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Juvenile Nonfiction

My Year of Living Fearlessly: A Comedy about Facing Your Fears
Amber Karlins
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"The more I thought about it, the more simply holding a baby alligator seemed insufficient. It was this line of thinking that led me to the completely insane idea that I should try alligator wrestling."

When Amber Karlins's mother lovingly observes that Amber might be living a "small life," it inspires the twenty-something to seriously ponder the suggestion. And, it sparks the realization that fear is holding her back. So she decides to do something about it. The result is a book that challenges readers to examine their own fears. It also begs the question, what rich experiences and opportunities for growth do we miss when we fail to try new things, never leave our comfort zones, and allow fear to dominate?

Karlins's book details her exploits as she tackles one fear each week for a year. In doing this, she will accept no halfhearted, safe, routes. So, she describes attempting indoor skydiving, learning to walk on glass and eat fire, swimming with sharks, performing stand-up comedy, and much more. Some challenges are simpler, almost mundane, such as going to the beach in a bikini, while others reach deeper into her heart, like facing her crippling phobia of flying.

Each story is written with captivating, charming, often self-deprecating humor. Each is brutally honest. They read like a letter to a friend or a diary, which is understandable because the episodes started as a blog. Karlin brings readers vividly into the moment as she spits crickets to place third in a contest or dangles high on a trapeze, struggling to complete even the simplest move. She never shies from sharing either her embarrassment or her sense of joy and achievement.

Warning: these stories are a little addictive. From laughing to holding your breath, it's hard to stop at the end of each short chapter. At times, the youth of the author is evident because a few of her challenges are ultimately just part of maturing into adulthood and some of her reactions may seem a little over-the-top to older readers. This almost distracts at times.

However, such moments are few. They are vastly overshadowed by skilled writing, a masterful ability to keep an audience's attention, and a subject everyone can relate to. It's a fun read for anyone who already leads an unfettered life, or anyone who needs a kick in their behind toward living a bigger one.

Diane Gardner