



FEAR OF FLYING

By Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.

Many people have a fear of flying, and the events of 9/11 exacerbated that fear to an enormous degree. Now even people who previously flew without a thought are avoiding air travel. Every day there is another report on air security, and any aviation accident is treated with suspicion. Long lines, uniformed soldiers, humiliating searches, canceled flights, evacuated airports, all add to the public's distaste of flying.

I have treated patients with the fear of flying, and I find the current situation does add somewhat to the concerns of people with a pre-existing phobia, but it has also given the public a good taste of what a phobia is all about.

Fear of flying, like any phobia, is an unreasonable fear. Almost everyone understands that flying is safe. Officials trying to encourage a boost in

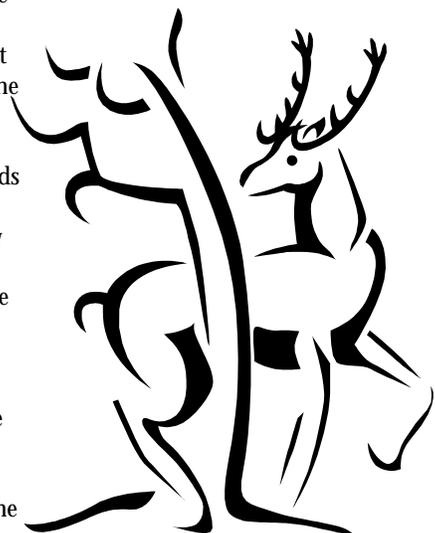
air travel remind us that the chances of dying in the air are infinitesimal compared to that of car travel. Such reminders are a waste of time. We know this already. It just doesn't penetrate the fear barrier enough to calm many of us down. It doesn't convince us that it won't happen to our own precious selves. The chances may be small, but the consequences are too big. At least in the car, if you are driving, you can have and illusion, however false, of being in personal control. Denial is a wonderful thing.

My fearful flyers actually do not fear plane crashes as much as they fear losing control of themselves in a situation in which they feel trapped. An airplane at 37,000 feet is not a place one can easily exit. Many of my patients fear they will have panic attacks in such a situation. Their fear is more of

themselves than of the plane.

Having a panic attack is a little bit like having a hijacker take over your body. It seems like it is out of your control. Everyone can understand this fear since the events of September. The hijackers are in all of our minds now, not just in those with a fear of flying. Our uncertainty about ceding control to the hijackers—whether they are the flesh and blood kind or the emotional kind—triggers our deepest fear of loss of control. Now, perhaps those who once ridiculed the fearful flyer will understand a little better.

Ironically, perhaps it will be the fearful flyers that will calm the rest of the rest of the public down and reminding us all that FDR was correct when saying, "The only thing we have to fear is Fear itself."



EDITOR'S NOTE

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IN TIMES LIKE THESE By Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.

Since 9/11 people have been asking me whether patients with anxiety have been feeling even worse than usual. We have seen planes crash into skyscrapers, invisible spores wreak havoc on the mail service, and evil people plot and plan to destroy our way of life. It seems that so much has changed, that it stands to reason that people with a pre-existing problem would have a greater struggle dealing with it.

In the first few weeks, it seemed that this was true. Many patients in my practice, as well as patients of other therapists with whom I spoke were grappling with the effects of the terrorists in our society. Some said they were sleeping poorly or that they were having stomach problems, all of which just added to their original anxiety issues. Some said quite frankly that the events of 9/11 further confirmed their ideas that the world is an unpredictable and uncontrollable place, and that they themselves were powerless. I spent much time discussing these issues with patients, and I was indeed concerned that it would be difficult to find a way to put things into perspective so as to prevent setbacks in my patients with anxiety.

I not only observed much worry in patients with anxiety, but with all of my patients. Indeed I could feel it quite acutely in myself. In fact, there was no one who was not profoundly affected. Hysterical news accounts of terrorists at our gates and anthrax in our mail added to this fear.

When a poor Middle Eastern art student was jailed on federal charges because he carried a small Exacto knife on board a plane, it seemed to symbolize the ridiculous lengths to which our fear and paranoia had taken us. In the name of security, our leaders even threaten our liberties by establishing military tribunals in the place of courts.

As time has passed, however, I am sensing something else, something fresh and new. I am sensing strength and the power of the human spirit. I see this in my patients. I see it in society. I can feel it in my own heart. The terrible tragedies we have witnessed have caused us great grief but they have also brought out the best in all of us and they have challenged us to think about our lives, our faith, our connections with others and our priorities.

After an initial period of shock, my patients have rebounded. Many have spoken about acts of courage and compassion they have seen or heard about. Some have made their own small contribution to the national need for healing. One patient, for instance, who is a professor was approached by a student who could not concentrate. She put things into historical perspective for this young person and despite her own issues with anxiety, or perhaps due to them, she understood the student and comforted him.

Things will never be as they were before September, but we have all learned so much and in many ways we are stronger for it. We have learned that courage does not mean having no fear but being able to look fear in the face. We have learned that we need to help ourselves and one another. We have learned that just as there is evil in the world, so there is goodness. We are not alone and we are not helpless. As our president says, we will prevail.

LETTER FROM A SUBSCRIBER

One of our faithful readers sends the following letter, here edited for space and to preserve her anonymity:

“ I am well. I do just about everything I need or want to do. We went to my brother’s in Florida this year, *on the airplane*. I guess I kind of figure, either we make it or we don’t. I take my ‘crutches’ with me, but this time I did not reach for my sherry bottle not once! I find if I keep my hands busy, like with my report from work or my coupons, I’m okay.

In addition to flying we took a car trip to visit a cousin. I had

no trouble with that at all. It was nearly five hours in the car each way, but we stopped often and I was okay. You might like to know that I go to the dentist all by myself! I also ride the elevator up four floors now at work, often alone. Anyway, I guess you could say I am doing pretty good.

If I have any advice for the struggling agoraphobic (and we know what a struggle it can be) it is to keep trying and not to care so much what other people think. You can usually leave if you really want to leave. I just don’t care what the dentist

says, or what anyone says. I have never done any of these things, but I keep these thoughts with me and it helps me get through these situations. And...I talk to “Dear God” *a lot*. He goes where I go.”

We wish our friend well and we wish all our readers and subscribers the best this season. We invite your letters and e-mails. Send letters to Editor, *Calm Courier* 155 N. Craig Street, Suite 155 Pittsburgh, PA 15213. E-mail to glanzlaw@yahoo.com



BOOK REVIEW

THE PALPITATING HEART: Seeing Anxiety Differently

By Richard D. Herman

Reviewed by L.M. Glanz, Ph.D.

Many people with anxiety wish they could write a book about their experiences. Not many have the time or talent, but Richard Herman took the time and he definitely has the talent. Unfortunately, the one thing he does not have is a publisher, so his 146 page book, *The Palpitating Heart*, is self published. It is a very personal account by an individual with great determination and a unique perspective on the causes and treatment of anxiety.

Mr. Herman tells us that he suffered daily panic attacks for ten years and that he eventually experienced agoraphobia so severe that he was unable to leave his home except for brief periods of time. His problem resulted in profound changes in his life and nothing seemed to help. He even stopped smoking, which was certainly for the best but it did not help his anxiety.

Mr. Herman turns out to be a very determined individual. He had heard that diet can play a role in

anxiety and began experimenting with his own diet in a methodical way. At the same time he also began paying great attention to his own bodily sensations. As he did so he learned a great deal about the way his body responded to seemingly small changes in his diet. He experimented carefully, kept detailed records and reports the results in his book. His appendices provide a guide for others to follow. His results were most surprising and they point out the importance not only of diet, but the necessity to understand the individual.

No two people are alike and Mr. Herman does not claim that his method will work for everyone.

He simply invites the reader to test it out and to do as he did: pay close attention. His story is one of hope and determination, something from which everyone can learn. The book is available on his website:

www.readingourbody.com, a very appropriate name for the site.

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