

## Ask Connie... My Grizzly Dream ...

Connie Myslik-McFadden

Dear Connie,

About once a year for many years I've had the same nightmare, and the other night I had it again. I woke up in a cold sweat after calling for help in my sleep. My husband was awake by then, and he said, "Why don't you find out why you keep having that nightmare?" I'd really like to know why I do. Here's the dream:

There's a grizzly bear in my basement. He's knocking things over, making lots of noise, and then he comes up the stairs and tries to get through the door. I'm terrified. The door is locked but I know he is strong enough to push it open. I wake up just as he's breaking down the door.

Thanks, Melinda

Dear Melinda,

The nightmare you describe, even though scary, can be seen as a gift from your unconscious. It is trying to tell you something that, so far, in your conscious mind, you don't understand. Recurrent dreams are like that—knocking on the door of your consciousness, saying, "Pay attention, this is important!" Because dreams speak in symbolic language, it isn't always easy to understand what the message is, and that can be frustrating. But if you approach the dream as if it's a puzzle with a unique language, you may find that it ultimately has great meaning for you. In fact, once you understand this nightmare, it will have done its job and you won't have it any more. That's strange, but true.

There are several different kinds of dreams. Some dreams are mundane. They serve the purpose of sorting and organizing, kind of like filing information on a computer disk. These dreams are usually straightforward and don't have emotional content. Then there are dreams with bizarre images that seem to make no sense. For example, you're riding in a car that's moving backwards, pulled by a rhinoceros! In other dreams there may be people, times and places in relationship to one another that would be impossible in waking life. For instance, you might dream that your kindergarten teacher is drinking whiskey with your great Aunt Blanche, who died ten years ago! There are dreams in which



the dreamer seems to go to faraway places, sometimes flying. And dreams in which people who have died come to visit. Sometimes you may feel you are the main character in a dream. Other times, you are watching yourself. Or both. Some dreams, like the one that is disturbing you, arouse strong emotion in the dream, and after waking.

It's important to remember that if you try to figure out the dream yourself, you will probably interpret it in ways that are in accordance with what you already know about yourself. That's why it's a good idea to be part of a dream group or work with someone experienced with dreamwork, who can help you one-on-one. You will get another perspective—one that shows you parts of yourself you don't already know. However, even experienced dreamworkers won't try to tell you what your dreams mean. Understanding a dream is a process of discovery that the dreamworker hopes will lead the dreamer to having a flash of insight and an "aha!"

When I work with dreams, I always ask first about the relationship between the dream images and reality. First, we would assume you don't actually have a grizzly in your basement, and ask whether you have recently had an encounter with a grizzly. In your nightmare, the next question is, "What is a grizzly bear?" What are your associations to grizzlies, meaning what do you think, feel, and remember when someone says, "grizzly bear"? Since we're not really having a conversation, I don't know your answers, but it's important that you answer the questions for yourself. Write down everything you think and feel when grizzlies come to mind. You'll

discover that you have definite associations to this bear. Some will be personal, and some will be archetypal or universal associations to the word bear. Carl Jung and many others who researched and wrote about dreams found that many dream images have a universal meaning.

In your dream, the bear is in the basement. So, the next question would be, what do you think and feel about your basement? What about basements in general or a basement in your past? "Basement" is another symbol seen to have universal meaning. In dreams it is generally understood to refer to the unconscious, that which is "in the dark", musty, unknown or unused. To have a bear in the basement, depending on your personal associations to bear and basement images, might mean that your ego thinks there is something large and dangerous in your unconscious and is working hard to keep it from rising to consciousness. What could it be?

The fact that it arouses such fear, and that the nightmare recurs, probably indicates that it's something that was repressed long ago. The bear could represent a part of you that is very angry, or aggressive, that you have not wanted to, or been unable to, acknowledge. Could it be that you are an especially nice person who was taught early in life not to express anger or aggression? Perhaps you no longer feel that these qualities are even still within you? But this energy is trying to break the basement door down to connect with you! Surprisingly, perhaps, there is a great deal of positive energy you can access and integrate if you face your fear(s) and get to know this grizzly bear.



**Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in Bozeman with 25 years of experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads workshops, retreats and teaches Dream work and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School of**

**Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabbalistic school of healing. She is the author of "Gathering the Soul, a True Story of Spiritual Healing." Pathwork (Pathwork.org) and Imago Relationship Therapy (www.GettingTheLoveYouWant.org) are two easily accessible sources for the theories upon which much of this column is based.**

One of the ways to work with dreams is to go back imaginally into a dream and have a conversation with a dream character like this grizzly. If you turn and face the bear and ask it what it wants from you and what it wants you to know, you may get some interesting information! Or, you can create an imaginal dialogue on paper in which you ask the bear these questions and allow answers to come "from the bear." These techniques open up a dialogue between your conscious mind and your unconscious, which then allows you to actively explore all the possible meanings of the dream. Once you have owned the grizzly part of you, that bear is not likely to enter your dream life again.

*Good luck, Melinda!*

### **Do you have a relationship question?**

Write to Connie at [conniem@mcn.net](mailto:conniem@mcn.net) or  
Call 406-582-7450 —and ask!

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