

Who's afraid of the big bad FEET?

From flying to feet, students face common and uncommon phobias

By Beth Muldoon
THE BATTALION

In an interview with www.women.com, actor Billy Bob Thornton admitted to an intense phobia of antique furniture.

"I just try to stay away from really old furniture," Thornton said. "Pieces from 1700 and 1800 France and England really freak me out, especially harpsichords."

Thornton said he also has fears of hair and germs in general.

Dr. Ada Kahn, author of *Facing Fears*, said the term phobia is derived from the Greek word "phobos," which means fear, panic, terror and fright. The word phobos comes from the name of the ancient Greek god, Phobos, who provoked fear and panic in his enemies.

One of the most common phobias is a fear of flying. Some people who are afraid to fly react with violent anxiety before and during an airplane trip and some will avoid a trip at all costs.

The fear of flying is included in the same category as fear of heights, crowds and traveling. These fears compose the most common type of phobia called Agoraphobia. Agoraphobics find it difficult to remain calm in any situation they cannot control such as large crowds of people, traveling in airplanes or trains and heights.

Dr. Aaron Beck, author of *Anxieties, Fears and Phobias*, said the most common fear involved with airplane phobias is a fear of crashing.

For Gabe Shutt, a junior English major, overcoming her fear of heights simply means backing away from the situation and thinking about something else.

"I'm fine as long as I don't think about being up high or what could happen if I fall," Shutt said. "It's not the height so much as the instability of the thing I am in or on," Shutt said. "I also try to avoid situations that might have an adverse effect on me."

Beck said symptoms of Agoraphobia usually appear after the age of 20 and are caused by sudden panic attacks from a loss of control in a certain situation.

For Shutt, the symptoms of her phobia began at a young age.

"I don't remember anything ever happening to me that caused

me to be afraid of heights," Shutt said. "I've just always been this way."

Beck said phobias do not stem from a fear of an object, but rather from a fear of contact with the object. For example, a person with a fear of needles is not necessarily afraid of the needle itself, but they do fear the pain that could be inflicted by the needle.

Jenny Day, a senior interdisciplinary studies major, has an intense fear of feet.

"I find them disgusting," Day said. "I don't want anybody to touch my feet and I don't want to have to touch anyone else's feet."

Day said she gets a lot of criticism from her friends for her phobia.

"My friends like to torture me and touch me with their feet a lot," Day said. "They think my fear of feet is a pretty ridiculous fear."

Historically, phobias are classified by the name of the object of fear and Beck said there are at least 107 different names for phobias. Some of the most common include Claustrophobia, a fear of tight spaces, Ailurophobia, a fear of cats, and Arachniphobia, a fear of spiders.

Kahn and Beck said a simple three-step program can help anyone conquer a phobia, anxiety or fear.

"The first step is to identify your fears through a process of self-



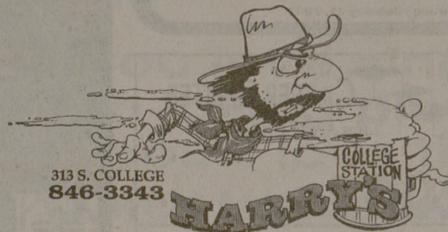
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diagnosis," Kahn said. "Next, pinpoint what triggers your fears and lastly, develop an exposure program to help you face your fears."

Phobias can restrict one's life and can keep people from doing what they love, but with three simple steps and some courage, phobics can experience normal lives.

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