

WAT IK
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WILLEN
WETEN OVER
ANGST, ZELFLIEFDE
EN ACCEPTATIE
MARIAN MUDDER

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This book is for people who want to feel better, for people whose life is sometimes hard, and don't know if they are worth it, for people who want to go their own way but are afraid to. For whom life is a scary endeavor.

I am a known actress and writer, but what few people know is that I have been active as a coach and therapist for ten years. I am trained in EFT and I am a mindfulness trainer. As a therapist my specialty is to explain complicated matters in a simple and transparent way. And having real life experience suffering from anxiety disorder, I know what goes on in the minds of insecure and fearful people and why certain things are so challenging for them.

What I would have like to have known earlier – on fear, self-love and acceptance contains everything I have learned through the years combined with the professional knowledge I have gained while working as a therapist. It's the book I wish I could have given my younger self.

About me (before I was a therapist)

As a little girl I was very adventurous. I build huts, climbed trees, and called the barren land next to my school the Amazon. I was fearless. Life was easy. That changed as I got older. As I became an adult I did not feel fearless. I did not feel loved and I did not feel pretty. I felt as if was worth nothing, suffered from chronic lack of energy and often had unexplainable headaches.

I felt worthless, guilty and was worried constantly. I was deadly shy and scared to approach people I didn't know. I once pooped my pants because I was too shy to ask where the bathroom was. Often I would wake up in the middle of the night crying and in a panic. Besides that, my relationships were complicated, as I had commitment phobia as well as a fear of abandonment, and was quick to get angry. I couldn't imagine that anyone could fall in love with me, or stay in a loving relationship with me. When my first boyfriend said: 'I love you', I answered: 'Oh... don't'. Not because of false modesty, no, it was well meant advice on my part.

When you never feel good enough and you think you are ugly and stupid, it makes you feel ashamed of those feelings. And you start working on yourself. I went into therapy. In therapy I learned my parents were the cause. My mom was a huge worry wart that obsessively worried about literally everything. My dad suffered from depressions. So that was very clear. I hadn't learned to form healthy relationships, hold my boundaries, and to respect myself for the simple reason that my parents never did. Children subconsciously take on patterns they learn from their parents. But knowing why you have a problem, doesn't mean the problem goes away. So I took a course in transcendent meditation, then Reiki i and ii, Avatar, and other workshops like 'finds the goddess in yourself' to 'Breath till you drop'. I read many books on philosophy, spirituality, psychology and neurology. I have undergone many therapies and took workshops, and did endless self-evaluations. I studied all self-help bestsellers and gained insight into myself, and understood better and better what was wrong. But, at the same time, these workshops and books reinforced the self-doubt, shame and feeling that there was something wrong with me, something I kept thinking needed fixing. And as long as you keep thinking something is wrong and needs fixing, something *is* wrong with you.

At a certain point in my life I was in a deep crisis. It was a deep mourning process that was caused by a big loss, one because of a death of a loved one, one because of letting go of a love; in short: my life had collapsed.

Then I did something I had never done before: nothing. I didn't start analyzing, I didn't rationalize. I didn't read a self-help book, didn't visit a therapist. I didn't toughen up, didn't have a stiff upper lip. I just went to lie in my hammock, and did nothing. I allowed myself to let the pain in. I started to feel. And I fell into a deep depression. When someone asked me how I felt, I said: 'very bad'. It was the first step in my recovery. During the healing process I have learned a lot. I found out all the therapies I took had taught me to work hard to keep my head above water, but I was still working hard. I learned that pleasing people is a fear based survival mechanism, just like perfectionism. Shame makes fearful and allowing yourself to be and feel vulnerable is the road to recovery.

About this book

This book gives you the information and tools to help yourself. Because, and I want to stress this, reading it offers you valuable insights, but things will change only when you bring those insights into practice. So use this book as a workbook. Make notes, talk to it. Rip out the #notetoself lists that appeal to you and hang them up in clear sight. Not everything you read will fit you, but pick and choose to create your own menu. Be aware of sensations in your body while you are reading. Some will make you feel resistant, others will make you feel drawn to. The things that push you away are the most interesting, most likely they will touch something in you deeply in a place where you don't want to be hurt. Don't focus on it too much but just keep reading. Or skip a chapter. I have arranged the book in a way that leaves a lot of variation, and soon you will find something that you will enjoy reading again. And the next time you read the book, you will find that the chapters that cause resistance will draw you in. Some exercises will lead to self-exploration, other ones will immediately cause a beneficial effect on your mental health. But, change demands effort and commitment. The book shows you the road to recovery, but you have to walk that road, sometimes hop-skipping, sometimes crawling. You will find out what fear is and where it comes from. That it is not your fault that you are afraid you feel like you are not good enough and that you should stop blaming yourself. Little by little you learn to rise above your thinking patterns, and you find out your fear responses are fooling you. You learn to attack stress factor nr 1, self-criticism, and you will see a lot of negativity in your life was caused by that. This book is not about bettering yourself, it's about accepting yourself the



way you are. The world changes when you feel like you are good enough. And now it's up to you. All you have to do is say yes.

Love,
Marian

Getting to know your brain

For a long time I thought that we as humans had improved ourselves through evolution, but that's not entirely true. Yuval Noah Harari, in his book *Sapiens*, writes that we have evolved, but mostly in the areas of survival and fast reproduction. We have improved our skills of exploiting animals, destroying planet Earth and abusing the oceans for dumping waste. We have improved our capacity to fight and cure diseases. We have bettered our skills of killing another human being, plant, tree and animal without hurting ourselves. We are better equipped to deal with danger. The reason we are so successful as a species is that we have become experts at survival. At the core, our brain is only interested in survival, it doesn't care about happiness. And our primal brain is the cause.

You have three brains

Our brain is a product of millions of years of evolution. American neuroscientist Paul MacLean developed the theory that our brains consist of three autonomous brains that each have specific functions and possibilities: the reptile brain, the mammal brain and the human brain. The three brains - as their already names imply - have been evolved subsequently. They are connected and are hierarchically structured, and the oldest brain represents the highest level.

The **brain stem** (also known as reptile brain) was formed about 500 million years ago and is geared towards survival. It guides our instinct and controls breathing and heart function. This brain stores physical impressions.

The **limbic system** (also known as mammal brain) was developed about 200 million years ago. This brain contains everything that has to do with emotions and motivation. The core of this brain is the amygdala, that plays an important role in fear regulation.

The **neocortex** (also known as the human brain) was developed threehundred thousand years ago and is known as the crown of creation. This part of the brain regulates knowledge, allows us to analyze and think logically. It also makes sure we can communicate via language. If you would compare the evolution of the entire brain to 24 hours on the clock, the neocortex would have been around for only ten minutes.

We live in a social jungle

The brain stem and the limbic system together are called the primal brain. A few characteristics of the primal brain: it is focused on survival, and sensitive to instant rewards. It thinks short-term. It delays obligations. It works based on instinct and impulses. It eats too much and too often. It prefers salt and sweet flavors and prefers you to sit instead of stand. It doesn't like change, because uncharted territory can be dangerous. It wants to belong to the group. It's reactive instead of proactive. It chooses unhappiness in familiar circumstances above happiness in uncertain circumstances. It's terrified of failing. Our primal brain prefers safety over happiness, or self-development. Those concepts are trivial to the primal brain. The primal brain is omnipotent. You could view it as the older brother of the neocortex. And while the neocortex is much smarter than the primal brain (that regulates our cognitive ability), it lets itself be intimidated by it. This is why you feel anxious a lot of times. Obviously the primal brain has positive features as well, but for now I am focused on what causes you to feel anxiety.

Our primal brain is conditioned to scan the surroundings for danger and protect us from it. Especially the amygdala is conditioned to constantly scan our surroundings for danger. It has a very good reason to do so: survival. It is always focused on the negative because that is where the danger comes from. The fact that our modern world functions differently than it did a millions years ago, has not reached the primal brain. It's still in eat or be eaten mode. The brain has an instinctive need to belong to the group. And as our brain further developed and started to think and feel emotions, our brain focused on emotional threats, like rejection and exclusion, the most common threats in our current society. And while these are not a life threatening dangers, the primal brain sees them as such. For our primal brain our current society is a social jungle. A dismissive look of a loved one or superior is registered as danger. It can encounter many situations every day that may feel unsafe. Criticism and rejection – thanks to our primal brain - are perceived as a threat.

For example: parents that are disappointed in you, a teacher that is angry because you don't understand a lesson, a superior that plans a job assessment interview and asks you 'how do you think you are doing?'. The wilderness of a million years ago takes place in the office of today. Or in social media. Or in your relationship, or family.

The feeling of rejection triggers a fear response. We become defensive or even aggressive. The modern day attack consists of judgement, reproach, arguing or withdrawal. Also, we translate that stress into something negative about ourselves: I'm not good enough, no one likes me, everyone knows I am not good at anything, I can't do it, I won't succeed. The fear of rejection, of abandonment, or of exclusion is a primal fear. The fear not to be loved is deep inside us. But there are more reasons why we experience unnecessary fear.

Your brain makes no difference between physical and emotional pain

Did you know that when you are stabbed in the back, the same area of your brain is activated as when you are rejected? No wonder we sweat bullets during a job interview or an audition, when there is a chance we could be rejected. Saying to someone that is about to go for a job interview: 'Ah, don't worry, just be yourself', is telling a sheep to just take a bit of distance from the herd. It is not possible. We can rationalize rejection or make it understandable, but that doesn't mean that the pain we feel when we are rejected is any less. So it makes sense our system responds very strongly to rejection. It has helped me a lot to know that all irrational stress comes from the fear of rejection, and that the cause is our primal brain's fear of being abandoned from the group and facing the world alone.

Your brain makes no difference between reality and fantasy

When someone asks you to look at a certain object and makes a scan of your brain at the same time, certain areas of your brain will lighten up. When you imagine that object, without really holding it, the same areas will lighten up. The same thing happens when you are scared.

When you feel fearful, it is usually because you are thinking of something you are afraid of, not because you are really in danger. Fear is a confrontation with what you are imagining.

Subconsciously you imagine things you don't want to happen in the future. And because you consciously or subconsciously think of that image, your brain registers a dangerous situation. Your brain sets off the alarm, which causes nerve-wrecking stress.

It isn't hard to turn life into a fear filled trip when you are under the control of your own thoughts. There is danger everywhere when your head starts time traveling into the future. You see the housing market collapse, think about how you will be fired, how you will go bankrupt, will become sick and die a lonely death. Your brain is an expert in imagining the future in a way that will scare the hell out of you. It's even worse if the primal brain can present evidence from the past. When the primal brain registers danger that looks like danger it has experienced in the past, I will do whatever it can not to experience the same pain again. Even though your rational brain might think: there's nothing all that bad happening, don't overreact – your primal brain does not care. It does its own thing. It's a great system, but it's wound too tightly and turns on

the alarm too quickly at times. Comments, gestures and looks of other people can trigger unsafe feelings because our brains associates it with negative experiences from the past. The reaction is subconscious and moves eleven million times faster than our conscious mind. Our brain detects something and associates it with something that happened before, like a look, a sound or the tone of someone's voice, and you experience uncertainty, fear or panic, without even really knowing why. This is how you can develop an anxiety disorder, panic attacks, fear of failure, fear of commitment or fear of abandonment, without having a clue where it comes from.

#notetoself

When you feel bad, look for the comfort of a structured, disciplined life

Drink plenty of water

Take vitamin D in the winter

Difficult people are not struggling with you, they are struggling with themselves and project it onto you

Life is too short to focus on people you don't like. Focus on people that get you, think you are great and love you

You are not your thoughts, not your emotions, not your experiences. You are not your pain

There is nothing that gives you as much power as embracing every experience life has to offer you, from extreme pleasure to extreme pain

Pain is an attention seeker. There is usually more going on than just the pain

Take a nice photo every day. Why only notice your surroundings on a holiday?

Everything you focus on, grows

When you are insecure in the company of strangers, just think: They love me, they just don't know it yet

PRESS

This book is unique because it reveals the anatomy of emotional problems. Why do we think negatively about ourselves? Why can't we let go? The second and third part of the book focuses on solutions. A perfect link between psychology, neurology and spirituality.

"A child that is not treated well, does not stop loving its parents; that child stops loving itself."

'Marian Mudder has conquered her fears. A candid book with lots of tips' – *NRC Handelsblad*

'Years of therapy brought Mudder – now a therapist herself – insights she wants to share with others' – *de Volkskrant*

FACTS

What I would have liked to have known earlier – Marian Mudder

Ambo Anthos publishers
Non-fiction - 256 pages
Released: January 2022
Bestseller in the Netherlands

Foreign rights:

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