Amy, the author of this personal narrative, effectively uses voice to convey the fear she feels as she ascends a path to an area above a 100-ft. waterfall. Her expert choice of words helps to paint a beautiful picture of her surroundings.

The Climb

I have this fear. It causes my legs to shake. I break out in a cold sweat. I start jabbering to anyone who is nearby. As thoughts of certain death run through my mind, the world appears a precious, treasured place. I imagine my own funeral, then shrink back at the implications of where my thoughts are taking me. My stomach feels strange. My palms are clammy.

I am terrified of heights.

Of course, it’s not really a fear of being in a high place. Rather, it is the view of a long way to fall, of rocks far below me and no firm wall between me and the edge. My sense of security is screamingly absent. There are no guardrails, flimsy though I picture them, or other safety devices. I can rely only on my own surefootedness—or lack thereof.

Despite my fear, two summers ago I somehow found myself climbing to a high place, while quaking inside and out. Most of our high school had come along on a day trip to the Boquerón, a gorgeous, lush spot in the foothills of Peru. Its prime attraction is the main waterfall, about 100 feet high, that thunders into a crystal clear pool feeding the Aguaytia River. All around the pool and on down to the rushing river are boulders large and small. The beach is strewn with rocks. On both sides of the fall, the jungle stretches to meet it, rising parallel to it on a gentler slope.

After eating our sack lunches within sight and sound of the fall, many of us wanted to make the climb to an area above it. We knew others had done so on previous trips. A few guys went first to make sure they were on the right path. But after they left, my group of seven decided to go ahead without waiting for them to return. I suspected we were going the wrong way, but I kept silent, figuring that the others knew better. We went along the base of the hill until we reached the climb. It stopped me in my tracks.

The climb ascended steeply above us. Along the right edge, the jungle hugged the rocks; passage through its trees did not look feasible. The majority of my view was filled with rocks. Looming high to the sky, the boulders rose in a tiered manner. Peering back down toward the river, I saw a steep slope of rocks all the way to the water. All I could think about was how far it would be to fall.

My tense thoughts were interrupted by the realization that my friends were already beginning to climb! My anxiety increased as I watched them.

*Do I turn back?* My whole being shouted, “Yes!” *Will I regret it later? I really want to get to the top, but…*

I voiced my uncertainties to my friends. They dismissed my fears and encouraged me to stick it out. Questioning my own sanity, I decided at least to attempt the climb.

I chose a path that seemed easiest. My friend Tom was ahead of me. Then, suddenly, he slipped and slid backward about 10 feet! I watched, paralyzed, until he stopped himself and assured us he was all right. My heart was hammering.

Now those who had tried the other way came back; it had not worked. Consoling myself that my friend Seth would be right behind me, I shakily began the ascent. The “path” led up a narrow area between boulders. In it, we reached a place where there just were no good handholds. Seth braced my foot, and those above sent down words of encouragement. I was soon past the first challenge safely, but not feeling much better about the rest of the climb.

The difficulties only increased from that point on, with scary spot after scary spot. Though I knew I should not look down, I could not always ignore the long drop to the boulders below. My breathing sped up, but my heart pounded even faster, growing loud in my ears.

My friends kept right on climbing. But they did not forget me. Someone was always behind me to help hold my feet steady when necessary, and someone else was always ahead to offer a hand up. I trusted them more than myself; I knew my feet could easily slip. With friends supporting me by words and actions, I slowly gained ground.

Finally we came to the worst section yet. To me the slope looked very close to vertical. The slight handholds were few and far between. Being short, I knew the stretches would be difficult enough in normal conditions. In my current panic, it would be much worse. The alternative was to go back down. Which was more difficult? I didn't want to go either way, but obviously I had to go somewhere.

The trouble was, we were not getting any nearer to the falls. By now, we realized that this route was not the way most frequented! But knowing this did not get me any closer to safety.

Since getting up this next part was next to impossible, and waiting for a rescue helicopter was not an option, with fear and trembling I decided to go down, but not by myself. Melody agreed to go with me, earning my eternal gratitude. She paused to pray for safety; I did not trust my voice enough to pray aloud.

Now, with our backs to the rocks, the drop was continually in our line of vision. It seemed even steeper than before. The song “Angels Watching Over Me” ran through my head as we began, Melody going first. I kept up a steady stream of chatter, my trembling voice betraying my fear.

One of the first tough places we came to gave us trouble. Cautiously stretching one foot down, Melody could not reach the bottom of the boulder. A slip would mean an extremely long drop. So we tried a different route where a fall would be shorter. It was somewhat wet and would entail a short slide to reach the bottom.

Melody made it safely. I hesitated, unsure of my footing, and picturing myself at the bottom of the cliff, bones broken and pain wracking my body, if I still lived.

“You can do it! I'm right here,” Melody called. She waited patiently, not pressuring me to hurry.

Inching carefully to the edge, I could see in the corner of my eye the boulders and river far below. As I started down the rock, my foot slipped! My heart jumped into my throat as the terror I had held just under the surface swept over me.

*I’m gonna fall!* I inwardly shrieked.

It had been only a small slip, however; I was not in midair! I took a few calming breaths, and my heart repositioned itself where it belonged.

With no further mishaps, we came eventually to the last troublesome spot, the stretch between two boulders that had given me problems on the way up. Thankfully, the rest of our friends had given up climbing to the top and had now caught up to us. There were two possible descents from here. One way included a short jump down. I decided to check out the other way. Seth was working his way down this second route when he fell a few feet and bruised himself! I again looked over the first option.

*Do I want to jump? There’s a big drop if I jump wrong or don’t stop on the ledge! But the other way…!*

I knew if I was to get down, it would have to be Seth’s way. He was willing to help me however he could. I inspected the “path” he had taken. There was some low vegetation, matted down and sloping slightly toward the edge. Then came a drop down to a narrow inlet between rocks. That was not so bad. The hitch lay in the fact that there was no handholds or footholds, and my short legs would not reach to the rocks.

“Uh, I don’t know about this. I don’t like the looks of it!” I said, my voice quavering.

“You can make it, Amy! I'm right here. I won’t let you fall,” Seth promised.

Slowly, painstakingly, I backed over the vegetation.

“I’m coming down,” I warned, my voice unsteady.

“I’m ready,” answered Seth. “I got you.”

His assurances gave me the strength to go on. I trusted him implicitly. Flattening myself onto my belly, I edged my feet into midair. Seth held them tightly and slowly lowered me, guiding my feel to a firm place as I let my body slide over the leaves, twigs, and rock. When my feet made contact with the solid rock, I heaved a huge sigh of relief. I could feel the fear draining out of me.

My arms and legs were scratched up; I was dirty and sweaty. But none of it mattered. I was at the bottom!

“Yaaaaaaahhhh!” I yelled. I never felt so alive, and so thankful for that life.

- See more at: https://k12.thoughtfullearning.com/studentmodels/climb#sthash.iWl7abrS.dpuf