

“My Quarter-Life Crisis: How an Anxiety Disorder Knocked Me Down, and How I Got Back Up” by Lee Wellman

Book Review by Judith Bemis, Co-author of *Embracing the Fear, Learning to Manage Anxiety and Panic Attacks*

“There’s something humbling about developing an anxiety disorder. It can knock you down in a heartbeat.” Anyone who has walked in Lee Wellman’s shoes will relate to these words as they will to each page of his book, *My Quarter-Life Crisis: How an Anxiety Disorder Knocked Me Down, and How I Got Back Up*. As a recovered agoraphobic, I wish I would have had this book in hand at the age of 27 when a sudden rush of adrenaline shot through my body. When my heart was pounding and I thought I might pass out. When I too was knocked down in a heartbeat.

Lee Wellman experienced his first panic attack while sitting in a conference room at the Prudential Center in Boston. It was his first month in a new position. He described the attack as follows: *“A sudden rush of adrenaline rushed through my body and into my head. It hit me out of the blue and felt as though someone had sucked the breath out of my lungs and blew it back into my face. I was almost knocked out of my chair. A strange, innate sensation to get out of that room came over me.”*

He attributed these symptoms to poor air circulation in the conference room. Nine days later, after he had his second panic attack, he writes, *“Unbeknownst to me, this attack changed my life forever.”* He was now aware that there was something wrong, that the first attack had nothing to do with the air circulation. So, what could have caused such a strange reaction? Here was a young man who was educated and successful. He was on top of the world. His career was thriving and he had recently been promoted. Sometime during the course of his recovery, he learned that it is that same personality type - intelligent, ambitious, high achiever - that made him a prime candidate for an anxiety disorder. Wellman writes, *“Motivated, successful, intelligent people suffer from anxiety issues because they care so much about their lives, their future, and are constantly striving for the best.”*

As I was drawn into his story, I found myself walking home with the author on that cold, January day, *“confused, scared, sad, and mad all at the same time.”* I dreaded the workplace along with him, and felt his discomfort during those long meetings in the conference room. I got caught up in the utter confusion, the ceaseless analyzing. How vividly I recall that feeling of being trapped, and the need to escape. Throughout the book, I relived the terrifying days of my own anxiety disorder. And I thought to myself, How can all of this be so predictable?

Wellman describes waking up each morning fearing the anxiety, going through the day worrying about it, and going to bed at night thinking about it. It became his main focus. He talks about the loss of identity. *“I didn’t like the new me,”* he writes. *“I didn’t like being afraid of going to work, heading to dinner with friends, standing in line, or even attending church.”* Those of us who have ridden the waves of uncontrollable panic attacks, or have tried to cope with intense anxiety on a daily basis, can certainly identify with the author.

He searched for some kind of answer or resolution to the problem. Seeing his symptoms as physical he sought out medical help, only to be told that there was nothing physically wrong, that he was in “great shape.” At first, like many of us, he was reluctant to seek out psychological help. *“People tend to shy away from therapy,”* writes Wellman. But he goes on to say, *“The first step in conquering an anxiety disorder is admitting to yourself that you need help and that it’s okay to seek it.”*

Wellman retraces his steps, digs into his past, and follows the course that finally erupted into his struggle with anxiety and panic attacks, recognizing the thinking patterns, symptoms and personality traits that provoke anxiety. His insightful journey makes it clear to the reader that these attacks are not coming from “out of the blue,” that they are there for a reason. What a valuable insight this is for the reader who is lost in the confusion and hopelessness of an anxiety disorder. It is one of the most important lessons in the book. I well remember that this very awareness was the beginning of my own recovery. It is a message that is empowering. We are no longer the victim when we realize that we ourselves have set the anxiety in motion by our own thinking patterns.

The author realizes that the anxiety isn't going to just go away. It follows him everywhere; it is no longer confined to the workplace. He knows that he is dealing with something that he cannot just walk away from, or leave behind. Soon he is faced with the depression that invariably sets in when his world is turned upside down and he just isn't sure what is happening to him. As his anxiety grows, he begins to educate himself about anxiety disorders, panic attacks and depression. He writes that knowledge empowered him and restored his confidence. Confidence that helped free him from the hold of an anxiety disorder. *“Educating yourself about anxiety before it strikes will lessen the blow, if not protect you from it altogether.”*

Wellman claims that he stumbled upon a quarter-life crisis due to a combination of stress and the fact that he was constantly focusing on his future. He was dwelling on where he thought he should be rather than simply being happy where he was. He states that, *“Thinking about the future and not living for the present day is the number one cause of anxiety.”*

In time, the author learns to roll with the punches and go with the flow of life. He learns to live in the moment and not get caught up in the “what ifs” of the future. He reaches a point where he no longer focuses on the anxiety. Realizing that there is no quick fix, no recovery deadlines, he allows time to pass, and he is happy with the slightest progress.

“You can forever wish away your disorder, or you can turn your struggle into a positive,” he writes. Lee Wellman definitely turned his struggle into a positive. He faced his anxiety problem with great courage. He met it head on. His words are bound to reassure anxiety/panic sufferers, giving them hope for their own recovery. More than that, his words will uplift and inspire them. The author came through a very difficult time and having done that, he is now reaching out to others so that they too can find freedom from their anxiety. His down-to-earth, candid account of his own disorder, and a “cheat sheet” of helpful strategies, make this book a *must read*. (Book may be ordered through www.leewellman.com or amazon.com)