



# Matilda

meets the big black cloud

by Rachel Jacqueline

Matilda had skied for as long as she could remember. All her memories were of snow, and all winter long skis were strapped to her feet. Sturdy, strong and fast – skis were like a second pair of feet on turbo power for Matilda. With skis on, Matilda felt like she could fly.

Matilda loved skiing. She was only young, but aged 10 was one of the fastest girls on the slopes in the whole of Australia.

Every year Matilda seemed to get faster and faster. She'd shoot down the slopes like a rocket, turning smoothly on the edges of her skis, leaving squiggle shapes down the slopes behind her.

"It's like you don't know fear!" her coach said to her one day. Matilda stopped. "Fear?" she wondered to herself out loud. "No, I don't know who Fear is at all."

She had always heard about this thing called Fear. The girls in her ski team called it the Big Black Cloud. "Don't you know, Matilda, it's like this cloud that comes over your whole head, it stops you from seeing things properly," Ellie, one of her ski friends had said one day. "It holds you back and slows you down."

Matilda didn't know what Ellie was talking about. She honestly didn't know who or what this Fear thing was.

Whenever Matilda skied, all she saw was Happiness, Glee, and Joy – that bunch seemed to follow her around all day, pushing her down the hill. “Faster, faster,” Happiness, Glee, and Joy would whisper in her ears as the wind blew in her face.

She loved the feeling of ripping down the slopes, weaving in and out of the race flags. She learned to turn harder and tighter, making her go faster. Sometimes she had little falls, but they were not so bad: just like spending a few seconds in the dryer, tumbling about and emerging in a cloud of snow.

No, she didn’t know Fear or the Big Black Cloud, at all. And she was very glad, as she didn’t like the sound of him very much.

For years Matilda kept skiing, getting better, stronger and faster. One day, after Matilda and her friends had finished training, their coach announced they would have the next day off for free skiing. All the kids in the ski team were ecstatic! It had also snowed overnight, so there was a lot of fresh powder to ski the next day.

Matilda couldn’t wait. She hardly slept all night in excitement and was the first of her friends to be ready at the chairlift the next day. They spent the whole morning having a fantastic time, skiing through deep powder snow, like skiing on clouds. After skiing all the easy runs, they decided to ski a harder slope. It was steep, and the terrain a little tougher. But Matilda didn’t notice: she was the first to go down the hill. “Wahooooooooo!” she shouted out, as she led her friends down the steep slope.

Matilda, who loved going fast, picked up speed as she whizzed in and out of trees and bumps in the snow. Happiness, Glee, and Joy were having a celebration all around her, it was like a party. It was the best feeling ever. Matilda felt like she could fly...

Until she came crashing down in a heap. Her ski tips had crossed over each other and she tripped, sending her flying in all different directions. Snow was in her hair and in her mouth; she’d lost her goggles. And then all of a sudden she felt a searing pain in her right leg.

Matilda had broken her leg.

It was devastating for Matilda. She wouldn’t be able to ski for the rest of the winter. When she was better, Matilda was eager to get back on her skis and see Happiness and the gang again, but she had to wait patiently through spring, and summer and autumn until it was winter time again.

Finally, it came. Matilda's leg was strong again, and she was ready. On the first day of snow, Matilda was one of the first people waiting at the chairlift to meet her ski friends.

And that's when she first saw Fear. It was a big milky-grey fog, hovering just behind her shoulder while she waited. She looked away, distracted by meeting her friends, and rode the chairlift with them. But when she pointed her skis downhill to ski, she saw him again.

And from then on, Matilda saw Fear everywhere.

He sat next to her on the chairlift.

He hid behind the trees.

He pulled on her to slow her down every time she skied down a slope.

The next day, Matilda didn't want to ski at all. Instead, she sat at home all day with Fear in sulky silence.

The next day she awoke to fresh snow. Matilda felt a flutter of excitement in her chest – she loved fresh snow! But then she saw him again: Fear. He was sitting at the end of her bed. She pulled the covers over her ears and went back to bed.

It happened the next day too, and the next. No matter what she did, Matilda saw Fear everywhere.

After several weeks of not skiing, Matilda's friend Ellie came to visit.

"Why haven't you been skiing?" Ellie asked. Matilda felt too scared to tell her the truth and just looked at her toes.

"I...I... can't," she said quietly, almost whispering.

"I can't do it. I'm scared. Fear has been following me around and I can't seem to get rid of him," she blurted out. "He's everywhere!"

She looked over at her friend Ellie, who was older, wiser and a better skier. She smiled, took Matilda's hand and sat next to her.

"Matilda, don't be afraid. We all meet Fear at some time or another," she explained. "In fact, Fear is not always a bad thing to have around. He can sometimes hold us back, but Fear is also important for teaching us about our limits, and when we need to be careful."

“But we don’t learn anything if we always listen to Fear and let him get in our way. We have to reach outside our comfort zone. That’s where the magic happens. And mistakes sometimes happen, but they’re an important part of the magic too.”

Matilda nodded her head and looked over to Fear sitting in the corner. She decided she would try again tomorrow.

The next day Matilda got up and put on her ski clothes. She put on her ski boots and pulled her skis over her shoulder and walked to the chairlift. Without waiting for her friends, she took the first ski lift up – then kept going. She took the lift all the way to the very top. And she didn’t stop there either.

She took off her skis, swung them over her shoulder and decided to hike to the very top of the mountain where she’d never been before.

Fear followed her every step of the way. And every step he got bigger. The Big Black Cloud got murkier and darker. At the top, she put her skis on. The Cloud felt so big at that point like he was going to cover her completely. But she remembered her friend Ellie’s words: It’s where the magic happens.

**She took one big, deep breath in. “I can do this,” she said quietly.  
She took another breath in: “I CAN DO THIS,” she yelled.**

And with a push, her skis tipped over the edge, and down she went...

... She hurtled through the Big Black Cloud, popping it into thin air as she skied through it.

As she made her first turn, Happiness turned up, then Glee, then Joy! And more emotions kept following her with every turn: Pride, Confidence, Determination – they were all there! And Fear was there too, but smaller and further back.

They all joined her on a magical ski down the ski slope – the best ski Matilda has ever had. She finished at the bottom with a big grin on her face.

Matilda knew it would not be the last time she came across Fear and the Big Black Cloud, but she was OK with that.

She'd conquered them once, and something inside told her she knew she could conquer them again. And with that, she clicked off her skis and went to joined Ellie and her ski friends to tell them all about her adventures.

**Remember, everything you ever want is on the other side of  
Fear and the Big Black Cloud!**

Sisu Stories are creative fiction inspired by the real life experiences of our ambassadors. They do not represent a factual account of events, but are based on real achievements.



## Matilda Coates

Matilda Coates is an Australian skier who's encountered many "Black Clouds" in her career: aged 11 she was struck with pneumonia, aged 14 she broke her leg skiing and her latest challenge has been her most difficult yet: two months after selection in the shadow Australian Olympic Team for Sochi 2014 she was struck out due to illness.

We believe Matilda is not only a girl with serious sisu, but an amazing and inspiring role-model for all women. You can follow Matilda on Facebook, [The Winter Coates](#).



**Whats your biggest fear?**

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**When was the last time you were scared or frightened about something?**

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**Is there something that scared you, but after you tried it, it wasn't so scary anymore?**

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