

Fear takes so much away from us

by MARK PAVILONS

?Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live.? ? Dorothy Thompson

Fear is one strong human emotion, trust me.

Largely, we fear the unknown ? what we don't understand or cannot comprehend.

Our fear has kept our species thriving for millennia and it still serves us to this day. Along with facing real fears comes battling irrational ones.

We know a centipede won't harm us, yet I've seen people jump on their chairs when one crawls past, hundred legs and all. I bet a few people cringed at that very sentence. Similarly, bats, snakes and spiders would rather avoid us than confront us.

I?love horror movies, but I?am rarely scared by the on-screen antics.

I?think our one, main fear is the fear of dying, and what may, or may not come after.

Jim Morrison advised us to ?expose yourself to your deepest fear; after that, fear has no power, and the fear of freedom shrinks and vanishes. You are free.?

I?really hate cancer and the way it toys with me.

Cancer hides in plain sight, mocking us, daring us to come closer, to find a way to extinguish its flame.

In many cases, medical experts have found ways to fool this insidious beast, to trick it into hibernating, or hiding under some dark, damp rock.

And still, every once in a while, it nudges us, pokes us to let us know it's still there.

It takes.

Not only does it creep into the nooks and crannies of our bodies, it inhabits every corner of our minds. It plagues us with fear, apprehension, anxiety and stress.

It's almost perfect in its total destruction of a human being and the fear it brings.

We are not alone in how we process our panic. Almost every other creature on the planet experiences fear.

Apparently it's not totally a learned behaviour but more of an inherent survival mechanism.

The amygdala in the brain processes fear, releasing hormones like adrenaline to prepare the body for action. Fear is a natural, biological response designed to protect us from danger by alerting us to potential harm.

Experts say it's a biological response, not a learned behavior, that involves a complex set of physiological changes, including an increased heart rate and the release of stress hormones like adrenaline, sparking the ?fight-or-flight? response.

Fear is a fundamental evolutionary tool that helps living organisms detect and escape harm, enhancing their chances of survival.

Fear extends across the animal kingdom, from insects and snails to most mammals.

It's funny, though, that humans are born with innate fears of loud noises and falling, perhaps forms of self-preservation, associating these things with danger.

Fear is deeply embedded in our nervous system as a survival instinct to keep us safe from dangerous situations, whether physical or psychological.

When I hear people say they're afraid of something, I smirk.

Only those faced with a life-threatening disease, ailment or situation know real fear.

Carry the fire for a world free from the fear of cancer. That's the slogan for the newest home lottery being held by the Princess Margaret Foundation. Notice it says fear.

Fear is being told you have cancer. Fear is having an operation to remove an organ. Fear is going on chemo. Fear cloaks you every time you slide into a CT or PET scanner. Fear is, well, fearing the worst.

Going through a phase of thinking about death and being hyper-aware of death is a part of the existential train of thought.

For many of us, it's our unavoidable train of thought, something we'd love immensely to derail.

I wonder whether cancer has turned me into an existentialist.

In the philosophy of existential nihilism, the idea is that life, in particular, has no inherent meaning or purpose.

The recognition of death as the ultimate end is a key factor in existential nihilism. It suggests that since everything will eventually cease to exist, including individual accomplishments and the entire human experience, so there's no real, lasting, objective value to be found.

This perspective can lead to a sense of indifference, lack of motivation, or even existential crises.

Very dark, isn't it?

But some philosophers, like Albert Camus, argue that acknowledging the absurd nature of existence can be liberating, allowing individuals to create their own subjective meaning and live authentically.

They recommend using this time to see what you want to give to life and what you want to take from it.

All well and good, but, in reality, optimism also falls victim to cancer.

How does one make a giving list when time is short?

Many people talk about their bucket lists when they're still young and healthy. While my bucket list is full, the bucket is, alas, empty.

Who has the flexibility and money to check off bucket list items, especially if they involve travel to exotic places?

The most exotic place I'm going in the near future is the Stronach Regional Cancer Centre in Newmarket.

That being said, dread has become my ally, my companion. There's much to be learned from apprehension and worry, who've also been my life-long acquaintances.

Fear doesn't shut you down, it wakes you up!

And now that I'm constantly wide-eyed and bushy tailed, I need to live, and sideline my uneasiness.

?The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.? - Nelson Mandela

Maybe, with the help of many others, I can conquer this fear, and lessen cancer's grip on me.