

Carla Rieger



## How to Unload your Worries in Under 5 Minutes a Day

“Fear is that little darkroom where negatives are made.”

*Michael Pritchard*  
(juvenile probation officer turned  
standup comedian)

I am an expert on worry. I come from a long line of professional worriers. We called my father the *Axis of Doom*. Worry was his favourite retirement activity.

He put bars on every window of his house. He took thousands of vitamins a day. Worried he might fall, he stapled 2-inch thick underlay to every floor; the house looked like a MacDonald’s playroom. I was over having coffee, dropped my cup, and it bounced right back up into my hand.

### Worrying is Sensible?

My father convinced me I needed to worry or bad things would happen. I came to believe that worry was a sign of intellectualism, realism, and “being sensible.” It only made sense that being positive meant you were naive or in denial. Sally Armstrong, award-winning journalist, once noted, “If you write negative news, nobody asks you to prove it. If you write positive news, people want a jury.”

### Great Thinkers

The more I studied the great thinkers in

history, the more I questioned those beliefs. Recently John Roger wrote, “Worry is paying interest on a debt you may not owe.” Sixty years ago Mark Twain said, “I’ve lived a long life and had many troubles, most of which never happened.” Four hundred years ago, Molière said, “People spend most of their lives worrying about things that never happen.” And finally, over 2000 years ago, Plato said, “Not one shred of evidence supports the notion that life is serious.”

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### The Worry Jar

One day I decided to do an experiment. I got an old cookie jar and cut up strips of paper. At the beginning of the week, I wrote one worry thought per week onto the strips of paper and I put the strips into the jar as a symbolic way of “letting them go,” knowing I could come get them again at any time. At the end of the week, I pulled the strips out, and put them into four piles. One was “bad things that never happened”; the second was “bad things that happened but the

consequences were good”; the third was “bad things that happened and the consequences were manageable”; and the final pile was “bad things that happened and the consequences were just as bad as I imagined.” Guess which pile was biggest? The first pile contained 80 percent of the strips; the second pile 12 percent; the third pile 7 percent; the fourth pile 1 percent. I did this for seven more weeks and the percentages remained similar. I proved Molière’s theory.

### The Difference between “Taking Care of” and “Worrying”

How do you know when you’ve crossed the line from “taking care of” your priorities to “unnecessary worry”? Ask yourself this question: *Is this something I can take action on right now?* If not, let it go for now.

For example, I gave a presentation at a conference. After driving away for 30 minutes, I realized I had left my purse in their public washroom. At first my thoughts were constructive: *I better turn around and go back. I better call the conference organizer.* Those were actions I could take at that moment.

When I discovered the organizer had gone home, then found myself locked in rush-hour traffic, my thoughts began to

darken. I watched my mind create increasingly worse scenarios. *I won't find my purse; I'll have to get new ID; won't be able to go on my trip tomorrow; someone will buy a Winnebago with my VISA.*

I became bad tempered and anxious. At one point, I realized it made no sense to ruminate about "what ifs" because there was no action I could take yet. I started listening to Stuart MacLean's *Vinyl Café*. After laughing through a story or two, the adrenaline eased off. I arrived back at the conference centre 30 minutes later to find that the janitor had picked up my bag and was holding it for me, everything intact.

### **Worry is a Parasite**

I believe that worry thoughts are like parasites that want you as their host. They convince you they are your friend, that without them you would die or be a sickly pauper with no legs, one eye, and a stock portfolio worth 2 percent of its original value. Worry thoughts fly through the stratosphere at millions of

bytes per second. You can download them any time, anywhere, at no cost. All you have to do is choose to do it. If you cannot make an easy connection, simply turn on the nightly news, talk to an insurance salesperson, or attend a Yahoo shareholders' meeting.

### **The First Law of Increase**

This law states that our negative thoughts attract negativity, and our positive thoughts attract positives to us. Therefore, if you spend time worrying about not having enough money, over time you are training your mind to not have enough money. In other words, what you resist persists. It makes more sense to spend your thought time in joyful, positive ways. After all, life is short.

### **Joy Thoughts**

You can also download joy thoughts, but they are more elusive. They are like flower seeds that must push up through all the dark matter and sticky stuff to thrive. The proportion of worry thoughts to joy thoughts floating around at our

present time in history is probably about 10:2. That's why it's so easy to get caught, like an innocent fly in a spider's web, or a Hwy 1 commuter at quarter past 5. Ridding yourself of the worry parasite requires decisive action. Let's look at some remedies and preventative techniques you can take.

### **1. Refuse to Download**

Worry thoughts are like attachments or pop-ups. You can simply decide NOT to open them. Keep surfing or just hit DELETE.

### **2. Observe and Label**

Okay. You got sucked in. You opened the attachment and the worry parasite has taken hold. Notice that you let it happen. Watch yourself in the process. This "observer" state can sometimes help you detach.

### **3. Do a Reversal**

What is the opposite of the worry thought? *What if my work isn't good enough?* becomes *What if my work is excellent?* Or *I might be late* becomes

*I might be on time.* Just as you do with clothes, decide to take off the worry thought, and try on a positive one instead. See how it feels.

#### **4. Laugh about It**

Laughter is THE cerebral laxative. It can purge you of unwanted fecal thought matter. I remember racing through Vancouver Airport barely holding onto my wardrobe bag, computer bag, and boarding pass. I came whizzing around the corner and saw a bronze statue of a man racing through the airport, barely holding onto a wardrobe bag, computer bag, and boarding pass. I suddenly saw myself from the outside and had to laugh. I walked the rest of the way to my gate, resigned to whatever fate awaited me. Once there, I discovered my flight was delayed 20 minutes.

#### **Take 5 Minutes a Day**

We need to regularly remove the “thought plaque” that builds up. Take 5 minutes a day to delete any worry thoughts that have crept into your consciousness. Put them in a worry jar, imagine hitting the delete button, do a reversal, or simply stand outside yourself and see how funny it looks. As John Milton once said, “The mind can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven.” Life is probably one big virtual reality experience anyway, so choose your mind games carefully. ▲

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