

Transcending By Brian Germain Fear

Book Review by Dave O'Flynn

Transcending Fear is not a book about skydiving; at least, not directly. It's a book about being scared and dealing with it. It draws on elements of Buddhist teachings and Western psychology, with a little motivational pep talk thrown in for seasoning.

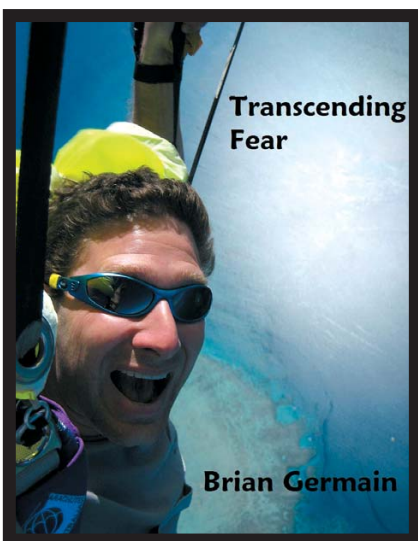
The book opens with a discussion on the science of fear. Much of the material in this section will strike a chord with AFF instructors. Fear is a response to a high-stress situation perceived as being beyond what we can comfortably handle.

For a sedentary person, doing a tandem might be the scariest thing they ever do, whereas for a TM with 4,000 jumps to their name, having to wear a shirt and tie to a job interview may push them far outside their comfort zone.

There's a lot of truth in the old sayings we get "scared out of our wits" and "scared senseless". In stressful situations we become stupid – every time you get out of an airplane you lose half your IQ. When there's a load of adrenaline rushing through our veins and our arousal level's off the scale, our ability to reason logically goes out the window. We're reduced to the tools evolution has equipped us with and those we've drilled into ourselves. Evolution has come up with three handy tools that have proved remarkably effective at keeping the species going. In escalating order, these are Fight, Flight and Freeze.

The first response of the body to a threat is to try and meet it head on, force with force. Amateur cultural anthropologists can study this phenomenon at the pub on a Saturday night. If the opposing force is too strong – usually about the time the police

turn up – the body decides to run. Getting the hell out of Dodge has kept many organisms alive over the millennia. However, the apex of this trio, used when the other two are not enough, is freezing. Rabbit in the headlights. Maybe, if I stay still, I won't be seen and this will pass.



Unfortunately, if you've just had someone wrap you at 600ft, none of these are ideal reactions. The modern world is more complicated than the one our ancestors grew up in. We need the ability to stay calm and take appropriate action.

Scared people shy away from whatever frightens them, unless, of course, they've found a way to deal with the fear. Relax, Focus and Flow is the subtitle of this book and much of it is devoted to these three actions.

Slowing down gives you the space and time to see what's happening. Great athletes never seem rushed; there's always time to look up, assess and make a choice. Relaxing is essential and because the body and mind are linked, the easiest way to calm down is to slow your breathing down. We need to practice the relaxation response or it won't be available to us when we're amped up – precisely the time we need it most.

Once calm, it's time to pay attention to what's going on. Focus on the situation, not on your fears, doubts or daydreams. This is where you find a solution.

Then it's time to flow. Flow is being in the zone - being at one with what you're doing. Whether it's a 4-way that's almost like dancing, a headdown jump that's just there, or a swoop that seems to be making itself happen - being in a flow state is being elegant, taking the path that's right, without wasted effort. Being in balance as you move is the point of the game.

Little in this book is, in itself, new. What is novel is the particular synthesis of influences Brian uses to convince us to take a different approach to life – one that's limited less by what scares us and is more open to things new and exciting.

Will this book improve your skydiving? Maybe. Will it change your life? That's a big ask. If nothing else, it'll open your eyes a little to the way you and those around you react to the world. Should you buy this book? I did, and got much more than my money's worth. There's a sample chapter on the book's website. Have a read and if it strikes a chord, pick the book up.

Transcending Fear is available from Terminal Sports, Total Control and from www.transcendingfear.com

About the Author

Brian Germain is the author of The Parachute and Its Pilot and Vertical Journey. He's also a professional canopy coach and an accomplished freeflyer. In his spare time he designs parachutes, which you can buy from <http://www.bigairsportz.com>.

Dave O'Flynn jumps out of airplanes and reads too much.

