

## **Vignette nine**

A couple of years ago now I was working with a woman who had quite a debilitating anxiety. She would lose confidence while she was out walking in public and lose her balance and would get quite stuck where she was and she would have panic attacks and she would just have to wait until it had passed and hope like heck someone would be there to help hold her hand to get over to where she needed to be. She and I worked together for quite a few months. We practiced initially getting out walking. She quite often used to lose her confidence with the traffic and stuff like that, so we built up a rapport walking along.

There was a significant event coming up in her life where she had to stand up in front of her church and walk up in front of the whole congregation when her daughter was getting confirmed. She didn't have the confidence to do it. She didn't think she would be able to do it, so we went to the church and we practiced and we practiced walking up and down and up and down that aisle. At the end of the aisle there was a lovely statue and God was there and Jesus was there. His arms were wide open, and I just looked at us and said "This is beautiful. Up there, he's your mate, and he's saying 'Come on up, you are welcome here, you belong here, nothing is going to hurt you here'". So we practiced those chants over and over again waltzing up and down the aisle. The priest came in, he wondered what we were doing there, and the client was able to say, "I have severe anxiety. I am not going to be comfortable doing this on Sunday, so we are here to practice". And the priest said, "You don't have to stand up there and do all of this". I said, "Yes you do. She is a member of your family. She is going to stand up with her family, and she is a member of this congregation. Nothing hurts her in this congregation. She is surrounded by love. She is going to practice it until we can do it." So we stood up and practiced and we practiced, and the upshot of it was on the Sunday, when her daughter standing up for confirmation, she was able to stand up in front of the congregation, walk up to where the priest was, and walk back again. But we were lucky we were joined by her daughters, and I got them involved in the practicing of it as well. It was all taken on board. The children were aware that their Mum sometimes got anxious and they might just need to walk beside her and hold her hand, if that is what she needed. So it was coming up with coping strategies that worked for her - that the family could use, that she could use, that we had tried together, and that she was then able to initiate on her own to get over her anxiety to stand up in front of her colleagues, in front of her church members, in front of the other school parents, and do what was holding her back initially. I was lucky that I had looked into anxiety for a number of different clients and I have researched it, and I had a whole toolbox of what worked, so I tried different things for different people.