

## Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

### Episode 29: Fears & Phobias

(Brief intro music)

Leah: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Leah.

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Leah: It's October, listeners! Today we are going to talk all about fears and phobias to ring in the spooky season.

Rachel: Yes, and to that end we find it necessary to insert a trigger warning. Neither Leah nor myself are going to get very graphic with descriptions during this episode, but be aware that we will be talking about fears, which can be upsetting. Also, please understand that many phobias cause issues for people simply by hearing about them. So, if you are at all concerned that listening to us talk about these sorts of things might evoke some kind of visceral reaction, then we advise skipping this particular episode. You can join us again for the next one which we promise will not be as creepy in any way, shape, or form.

Leah: We promise.

Rachel: There's a pretty long list of past episodes, too, so if you have been hoping to go back and listen to some of those, then this is the perfect opportunity. I also want to mention that we will provide a number of reading and watching recommendations based around the different fears that come up in conversation. So, if you like to be frightened, we hope that you can find some form of entertainment in those books and movies. Or maybe you could treat the experience as a weird take on exposure therapy...with the caveat that neither of your hosts claim to have any background whatsoever in psychiatric best practices. What I am trying to say is listener, beware! Here there be horrors, and you enter at your own risk.

(Scary sound effect)

Leah: So, I have a few things that I personally fear or that just squick me out really hard.

Rachel: That's a great word. Squick.

Leah: (laughs) They've plagued me since I was little kid: moths and centipedes.

Rachel: (shuddering sound)

Leah: I just don't care for them. Never have, never will. Centipedes, or just the thought of them, give me that shiver down my spine. And yes, just saying that gave me a shiver down my spine.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: I can remember being a kid and finding a moth in my bedroom. My parents weren't home to deal with it, so I fled my bedroom, shut the door, and waited outside my bedroom door for hours watching to make sure it didn't escape. Flagged my folks down as soon as they came home to help me! Listeners, recently I had to deal with almost just this situation as an adult, too. I had a new plant—a little, baby fir tree—to put in a pot, and I set up all my supplies in the garage. Only when I went to open my bag of previously opened potting soil, a big moth flew at me out of that bag!

Rachel: Oh, jeez.

Leah: My silly reaction was to slam the bag shut to keep it from escaping—to trap it.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Leah: Only I really wanted to pot that plant, so I needed that potting soil. My husband was away on a work trip, so there was only me, myself, and I to deal with it, and it was hard. I tried first to open the bag up, and shake it a bit to encourage the moth to fly out. Only, it didn't.

Rachel: Of course not.

Leah: It was nowhere to be found, which was so much worse than if it' had flown out.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: I somehow made it through getting enough potting soil out of the bag, scoop by careful scoop, to get that plant potted. But I did call my dog over—my beautiful, protective, brave dog—for just in case.

Rachel: (laughs) Good doggie.

Leah: She didn't know what she was on guard duty for, but bless her, she was ready to help. We don't deserve dogs, I swear. And in case you were curious, my little fir tree is thriving.

Rachel: So, it had a bit of a happy ending.

Leah: It did.

Rachel: Hooray.

Leah: I will admit this does seem to be a common fear for people. If not moths and centipedes, the creepy crawlies and flying insects in general. One of our Access Services staff had an interesting distinction to make. She can mostly handle slower flying things, like moths, butterflies, and bumblebees, but fast, zippy things like flies or wasps are more fear inducing. She also mentioned grouping birds into the fear of flying things, too. Though one reason she mentioned—about how crows can remember humans that wronged them and even pass that knowledge to the next crow generation—well, that just seems plain old super cool to me. Because that means a crow will remember if I'm nice to it...

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: ...and maybe I can collect a whole community of crows to hang out with and be my backyard friends. I'd be cool with that, but I'd have to make a note never to invite the crows over at the same time as...as that Access Services staff member.

Rachel: You know, that is fascinating. I've read that Corvids such as crows, magpies, and ravens are crazy-intelligent.

Leah: Yeah!

Rachel: Maybe that's just deep enough into uncanny valley territory to be considered scary. Plus, a group of crows is called a "murder" instead of something normal like a "flock" or a "pack," which raises a few questions. Another member of the library's Access Services staff also reports that one of their major fears is of hornets and wasps. They don't like the idea of any insect flying or buzzing nearby, but—and I quote—"add a hurtful stinger and anger issues..."

Leah: (laughs)

Rachel: "...and it scares me to the end of the earth! I don't like that other versions of it, which are nicer, pollenate the Earth, can be super cute and fuzzy, and yet they're associated." (laughs) And I completely understand. Hornets and wasps are the jerks of all black-and-yellow striped insects. Quite luckily, this staff member was able to avoid being stung...at least, up until the age of 19, when they were at a graduation party and there were a whole bunch of wasps flying around the backyard. Now, they didn't actually see it happen, but they sure as heck felt the sting. If you, listeners, want to queue up some scary movies this Halloween, specifically those involving things that sting, I recommend the 2006 version of "The Wicker Man" as well as the 1991 film "My Girl." Both feature some odd yet iconic scenes that have been given the meme treatment over the years. To quote Nicholas Cage, "Not the bees!" Anyway! I, too, have a general dislike for insects. Perhaps appropriately, they give me what's called 'the creepy crawlies'. There is one insect that I find especially terrifying, though, and that is the humble butterfly. Yeah, laugh all you want, but this has been a lifelong fear of mine. If I see one of these flying freaks headed in my direction, I will literally cross the street to avoid it. Sometimes I even experience this specific recurring nightmare where I'll be at my childhood home, usually in my bedroom—a safe space, right?

Leah: Mmhm.

Rachel: And I'll get this sudden, inexplicable sensation that there's something right above me. (low voice) I'll give you one guess as to what it is.

Leah: I don't wanna take it.

Rachel: (normal voice) When I eventually buck up the courage to look, lo and behold, the ceiling is covered in thousands of butterflies hanging upside down like bats.

Leah: (laughs) I don't like it!

Rachel: Leah did just shudder in her chair.

Leah and Rachel: (laugh nervously)

Rachel: They'll be completely still, as if they were dead, but then suddenly they'll fall like a collapsing house of cards, and then I'll wake up.

Leah: I don't like it.

Rachel, Oh, it is the worst and I hate it! Not one hundred percent sure where this innate fear came from, but I know for a fact that I have always thought that the butterfly house at the Milwaukee Public Museum was a house of horrors.

Leah: It really is.

Rachel: I mean, sorry to bad-mouth one of your main attractions, MPM, but I seriously don't get the appeal.

Leah: At all.

Rachel: If you're not familiar, the 'Butterfly Wing' is a glass room inside of the museum that houses a miniature botanical garden which doubles as a habitat for exotic butterfly species. You can wander in and walk amongst them at your leisure if you are insane and like to do insane things.

Leah: (laughs)

Rachel: The thing about live butterflies is that they eventually die, right? I remember going on field trips to the museum as a child and subsequently seeing all the butterfly corpses that had accumulated around the sides of the glass.

Leah: Ew.

Rachel: I...I could see them while outside of the garden looking in, and just thought, "Nah, I'm good actually, ya'll have fun in there without me!"

Leah: Mmhm.

Rachel: Mmhm. That imagery is reminiscent of lepidopterology which is the scientific study of moths and butterflies often involving pinning them under glass. My father has a small collection, and it has always made my skin crawl.

Leah: (inhales deeply and exhales slowly)

Rachel: Sorry, pops! It's just not for me. Anywho, if you would like to read a horror novel related to butterflies, try "The Butterfly Garden" by Dot Hutchison. It's about a psychopath obsessed with preserving youth and beauty who kidnaps young women to keep in his own personal butterfly garden.

Leah: That sounds awful.

Rachel: it terribly, terribly was. I myself only made it about halfway through before having to stop and shudder.

Leah: I like to think that my next fear is relatively rational, but since they're not real maybe it's not. I just can't handle zombies in any form of visual media.

Rachel: Mhm.

Leah: AKA, no TV shows or movies. Someone dressed as a zombie in real life? Fine. A book about a zombie? Okay. But shows about them? Absolutely not.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: That means no "Walking Dead" for me, which does happen to be a favorite of my husband. But he very kindly does not watch it anywhere where I might catch it walking by, and I love him for that.

Rachel: He is a smart man.

Leah: There's just something about the uneven gait, lack of intelligence, unrelenting pursuit, or just how icky they are that gets me. Or maybe it's the thought of being dead but not getting to rest. A few staff members mentioned a similar fear: that of death itself. The unknown of what follows, or never seeing—an I quote—"the light of another day on Earth." It's a question that we'll never really have a definitive answer to, at least while we're alive. One staff member took a class in college that was all about death, and she found a helpful way to think about it. In her words, "I thought about the different celebrations of death and ways I could be buried or cremated," and though I don't think that totally helped her defeat that fear, learning about

something is a great way to help mitigate that fear. Of course, if it's a truly irrational fear, you can learn everything in the world about it and it won't help. A book I might tie in here is "On Death and Dying" by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. It's a non-fiction book that works through some of the psychology around death. A related memoir about living with a terminal diagnosis and facing death is "The Bright Hour: A Memoir of Living and Dying" by Nina Riggs.

Rachel: I have a fear that ties in pretty closely with death and the undead, too. While I have no issue with the idea of being dead someday, I tremendously dislike the aftermath. So, corpses, decay, rot—all of that. This is something we briefly talked about in an earlier episode of the podcast. In episode number 6, "The Science of Death," I likened squeamishness toward dead bodies to an instinctual fear, one that is born out of self-preservation. Unconsciously, our minds will do everything possible to keep us alive, so being near something that has died puts all of our senses into overdrive. Which is why my truest, most basal fear is of premature burial.

Leah: Mmm.

Rachel: Think about it: You're alive, but you are unwittingly put into an environment that will kill you and, as that is happening, you are very much aware of that fact.

Leah: That kind of reminds me of how in Victorian England they would sell the...the coffins that had bells attached. It was such a fear in their culture at that time that you would be buried in a safety coffin where, if you were buried alive, you could just simply ring the bell and it would alert people that you needed out of your coffin.

Rachel: And imagine waking up in that scenario, where you're in a wooden box—

Leah: Oh, it'd be terrifying!

Rachel: —everything's dark, and there's this little bell pull that you can... (laughs) And you know at that point, "Oh yeah, my relatives buried me alive." What?!

Leah: (whispers) Yeah. (normal voice) But we'll mark you down for a safety coffin.

Rachel: Yeah, okay. Thanks. To scare yourself this Halloween, I recommend watching a classic film from 1945 entitled "The Body Snatcher." It stars horror movie stars Boris Karloff and Bela

Lugosi and was based on a book of the same name by Robert Louis Stevenson. Originally inspired by the Burke and Hare murders which took place in Scotland during the early 1800s, this story is bound to add plenty of nightmare fuel to the pyre.

Leah: As frequent listeners may know, I'm pretty into the whole camping-backpacking-roughing it kind of outdoors stuff. But a fear in the back of my mind when I'm out in nature—especially backpacking or hiking rurally—is running into a bear, startling it, and getting mauled.

Rachel: Jeez!

Leah: (laughs) I just think about it while I'm out doing that stuff.

Rachel: (muffled laugh)

Leah: To a lesser extent, I also have the same fear of startling a large wild cat, but...but bears, you guys. If you have any roughing it outdoors experience, you may know that depending on where you are, bears are a real concern. If I head to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area for some backpacking, I could run into a black bear. They're native to that northern Minnesota and southern Canada area. When you go in, you watch a whole bear safety video at the ranger station where you pick up your entry permit. And you take precautions when camping with stuff that has a scent—think food, toiletries, bug spray...

Rachel: Mmhm.

Leah: ...by either putting it in a pack and stringing it up a tree a ways from your campsite or bringing bear-proof containers along. One specific scenario that always stresses me out: To find a campsite in the Boundary Waters, it's all first come, first serve basis for sites on the lake. So, you paddle up, visually check you can't see canoes, then pull up, hop out. Then you run up to the site, which is off the water a bit, and check that it's empty of tents or gear. Sometimes, folks will leave their camp and go out on day trips, so a site can look empty from the water but be occupied by gear.

Rachel: Sure.

Leah: Anyways, when I'm the "jump out and run up" girl, I always try to make a bunch of noise because I'm always afraid that there will be a bear in the empty campsite if the previous campers were messy or didn't clean up their food properly. I've never admitted that to anyone I go to the Boundary Waters with, and I know at least one listener is among that group so, Kelsey, that might be news to you, friend.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: I just don't want to run into a bear. Conversely, I'd love to see one in nature if it's from a safe distance away. A very safe distance.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: Speaking of animals, a fellow Reference Librarian mentioned a fear of...well, all of them. She shared she didn't have pets growing up and didn't start feeling comfortable around pets until she was older and her then-boyfriend now-husband's family had cats. They themselves had a cat for a while and now have a doggo who she loves dearly. So, exposure therapy for the win on that one, you guys.

Rachel: Hooray!

Leah: A member of our Access Services staff mentioned a fear of the outdoors, specifically how exposing it can feel and adverse weather when out in nature. She mentioned tornadoes, especially, and one harrowing experience on a road trip. I quote: "There was a giant and destructive tornado tracking the same highway we were on, but about 20 minutes behind us. It's like it was following us! That was awful!"

Rachel: That's so scary.

Leah: I can't imagine having the experience that you were quite literally racing to outrun a tornado. That's bananas!

Rachel: It totally is.

Leah: Personally, I do share in this 'adverse weather' fear. When I was little, I was in a flash flood while camping, and I also had to shelter in place at a music festival as an adult when some

funnel clouds were forming. Weather can be scary! Super cool sometimes, but certainly scary if you're not in a safe position to ride it out. So, both that staff member and I agree: we'll be in the basement if there's bad weather around. You can look for us there. One book in particular that matches both the super scary weather and a bear mauling is called "Prey" by Linda Howard. It's a romantic suspense novel that follows a character who fears bears but survives an attack by one that kills her companions...except for one who also wants to kill her. So, she escapes away in the woods during an incredibly heavy storm and is rescued by our hero. I do think I've mentioned this particular book on the podcast before.

Rachel: Mhm.

Leah: But it just fits so well here. Another about surviving in nature is the classic "Hatchet" by Gary Paulsen which you may remember from...middle school? High school?

Rachel: Yeah.

Leah: You may have read it in school.

Rachel: It is a popular one for our younger readers. All right. We have just a few more fears that come directly from some of our Access Services staff here at the library. Someone reported having trypophobia, which we recommend you research with severe caution because it is a visual-based fear and the Internet provides shock images in great abundance. Trypophobia is "an irrational or disproportionate feeling of discomfort or revulsion at the sight of clustered holes or bumps, as seen in sponges, honeycombs, certain seed pods, et cetera." The staff member who told us about this mentioned that it "is a phobia that doesn't get a whole lot of press, but it's probably more common than one would think." Have to say that after looking it up, I agree with their assessment! (laughs nervously) What instantly sprang to my mind was a cartoon mini-series called "Over the Garden Wall." According to an art book by showrunner Patrick McHale, one of the villains of that show was actually designed with trypophobia in mind, and mental images of his true form haunt me to this day.

Leah: (laughs)

Rachel: So, that's my tie-in media recommendation. Honestly, I'd suggest watching "Over the Garden Wall" at any time of the year. It's a great series that you can finish up in about two hours, tops, and it will just sort of stay with you. Yeah, I highly recommend that one. Another staff member told us a little about their fear of IVs. Here's what they told us: "I can handle needles just fine. However, I do not like anything going into my veins. I overall don't like anything to do with the heart, arteries, and veins, but knowing there is a device that interacts with them directly sends me into actual panic attacks. I also hate blood being drawn from me. I usually have to stay 30 minutes after an appointment in case of any possible side effects, just to make sure I am okay with driving home, because I usually faint when it is over." Listeners, I think it's fair to say that this is a pretty understandable fear which many, many people suffer from.

Leah: Mmhm.

Rachel: It is perhaps related to a fear of hospitals, which this person also has, unfortunately. They explained, "I feel helpless in there and feel like if I'm not a help, I should not be in the vicinity and should leave them alone. Along with hospitals, I cannot do anything that has to do with haunted or scary asylums. When it comes to sanatoriums and the off chance of them being haunted, one might have to think of all the horrible events that happened in there. I don't watch nor visit any haunted asylum-themed stuff, especially during Halloween."

Leah: Mm-mm.

Rachel: My sentiment, exactly!

Leah: Yeah, mine, too.

Rachel: I...I do not enjoy those pop-up haunted houses one little bit.

Leah: Mm-mm!

Rachel: Call me a scaredy-cat, I don't even care. You could not pay me to attend an event like that.

Leah: Yup. Not one bit.

Rachel: No.

Leah: Mm-mm.

Rachel: Actual sanatoriums were also terrifying just in and of themselves. There are many records of the atrocities that took place in those institutions. If you were condemned to be in one of those before all of the reform that started taking place within the last century, chances are you weren't getting out unscathed. A great non-fiction reading recommendation on this topic is "The Great Pretender: The Undercover Mission That Changed Our Understanding of Madness" by Susannah Cahalan. It's about how a group of quote "sane" unquote people in the 1970s admitted themselves into asylums to test just how legitimate some psychiatric labels were. What they found changed the field forever, and it was really the impetus for mass deinstitutionalization. If you prefer fiction, I recommend the graphic novel "Archival Quality" by Ivy Noelle Weir. The premise is that a librarian is let go from her job due to a mental breakdown, and she ends up taking on a new position at a haunted medical museum that—turns out—used to be an asylum!

Leah: Mmm.

Rachel: It's not meant to be taken too seriously, so consider it lighter fare during what has been a pretty dark episode of Not Your Mother's Library. In fact, with that we have come to the end of the episode. We hope that you have a spooky and safe Halloween. Remember to visit the show notes section to find details about everything Leah and I blathered on about. We ask that you subscribe and rate the podcast if you enjoyed listening to it. Remember that if you have questions, you may reach out to us through the Oak Creek Public Library website or Facebook page by sending a message to @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Leah and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)

Rachel: I'm sitting so tense just talking about this.

Leah and Rachel: (laugh)

Leah: Right?!

Rachel and Leah: (sigh)

Rachel: Oh, what have we done?