

## "Arachnophobic"

For as long as I can remember, I seldom have phobic attacks in public. My husband is the recipient of most of my attacks. When he first learned that I was an arachnophobic, he was slightly amused. During our three year marriage, he has gone from slight amusement to utter annoyance. He tells me often that big girls shouldn't be afraid of something that is 300 times smaller than themselves. His sympathy and understanding of my problem is quite touching.

I have no control over my phobia. When I see or come in contact with a spider, I become terrified. A tiny, harmless spider causes me to freeze, my heart beats faster, my adrenaline flows. I find the quickest escape route away from the dreadful creature; I become a different person.

I'm not ashamed that I'm arachnophobic. I realize that my fear of spiders is totally irrational, completely illogical and downright silly. People with phobias realize their fears are unreasonable. However, I'm not able to control my fear of spiders anymore than a claustrophobic can control his fears of elevators or closets.

I do not know why I'm arachnophobic. My mother has assured me that I did not experience anything strange or unusual in my childhood. She told me I was not attacked by a horde of spiders, nor did I watch spider monster movies. Sometime in my life I became totally terrified of spiders. I've long ago given up trying to find a reasonable explanation for my phobia. I simply accept it, and cope with it.

I usually have other people kill my spiders for me, especially big spiders. My husband gets a bit angry when he has to kill a spider. He grumbles, tells me I should learn to kill my own spiders. Killing spiders only adds to my phobic terror. I'm unable to squash a spider, I can only kill when he's near a drain. Then he gets a sea burial. I can also kill spiders with a vacuum cleaner, though I refuse to change a bag that contains dead spiders.

Besides being phobic, I've developed O.C. (obsessive-compulsive) problems. I often have dreams or nightmares about spiders. In a recent nightmare, I encountered a large spider, about the size of a

house cat. It was working its way out of an opening in my kitchen ceiling. It emitted scary, squeaky, mewling sounds. I ran for the bedroom where I could hide, while my husband killed the beast. I awoke from that nightmare hot and sweaty, feeling frightened. I did not return to sleep for at least 30 minutes afterwards.

Being afraid of spiders has caused me some embarrassment. A small group of us were sitting on the floor, talking, drinking wine. I was feeling good, relaxed. Suddenly, from the corner of my eye, I spotted a blurry shadow scurrying across the floor towards me. I jumped up, screaming, "Spider, quick kill it." I was up and across the room in an instant. Someone squished it, but I did not return to the floor the rest of the evening. It had been a large, brown wolf spider, the meanest and ugliest of all spiders.

That incident made me realize that other people think I'm abnormal and strange. In the eyes of my friends I saw disbelief and laughter. It was then that I began to hide my phobia, concluding that perhaps screaming and running from tiny spiders is a bit eccentric.

I've often been scolded by strangers and friends on the good aspects of spiders. I know spiders eat many annoying bugs, such as flies, moths, and bloodsucking mosquitos. I've seen the beautiful and delicate webs they spin. I'm not impressed. I have no qualms about spattering fly and mosquitos guts around. As a child, I spent many hours catching moths and stripping off their fluttering wings. If I vacuum up a few spiders, where's the harm? In the United States alone, the spider population is astronomical. My small war with spiders will not endanger the spider race.

Although I'm arachnophobic, I'm not crackers or looney tunes! I have an irrational phobia, but am able to lead a normal lifestyle. I vow to someday triumph over my fear of spiders. Perhaps I may even stop seeing shadows from the corners of my eyes. Black shadows that disappear when I look at them straight on.

by Sandra Berney

## "Frieda"

I needed to get rid of my boyfriend. I guess I panicked. I was afraid that our relationship was getting too serious. The easiest way, of course, would be for him to break it off. So, I was going to take him home to meet my family, well, mostly my mother. You see, that had worked with those before him. Yes, one trip home, and the relationship was over.

My mother had never been discreet about "her gift," as she called it.

A small woman, my mother with dark brown hair and eyes. So full of life and energy, she was always well-liked and the center of attention with her quick-to-laugh attitude. Even the people in town, who know about her calling, never spoke unkindly of her. Maybe it was because she did it for free.

I can remember the day she hung the sign on the front porch. She didn't want any help. She even designed and painted it herself, a white background with her name and title in red letters.

"FRIEDA" Animal Psychic and Healer

I had heard the story of how she had acquired this gift over and over. At every family gathering we would all sit around the table and listen to my mother recount this monumental event in her childhood. She would sit at the head of the table like a queen.

"They didn't want me to go, you know," she would begin, "but I was determined and hid on the floor of the car. Of course, when father hit the ice and skidded, the car went right off the bridge and into the water. Everything went black after that, until I remember someone pulling me through the water." It was like saying grace.

"Lets's eat," my mother said.

My mother probably inherited her love of animals from her father who was a veterinarian. She admired his ability to heal sick animals. Occasionally, her father would allow her to go to work with him. She would amaze him with her sharp diagnosis of an animal's health.

Uncle Willy always brought his cat Sapphire, and Aunt Jackie brought her dog with its pinched face and pointy nose, much like her own. My mother allowed animals both at and around the table.

"Tell me Frieda, why's Sapphire so finicky lately," my Uncle asked.

My mother would close her eyes and place her hands on Sapphire's head.

"Oh, she's not well," she said. Then she would raise her hands

above her head and clap them together. The dog and cat would flinch. My mother would then rub her hands back and forth as fast as she could. One time, Uncle Willy said he saw sparks fly from her hands

My mother would place her hands on Sapphire's head.

"I heal you precious Sapphire. Let the illness be gone from your body and be finicky no more."

"Thank you, thank you," Uncle Willy said.

Aunt Jackie would smile and slip her pinched-faced dog a bite of meatloaf. My father would continue to eat as though nothing was happening. My mother never seemed to affect him. Even when mother turned the garage into her clinic and held monthly healing and grooming sessions on the first, father calmly parked his car across the street.

Some public broadcasting agent from California interviewed my mother once. He stayed a whole week. He was attracted to my mother I could tell that. He tried to talk her into going to California to look at this Animal Kingdom that was for sale.

"We'll call it Frieda's Safari. I love it," he said.

"But I love animals and they'd all be tame," she said.

"So, we'll call it Frieda's Tame Safari, for the unadventurous," he said.

"No thanks," my mother said.

My boyfriend and I were on the front porch and I'm sure he was wondering about the sign, but it was too late to ask because my parents were at the door and the dogs were barking.

"Mom, Dad, this is my boyfriend," I said. My father took our coats.

"Ever hear a dog talk," my mother said.

"Ah, no," my boyfriend said.

"Where's Will, where's Uncle Will," my mother said. She directed her voice at the scruffy dog.

"Uncle here?" I asked.

"Nod, now listen," mother said.

In a low growl, you could barely understand the words, "I don't know." The dog wagged her tail.

"Yes, good girl," my mother said.

My boyfriend smiled and took my hand. I smiled at my boyfriend and realized that with all my heart, I hope he likes my

by Cynthia Bentley