



Fighting Phobias

blood pressure cuff, resulting in your wrist being suddenly transported into the Twilight Zone.

BORE-A-PHOBIA...The fear of attending a home cocktail party and being stuck in the kitchen for two hours with the pickled host who insists on telling you, nail by nail, how he personally built the new counters and cabinets he has

by Tom Dean

you pinned against.

I'm sure you can add dozens more as you think about the things that worry you. But, why do it? After all, why be a phobophobic, when all you have to do is square your shoulders, stick out that chin and repeat after me, "I ain't 'fraid o' no phobias!"

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When FDR told the American people, downtrodden and on the brink of Depression-era panic, that "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," he said one of the biggest mouthfuls in history.

Fear is one of the great motivating forces in life — ranking way up there with power, lust and old reliable greed. I once heard the president of a major corporation tell his executive management group, "We have one of the best incentive programs in business — do it or get fired!"

Most of us fear one thing or another... big dogs; airplanes; roller coasters, that sort of thing. These are considered "natural" fears because they can hurt us. The problem with fearing is when it becomes "unnatural." Head shrinks call these "phobias" which is derived from the Greek 'phobos,' meaning "Yipe!"

A certain general was purported to have confided to one of his officers, "I don't know the meaning of the word 'fear'... 'terror,' yes — but 'fear,' no." This flash of honesty is probably the best description of a phobia.

People with acrophobia aren't just afraid of heights — they're terrified of them. Claustrophobiacs don't just get a little nervous when they find themselves in enclosed spaces — they go stark, raving bananas.

Dozens of phobias have been identified by the psychiatric profession over the years. (It's no small coincidence that every new-found phobia requires lots of time on the doctor's couch...at a hundred-and-a-half per hour). But the list seems to grow proportionately as the times we live in get more complicated.

There's hydrophobia, which keeps a certain percentage of our population out of swimming pools, lakes, rivers and the pounding surf...erythrophobia, which makes people afraid of blushing (Really!)... mysophobia, something my Mother had a bad case of when she looked behind my ears — a fear of dirt. There's even one called "phobophobia" which is, you guessed it, a fear of fears (Are you listening, Franklin?)

I've been doing some thinking about this phobia we've developed about phobias, and I've concluded that there are a lot more of them than we realize. It's just that we haven't isolated them and, more importantly, we haven't given them names yet.

So, based on the premise that a cure can't begin until the disease is known, here's my contribution to the cause of good mental health — a short index of some of the "unnatural" fears I've been able to observe in our modern society:

STETHOPHOBIA...The dread that comes over you as you sit on a doctor's examination table, waiting for the ice-cold end of the stethoscope to be pressed against your bare back.

OFFRAMPAPHOBIA...A fear of getting caught in an "Exit Only" lane, forcing you to get off the freeway at one of those strange exits that doesn't have any way back on.

SEATMATEOPHOBIA...The fear of winding up on a very long airplane flight, trapped in a window seat next to a mutual fund salesman with bad breath.

ZIPAPHOBIA...A fear that strikes men only as they stand to give a speech at the Rotary Club and feel a draft in the vicinity known as the "fly."

VISAPHOBIA...A momentary panic you feel as a salesclerk runs your credit card through one of those new electronic machines that checks your credit li-

VCR-A-PHOBLA...A modern version of the fear of having left the iron on when you go on vacation. This one creates terrible stress as you worry whether you remembered to hit the "timer" button on your VCR to record that Bugs Bunny special that will air during your camping trip.

POWDERROOM-A-PHOBLA...A woman's fear of leaving the ladies rest room and parading through the full length of a fancy restaurant with the back of her dress tucked neatly into the waistband of her pantyhose.

REFUNDAPHOBIA...A fear that strikes annually — usually on April 16th — when you can't remember if you put stamps on your tax return envelope.

SHAMU-A-PHOBLA...The creepy feeling you get after polishing off a large seafood lunch at Sea World, and are told that the Shamu Show has just been cancelled.

MANSON-A-PHOBLA...The fear of meeting your teenage daughter's new boyfriend on your way out the door to the post office, arriving there and recognizing his picture on the wall.

PHONE-A-PHOBLA...A fear of telephone calls that begin with the words, "Are you sitting down?"

PINKSLIP-A-PHOBLA...The fear of arriving at an important business meeting wearing your neatly-pressed gray plaid suit and remembering that you had carefully put your presentation notes in the blue pinstripe.

LONG DISTAPHOBIA...The fear of calling your cousin in Cleveland by going through your new long distance service, dialing first an 11-digit access 800 number; then another 11 for the area code and phone number; and finally your 4-digit secret access code, only to have the phone on the other end answered, "Mushi, Mushi."

CHRONOPHOBLA...A fear of making a mistake while trying to set the correct time on your new electronic watch that's also an alarm, stopwatch, calendar, and