land.

And then the urge to run away, to hide, to be away from the people comes up. Who are they to me? What do I know of them? Sometimes I fight the urge, and stay on, hiding my vast discomfort. Other times I do run away, cursing the cowardice and the shame, miserable in my own misanthropy, but secure in my silence.

There is something in the faces, in the voices of the others that I do not have. They are into the conversation. They live outside themselves, I live inside myself. They talk, listen, and laugh; I think, listen, and smile.

They are relaxed. I am not. I am never relaxed, except when I am alone. Solitude is the only place where I am truly myself, the only place where the real ME can ever be seen.

Yet I am not content with this. For the real ME is lonely, desperately lonely, longing for intimacy, friendship and love. I long to be able to relax, to laugh, to talk, and converse amiably with other human beings. But I cannot. I idealize them in private and fear them in public.

Fear...fear drives the haunted mind. Fear tortures me, gnaws at me, and chases me from nearly everything I crave the most. But not even fear can conquer the longing, the desperate longing, the aching

On the Outside Looking In

striving for meaning in life, for something other than the endless nights alone and unhugged, the dreams unshared, the life unnoticed.

When I am alone, I wish I was other people. When I am with other people, I wish I was alone. This contradiction is slowly, but ruthlessly destroying my soul."

Soc-phob, Oct. 28, 1997

<http://www.depressedzone.com>

~~~~~

This piece was written by another individual suffering from Social Anxiety Disorder (S.A.D.). My heart truly went out to him. I do not know who the author is but it affected me so deeply at the time I read it. This person so effectively summed up a lot of what I have felt - and I'm sure what others dealing with S.A.D. have felt- during our lives.

At the time I read this on the internet, I was desperately searching for answers and help. Knowing someone else was sharing this horror was in itself a bit comforting. Not that I was happy someone else was hurting this way, but it meant that it wasn't just me and who I was. There was a name for it.

Today, it is the year 2010 and I am 43. My partner, Rachel of 4 ½ years, and I have a loving relationship and have made a very nice and comfortable home together. Sometimes I think back and wonder in disbelief how I was able to make it to this point. There were so many days I struggled through, barely having the energy or desire to leave my bed. So many days were filled with a darkness and "heaviness" so cumbersome, I felt as if I was being crushed. So many days I wandered aimlessly, desperately searching for a place to fit in promising myself if I was still feeling so hopeless in so much time, I would end my life thus ending the pain and torture I had endured for so long in silence.

*My Life with Social Anxiety Disorder*

Every hour of every day was a struggle and every day I felt alone no matter how many people were around me. Every day I wondered how I could possibly get through one more day. I couldn't be comfortable around other people and yet I hated being alone. I didn't know where to be. I was keeping so much inside afraid to divulge what I felt to be shameful qualities about myself including feelings I was having towards other women. I lived a life within myself - on the outside looking in.

I began a life of pretending to fit in. If I couldn't actually "feel" like I belonged, the best I could do was to act as though I did. My actions didn't come naturally to me and my conversations became "forced." I laughed when I thought I should laugh. I went out of my way to please others thinking that was the only way I could get them to like me. I wanted to be a part of the world and my surroundings. I endured countless hours of anxiety in an attempt to feel that way. This was the only way I knew how to do it. People who have not experienced S.A.D. may not understand what I mean by this but I'm sure if you spoke to someone else who has, they would attest to the same.

The only time I could be "myself" was when I was in the company of people I call my "comfort" people. For some reason, with these people my actions and words were my own and not forced. They came naturally. I could be funny, interesting, hold a conversation and feel I belonged. I felt so much "lighter" in their company. The "real" me was able to emerge if only for a short time. These times were incredibly freeing and I craved them.

These people have been few and far between and they have no idea how important they have been to me, or how much I relied on them for some relief from the outside world. In time though, these people have one by one moved on with their own lives. Each time one of them did, it was devastating to me and was a huge adjustment and loss. I still have contact with some of them, but they are not part of my



*On the Outside Looking In*

daily life except for Rachel. The only time I had proof there was another person deep down inside me craving to get out was the time I spent with them. If I could just be this other person all the time, I could be productive, content and have a sense I belonged in the world. I dedicate this book to those people in my life whom without knowing it, provided me the strength to carry on and to Rachel for coming into my life, staying by my side, being so supportive and willing to understand my struggles.

I became so good at hiding what was going on inside. Some of these people will be surprised by the confessions I will make in this book. Even though they were attentive enough to notice the way I became quiet, awkward and uncomfortable around others, they didn't know the extent of my struggles. I'd tried discussing this with several of them, but they couldn't understand it not having gone through it themselves. They did not know how to help and the topic would move on to something else leaving me to deal with it on my own. Others, I'm sure just thought this was my personality and who I was.

As I begin to write and think back of when it all started around the age of 12, I feel very sad for the little girl who boarded the school bus one day on her way to her first day at junior high school only to become afflicted with an overwhelming sense of detachment and alienation from the world around her. I'm sure I had been developing symptoms for some time but all the forces came together on that day. It was the first day I can vividly recall going through the mental and physical transformations associated with S.A.D.

I'm not proud to admit how large an impact alcohol has played in my life because of this affliction. It's proven people with S.A.D. have a much higher incidence of abusing alcohol and probability of becoming potential alcoholics as well as suffering from depression. More often than not, I've used alcohol to self medicate especially before a social event but also when alone to help ease the pain inside. I'd like to say

this isn't the case anymore but it is to a lesser degree. I'm able to keep a handle on it but there are times when I'm in such a hurry to ease my discomfort, I drink too quickly or too much. There are many times I've chosen which events I will attend based on the whether there will be alcohol there or not. At times, to other people, this came across as selfishness as I would only participate in situations I knew I could handle. I can see how this would be the case but when a close friend got angry with me because of it and told me I was selfish, I was deeply hurt. I believed I was a good person. I strove to be a good daughter, friend, sister, aunt..., but it didn't always come across that way.

I'd love to say I'm completely better today but I'm not. It is still very difficult for me to attend social gatherings and go to work every day. At times I still choose to avoid certain situations but unfortunately, I do not have the luxury of avoiding work and this happens to be one environment where social interaction is unavoidable. Most days I dread it but at the same time I want to be productive, contribute to our household income, and feel that I belong in the world. I specifically look for work which requires the least amount of social interaction. The best setting for me is to have my own space away from others where I do not feel obligated to maintain a conversation. I need to emphasize this is not how I want it to be. I long to have the ability to interact with my peers and feel their equal but mostly I do not.

I am college educated having recently graduated with a 3.73 GPA but feel I have not lived up to my potential as far as a career. I could do well in school because it was something I could do on my own. Applying those skills in the outside world is completely different. I've read that many people afflicted with S.A.D. work below their potential taking jobs they are over qualified for with lower salaries just to find a place where they can function adequately while others are unable to work at all.

*On the Outside Looking In*

Having said all this, I also have to say that I have come a long way from where I was. I'm now able to walk through the mall with my head up and not be thinking others are looking and talking about me. I'm able to sign my name in front of people and have it be legible. I try to not turn in another direction when approached by someone I know coming towards me at the store or on the street (this is still hard and still find myself doing it at times). I make it a point to at least look at people and say hello. I can go to the gym on my own. I'm able to make phone calls. I've worked very hard to block the negative self talk that plagued me nearly every minute of every day. Today, when these thoughts enter my head, I'm able to shut them down before they lead me down that dark road of self destruction. These accomplishments may sound trivial to someone who has not experienced S.A.D. but to someone who has, these menial steps are monumental.

It has been with sheer determination, many prayers, and a yearning to feel like I belong in the world that I've managed to finally achieve a fairly "normal" existence. I've fought, struggled, cried, and suffered a nervous breakdown to get to the point I am today. I was determined to not waste my life. Even though I'd contemplated it, I knew I couldn't end my own life and when God wouldn't take me either, I had to find a way to make the best of it. I had a wonderful family and several friends who meant the world to me. I wanted my parents to be proud of me. I wanted a family and a home. I wanted to love and be loved. I pushed myself to get through one day and then the next. I sought help from others and when that didn't work; I bought books and read articles on line on how to get better. There are so many joyous and beautiful occasions I want to experience, places I want to see. Life is so short. I hold onto the happy times I've had and hope to have in the future. I still endure anxiety in many situations but I have to remember to give myself credit for even allowing myself to be in the situation. There are still many times I'd like to run or avoid all together.

Medications have helped to alleviate some anxiety and the deep depressions which frequently overcame me. The thought of taking medication the rest of my life was something that didn't sit well with me and I fought giving in to it. I'm sure it doesn't sit well for other people either. It took many attempts and doctors to find the right medication and dosage for me. It was very discouraging so there were many times I would give up and discontinue them. But each time I hit my lowest points, I knew I had to do something. I could not continue to live that way. It was too hard to live. Eventually, I did find a medication that worked for me. I had to think of it as having diabetes or high blood pressure and needing the meds every day to control it.

The problem is there are usually side effects to meds which off-set the positive effects and you have to decide which is more important or easier to live with. In my case I've gained some weight which I've been unable to lose. I also experience a condition called "anhedonia" which is "the inability to experience pleasure from normally pleasurable experiences" and is usually accompanied by a loss of sex drive. Those "warm, fuzzy" feelings that used to come with being attracted to someone, close friendships, being with family or close to my partner are gone for me.

I've been told by mental health professionals this condition coincides with major depression and goes away when the depression lifts but I have a hard time believing this since my depression has been lessened by the meds and I'm still anhedonic. I have no clinical proof to back it up but I've read many testimonials on the internet by others who have taken antidepressants and experienced the same condition. I have to wonder if there is a correlation between the two. I also had to decide which is worse – the deep depression or weight gain and anhedonia.

My intentions in writing this book are in hopes that no other little girl or little boy should have to endure this amount of pain and anxiety alone or in fear of shame and that they will seek help sooner rather

*On the Outside Looking In*

than later. I write this so that people afflicted with it know they are not alone. Others need to be made aware that this condition truly exists and one cannot just “snap out of it.” I’m sure if that were the case, most of us would have chosen to do so rather than live a life of existence as opposed to living our lives fully, happily and without shame. I want to play a part in having people acknowledge this condition for the debilitating force that it is. I hope to encourage people with S.A.D. to not get so discouraged that they just give up and disappear. I also encourage family members and friends to look for signs if their loved one appears to have difficulty being around people. Make yourself informed so you can better understand what they are dealing with. Try talking with them. Don’t let them suffer alone. Be supportive. Let them know there is a name for what they are feeling. Steer them towards help as soon as possible.

I hope to relay how S.A.D. affects every aspect of one’s life. In doing so, I’ll write about my closest relationships, how they were affected, and the many relationships I’m sure I missed out on throughout my life. I’ll also share my experiences in the workplace and describe what a typical day at work feels like with S.A.D. Writing this all down and sharing my story is freeing and therapeutic for me as well. I’d dealt with this on my own in silence for over 30 years.

It has only been within the past several years that I have more openly discussed this with someone other than a therapist. I made the decision to fully disclose my issues to Rachel when I knew we both wanted a committed relationship and bought our home together. I wanted her to know what she might be dealing with. I didn’t want her to think I was lazy or selfish when it was difficult for me to make a phone call, run an errand, or attend a social function. Not wanting to burden her with all the daily responsibilities of maintaining a household pushes me to do things I might otherwise avoid. Rachel’s brother also deals with the effects of S.A.D. so in writing this, I am helping her to better understand both our difficulties. There had been

*My Life with Social Anxiety Disorder*

times when she questioned my not wanting to attend various social functions. It was hard for her to understand why I could be perfectly comfortable and competent with her and in our home and not be the same “out there.” She’s troubled by my need to drink in an effort to self medicate. I only wish I had an answer.

Most people know what it’s like to experience the elevated anxiety when giving a speech or going to an interview. But imagine if you had to live with extreme anxiety every day? Imagine if the only way to diminish the anxiety is to be by yourself-away from people. Imagine feeling detached or out of place most everywhere you go-feeling alone even when surrounded by people. Imagine waking up every morning with a feeling of dread at the thought of having to go out in the world to work or school (or partake in any of life’s daily activities that involve other people)-to give anything to not have to go. Imagine to prefer being sick and in a hospital versus dealing with the anxiety of going to work. Imagine feeling uneasy and unable to hold a conversation even with people you’ve known your entire life. Imagine walking through a mall with your head down in an effort to avoid eye contact thinking all eyes are on you and everyone is talking about you. Imagine feeling like you’re always on the outside trying to get in. Imagine not knowing where to be.

This is what it’s like to live with Social Anxiety Disorder.

Imagine feeling extremely uncomfortable and out of place no matter where you go where there are people - panicked to the point you're immobilized and unable to speak. Your only thought is that of fleeing to somewhere you can be alone and yet, when you get there, you can't stand to be alone. This is Daniela Grazia's detailed account of living with Social Anxiety Disorder and accepting her sexuality after 30 years of silence.

## **On the Outside Looking In - My Life with Social Anxiety Disorder**

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4964.html?s=pdf>