

Daniel:

Daniel: Hi. I'm Daniel Zomparelli, and I'm afraid of, well, a lot of things. Snakes, cars, debris falling from a plane and crushing me, parallel universes, just to name a few. I'm no expert on fears, but I wanted to learn more about what scares us, so I've invited some people to tell me what they're afraid of. Then I talked to some experts to try and dig into what those fears are really all about. This is, I'm afraid that.

Daniel: When I was growing up, our home had been broken into a couple of times. My parents were home each time, and I was usually just coming back from school. There were weapons. It was scary. You'll hear more about this later. Needless to say, I became paranoid. I used to take photos of any car or van that sat outside our home for too long. There was one photo with a guy giving me the middle finger. Even though I was certain, no one could see me. That fear never let up and I still check our locks often, and at my worst will wake up in the middle of the night to double or triple check those locks. Janicza Bravo, writer, director and actor, knows this fear all too well. It's one of her fears but not her only one we discuss.

Daniel: We also talked to her about her very intense fear of holes, known as tripophobia. Then we check in with forensic psychology expert, Dr Claire Nee to hear about her virtual reality experiment where she got firsthand knowledge of ways to protect your home from break-ins.

Daniel: We're sitting with Janicza Bravo who has directed for TV shows such as Atlanta and Dear White People, and who directed and co-wrote the movie Lemon and is currently working on a much anticipated movie, Zola. I'm very hyped about Zola.

Janicza: As am I. Did you read the tweets?

Daniel: Yes, of course I did. You had posted that you were doing the movie quite awhile ago and I lost my shit.

Janicza: It's my favorite thing that I have worked on to date. It's fun and it's very stressful and it is strange, which are all of the things that I'm interested in. I would say stressful comedy is like kind of my wheel house. That's the thing that I most want to cultivate or get into. And this piece in particular is at the intersect of Blue Velvet and Bodak Yellow. So it's where David Lynch and Cardi B meet. I would say is what [crosstalk 00:03:01]. Thank you so much. I'm coining it, I'm trying it out and seeing if that feels good where Bodak Yellow and Blue Velvet meet. You want that.

Daniel: I just feel bad for the marketing team, doesn't need to do any work anymore.

Janicza: I mean no, A24 is going to do a solid job and I can't wait. But yeah, I really do feel it's that intersect in that Lynch ... Lynch by the way, I feel is a sort of great segue into the world of the thing that you have built here because I find his work to be deeply distressing. Beautiful on the outside, but it has this very nightmarish core that causes me a great deal of anxiety and panic. But that I'm also really titillated by. I'm excited by

how he plays with my nightmares or with nightmares, because I feel like his work to me is a distillation of nightmares.

Daniel: That's where I want to live. That's how I want to be.

Janicza: And I feel that you're totally hanging out in that space. You're very much in that space.

Daniel: Great. That is the biggest compliment.

Janicza: Oh okay. You're welcome. You're welcome. All true.

Daniel: So let's get into it. You have a couple of years we're going to talk about. What is your fear?

Janicza: Home invasion.

Daniel: And your other fear?

Janicza: Holes.

Daniel: Okay.

Janicza: I know that one seems loony.

Daniel: Which one?

Janicza: Holes.

Daniel: No holes is a very common one. They're actually both very common. Whenever somebody sends me their fear, I scour the internet and I hang out in the anxiety message boards.

Janicza: Is there a live journal for this?

Daniel: There's actually specifically anxiety message boards, where if you're an anxious person this is where you post them.

Janicza: There probably are Facebook groups around this.

Daniel: There are. Reddit's good as well. There's a lot.

Janicza: I feel like I've never heard anyone say Reddit's good. Because I know it can be a real cesspool. [crosstalk 00:05:05]. That's good to hear.

Daniel: Now most websites are cesspools.

Janicza: Correct. Ding, ding, ding.

Daniel: Found out that logging in is gross. Why are you afraid of break-ins?

Janicza: Recently, I would say in the last maybe two or three years, I think I figured out why I have this fear. My parents love horror movies and love suspense and thrillers. And so from a very young age I watched a lot of movies that maybe kids shouldn't watch. And then the other thing is Unsolved Mysteries. Do you know that show?

Daniel: Yes.

Janicza: I watched a lot of Unsolved Mysteries. And there's this one [crosstalk 00:06:01] From single digits to double digits and because it's what my parents liked. I was an only child. I didn't dictate what we watched. They did. And I had up until a certain time where I was allowed to watch what I wanted. And then if I wanted to watch TV, I had to watch what they were watching, which was usually something really fucked up.

Janicza: And so I watched a ton of Unsolved Mysteries, and there's one in particular that really has shook me to this day. Basically this woman in the story, this girl, I think her mom or her dad are telling the story, like they've come back from a long day of hiking or camping or some kind of social in nature activity. And then they get home and mom's about to cook dinner and she goes to take a shower.

Daniel: I'm already scared.

Janicza: And that's the last time they see her. And so then they go to the house, and they're looking at the map of the house. And the only explanation would be that their bathroom has this small window, but that's where the story ends. And they're just basically circling this narrative. And I'm like, are you kidding? And so for a period of time after I saw this, I would ask my mom to come to the shower with me. And we had no window. But I was like, I just don't want to disappear when I go to the shower.

Janicza: And then it really solidified this idea of home invasion when I saw Michael Haneke's Funny Games, which was on a suggestion of ... I love his work or I have loved his work and a friend thought I would really love this movie. And she described it as funny. I don't know if you've seen that movie. It is not funny at all actually. Whether you see the American version or the non-American version. I have not seen the American version because I already saw one and I was good.

Janicza: But it's basically like these two very Arian, almost cherubic blonde boys break into this house and for two hours slowly torture and murder every member of the family. And when it was over, I can look back at this moment as it changing my relationship to how I watched violence on camera actually. It totally shifted for me. I saw that and I went, oh, I don't need that. I don't want violence like this. I don't need low cruel [crosstalk 00:08:42].

Janicza: Yeah. I feel like I don't do well with horror anyways or I don't do well with that kind of violence, but I was fine with it up until that moment. I'd been really fine. I could watch really gruesome things and not flinch and then suddenly it really, it basically changed my equilibrium. That movie just totally scarred me and I live alone now. I've been living alone for about a year, and I leave a light on in the bathroom because I feel like I heard somewhere if there's a light on in the bathroom, it implies that someone's home, what? But it makes me feel better. I oftentimes sleep with the light on in my bedroom and I'm totally fine with that.

Janicza: The other night actually I was feeling a little distressed and I had what I thought was a CBD gummy and it was kind of yummy, and then I had a second one, and actually whoever had gifted them to me, they were more THC than they were CBD. And then I [crosstalk 00:09:52], there was, but I just trusted it. I was like, they know that [crosstalk 00:09:57] I totally trusted it and the person who gave it to me knows that I don't fuck with weed because I can't. It just makes me sad. If you want to see me cry, give me weed and I will cry.

Janicza: The proportions were such that there was more CBD than there was THC, but even the smallest amount of THC is deeply negative for me. And then so I ended up feeling totally trapped in my body and couldn't really open my eyes and I was like, this is the perfect time for someone to break in because I am basically, my body is a coffin right now.

Janicza: And I thought I heard something at around 4:00 or 5:00 AM, and even though my dog wasn't reacting, I thought I heard something and then I was rationalizing how I would engage with my rapist. Where I went through this, okay so maybe I'll pretend I'm sleeping and then I guess Janet will be barking. They'll probably physically hurt her. They'll hit her or lock her out of the room, and then do I just pretend to be sleeping while it's happening? Or do I hide in the closet? Really was going through the list of things that I would do and then just hope that they just wanted money. I was like, I'm writing a check because I don't have cash. So I was going to write a check out.

Daniel: Yeah. I'm always like, what property can I give them?

Janicza: I guess people still want jewelry. [crosstalk 00:11:21] It just seems like so many steps. You get jewelry and then you have to go sell it somewhere and hope it's worth something. That's too many steps. So I'm like, I'm writing a check.

Daniel: A check is smart.

Janicza: Look, I got my check checkbook here.

Daniel: I do have a checkbook in my bedroom.

Janicza: I have a checkbook in my bedroom too, so I'm ready. I'm going to now put it on my nightstand and I'll be like, how much?

Daniel: Do you want the CB2 lamp? It was kind of expensive.

Janicza: I have a rack of dresses that are Japanese. Would you like that? Japanese linen? Is that something that's curious to you sir? But when I look at it, I think that Unsolved Mysteries, Nightmare on Elm Street with my parents, The Shining when I was six or seven years old.

Daniel: Was there any actual break-ins that have happened in your life?

Janicza: Never.

Daniel: But that's also such a common one because it's also based on a reality of break-ins happen a lot. Even when I research it's like-

Janicza: You've never had a break in.

Daniel: Oh yeah, no.

Janicza: At your house?

Daniel: Not our current house. So when I was growing up, my parents have very Italian taste is what I'll say.

Janicza: Is that a good or a bad, I can't tell what you mean by that.

Daniel: Just gaudy.

Janicza: Calling attention to itself.

Daniel: Yeah. So there was a fake water fountain in the front.

Janicza: So sexy.

Daniel: But it was giant. Raccoons now live there.

Janicza: Oh that's kind of beautiful.

Daniel: Yeah. But also psycho. The first break-in involved machetes. So they broke in from the downstairs and had machetes and my dad threw one of the giant chair because it was in the daytime, we were at school. Threw a giant chair at them, very Italian to throw a giant chair. And they scattered off.

Janicza: Oh, the chair worked.

Daniel: The chair worked. I think they just weren't expecting people to be home. Then the second time they were definitely expecting them to be home and had guns. [crosstalk 00:13:32] So that's when they finally got stuff. So they knew exactly where our safe was. It was very weird. My mom hid in the office and she thankfully had her cell phone on her

and she called the police. But that was it. They just had to stay quiet as they went through.

Janicza: And where was your dad?

Daniel: I think he was in the living room. I think he was also just hiding in another separate. I think they told them to stay down and they just stayed down.

Janicza: Wow. That's so dark.

Daniel: Yeah. So it's very-

Janicza: They don't live in that house anymore right?

Daniel: Dad's still at the same house. My mom passed away, but my dad still lives there. We still go there for, I had my 30th birthday there.

Janicza: Oh my goodness. That's so scary. Thankfully you weren't there, but I'm sure that however that made your parents feel, which I'm sure is not good, I do think that that kind of trauma can be absorbed. [crosstalk 00:14:33] I'm sure in your small kid body you could absorb whatever it was their energies were emitting, which is, that felt bad. Alert, alert, alert.

Janicza: That's what's so great about this is as we're talking about it, it makes me feel less batty because you're also having your own list of traumas and I'm like, oh well thank God. Then it's fine and it makes me just feel a little less isolated. It's also the control, right? If you are in control that feels better than when you're out of control. Because the fear of holes or fear of home invasion, so much of that is also about not having control, not having control of your narrative, not having control of your environment.

Janicza: And, or at least for me, I think I see where the part where I lose a handle or a grip creates a good deal of the unraveling is that I can't fix it. I can't reshape it or I can't model it into what I want it to be.

Daniel: Do you have things, you were talking about the light on. What are the other things that you do to safeguard your house?

Janicza: A lot of checking the door. There's like a ton of [crosstalk 00:15:55], really obsessive. I don't think of myself as having an OCD, but I do know that when I come inside from walking my dog, say I lock, lock, lock, and then I'll go do something and I'll come back and I'll just make sure that it's locked again. And then before bedtime I'll do it a few times. And then I have two entrances, so I will check that entrance oftentimes too, because maybe I opened that, even if I didn't open that door, I just want to make sure.

Janicza: But safety sometimes feels a bit like an illusion, right? I have these metal doors in front of wood doors. If you open the metal door, the wood door being locked is, I'm fucked,

I'm screwed. But for some reason, it makes me feel like if all of the doors are locked, it's impossible. Somehow it's impossible to get it.

Janicza: I'm more worried about the interaction around the home invasion, like violence, physical violence. That's the thing that I am most concerned with. I feel like so much of what I've consumed, I watch a lot of TV. I watch a lot of movies and I have always, since I was very little, that I have in some way, I've ingested enough of a vocabulary for the things that I am really concerned about.

Janicza: I have a pretty solid bag, which is why I don't really seek out horror or thrillers because I feel like my toolkit is actually pretty well equipped of things that I'm concerned about. So it's like I don't need more to add to it. I'm like, Saw six, so somebody could saw into my ankles. Interesting. I'd like to add that to my bag. It's like I don't need, I don't really need more to add to it. It's pretty satiated.

Daniel: Does this fear impact your sleep? Do you wake up in the middle of the night?

Janicza: Sometimes. I did this week, but I think that when I've had a hard time sleeping regarding that kind of thing is generally if I am in a moment in my life that is very high stakes, and if I'm a little more comfortable, that's at bay. Similarly, with my hole stuff, if I'm comfortable that stuff is pretty under wraps or contained, and I find that when I start to have rises it's because I am in kind of a porous moment also. I'm not at my strongest.

Daniel: I love that. Porous moment, that's so good.

Janicza: Thank you. Please feel free to use it in your life.

Daniel: I want to know more about this and what do you mean holes?

Janicza: How I figured it out was actually driving in my car in LA and listening to NPR. But I've had this from very small, I don't remember exactly how my parents figured it out, but I was trying to explain it to them that at first like I get goosebumps and then I get a little nauseous. And so they knew that I had this thing and it would be triggered by what they called, creases and what we referred to as creases in my house.

Janicza: So to see it happen to me when I was little, my mom would imprint her nail into her skin [crosstalk 00:19:48], kind of make this sort of half moon shape and show it to me and then I would be like full goosebumps and then I'd be like, [inaudible 00:19:56] and they thought it was so funny and so they would try to find other ways to make it happen for me where I would get it was a joke and I think I kind of liked it because they thought it was funny and it seemed like a joke we were all doing.

Daniel: It brought them joy.

Janicza: Yeah, it brought them joy even though I was like, I feel sick. Well I don't feel joy. So I feel like it's primarily been at bay, but sometimes like if I were to see a Lotus root, I have to

think, why does that make me feel bad? I don't get it. But it makes me feel bad. But not always, sometimes. Or a grater sometimes makes me feel bad, but not always, sometimes. And I didn't know what that was. And then I was there talking about a fear of holes and I was really engrossed and super curious because I was like, one, how do you figure that out?

Janicza: And then I sat in the car and listened to it for whatever the 15, 20 minutes that it's on, went home. And then I looked it up and there are these really disgusting images associated with it. I was like, oh I have that. That happens to me. But not always.

Daniel: I remember the holes thing came about from me learning about it was because American Horror Story did a trailer that utilized it. [crosstalk 00:21:24].

Janicza: Oh yeah, they had a print ad, and I was like, fuck you.

Daniel: And so the trailer caused a lot of people to have this freak out and then people are going to the research and showing that it was like from what they can find, it's one of those fears like fear of snakes or things that are ingrained in us from thousands of years ago.

Janicza: Yeah. It's our cave people.

Daniel: To signify disease.

Janicza: To go back to using the word porous, because they actually used, I believe they referred to as like porous textures or porous surfaces that they're now extinct or endangered. I'm not sure what the right word is. Plants or animals that had these surfaces that were poisonous and so that those triggers are basically your body's alert system of [crosstalk 00:22:16] danger, danger, back up, back up.

Janicza: I think loss of control seems to be the root of the thing for me. And not only loss of control, but then being in a environment or situation where I'm also quite fragile. Not only loss of control but fragility. Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

Daniel: Thank you so much for joining us. This was a delight.

Janicza: Okay. Yay.

Janicza: That was Janicza Bravo and her fear of break-ins and fear of holes. Before we check in with forensic psychology expert Dr Claire Nee, let's listen to one of the voicemails you left on our fear line.

Caller: Hi, love the show. My name is Randy. I have a fear of snakes as fingers. Every time I think about people who have snakes as fingers, it freaks me out. It makes me really uncomfortable to kind of picture it or look at my fingers and think that they could be snakes. But also I feel like I spend a lot of time wondering how you practically go about

having snakes as fingers. Like zipping up jackets or picking a pencil up or something. How that would go.

Caller: Also if I were with somebody and they had snakes as fingers and they went to grab my arm. Anyway, there you go. Bye.

Daniel: We're here with Dr. Claire Nee, researcher in forensic psychology, including crime specific research of burglary and theft. Welcome to the podcast.

Dr. Nee: Thank you very much.

Daniel: You created a study that involves, I believe it's a virtual neighborhood?

Dr. Nee: That's right, yeah. As researchers for decades, we've had to rely on interviewing people and doing kind of rudimentary experiments and that sort of thing to try and understand defending behavior and criminal behavior and decisions and the emotions and all those kinds of things that happen around the scene of the crime and during the actual offense. As a matter of fact, we had the idea when we were in LA a long time ago at a conference.

Dr. Nee: But you know with the advent of virtual reality and it's where it's becoming more and more accessible and usable in a variety of fields, we realized that if we could create virtual environments, the kinds of environments that crime happens in, we could actually ask there's nothing better than actually doing something to trigger all your memories and knowledge about it.

Dr. Nee: The virtual environments recreate the context of the crime perfectly. We developed a whole virtual neighborhood a couple of years ago. We brought it into prisons and we compared a bunch of very experienced burglars against other prisoners who hadn't done any burglaries, to see what we could learn about someone actually reenacting the crime in front of us. So it's been really fascinating. It's really opened our eyes on a number of levels.

Daniel: Very cool. What was probably the most exciting thing that came from that study?

Dr. Nee: I think for me the most exciting finding, if I can call it exciting, was that we always knew that burglars tended to avoid small children's bedrooms. And we thought that was because there's not going to be too much in there that's of value. But what we found literally to a burglar as they were wandering around the virtual house, they would open the door to the nursery, and they would all say, "Oh, I'm not going in there. That's a child's room." You just don't do that. So there was kind of a morality aspect. So there's kind of things that you would find out that you wouldn't have known to ask about in an ordinary interview. It's kind of generating lots of hypotheses and ideas for us.

Dr. Nee: We knew we had some idea about where they go to and where the items of value are taken from, but we could actually watch them go straight up to the main, what we would call the master bedroom. The sort of adult bedrooms nearly always go straight to

the top of the house. And that's usually to check as well. Just to double check that nobody's in, because burglars really, really don't want to meet their victims.

Dr. Nee: It's an interesting thing because burglary is rarely recorded as an interpersonal crime because burglars very rarely meet their victims and they don't want to meet their victims. But for the actual victim, it's extremely personal. And about a few years ago here, the same as in the United States, we changed the law so that householders are able to protect their homes now to a reasonable level if they have an intruder. And we wondered if that would make burglars more violent or take more things with them.

Dr. Nee: In case they had confrontations with their victims. But what we found is it's actually made it even more important to the burglar that he doesn't meet his victim because they know the law changes completely if you have any sort of interaction with the victim, it comes from a much more serious crime and they get many more years in prison for it.

Dr. Nee: So burglars would really, I won't say that they never go in when people are in their houses because if people are asleep, but there's often more things in the house downstairs. Such as, handbags, briefcases, iPads, credit cards, those kinds of things. But if they hear any noise at all that signifies someone's in the house, it makes them disappear very quickly.

Daniel: Okay. Because her fear was more that she would be at home, and it's nice to hear that the deterrent is being home.

Dr. Nee: I would say the number one deterrent is to fake that you're at home even if you're not. That's certainly what I do, and I would advise anyone to do that. So things like having lights on timers, having a neighbor pop in every now and then if you're away, those kinds of things are really important because if you kind of think of the burglary as two phases, there's the phase while the burglar's outside choosing his property, you want to try and deter him at that point don't you?

Dr. Nee: So he'll be processing these cues that tell him which are the good properties and which are the less profitable or more difficult to get into properties. He'll be processing all that fairly automatically. So things like lights coming on, or the sound of a loud radio or dogs barking will be a deterrent to some extent for sure.

Daniel: Is there any other big tips about what to do for your home to keep a deterrent? I think there was a point where you said outside, there's some things you should be doing?

Dr. Nee: Don't just rely on an alarm system because recent research has shown as which has kind of supported what we hear from burglars. Sometimes an alarm can actually attract a burglar if they're on top of security issues being looked at in the house as well. So think of your property holistically. Just an alarm on its own is not good enough.

Daniel: Just trying to understand that a bit more. So if they see an alarm and that's it, they assume that there's a way to get in easier?

Dr. Nee: It's not so much that it'll be easy to get in, it just literally attracts attention. I think like a burglar now, so I always notice when people have got an alarm or not. I just kind of think, oh, there's an alarm now. Why have they got an alarm? Is it because they've been burgled before? Which gets the mind thinking about how would the burglar have got in if they have been burgled recently. You'll know that they have replaced all their expensive items by their insurance. Those kinds of things.

Daniel: You do think like a burglar now.

Dr. Nee: I do, but there's been quite a robust piece of research as well backing up what we've heard burglars say where they've looked at the properties that have been burgled and having an alarm on its own can sometimes actually make it more vulnerable.

Daniel: Okay. Well I'm supposed to get an alarm system now. What about, this is a very silly thing, but I keep thinking about it, what if be aware of dogs. Dog signs, did those do anything?

Dr. Nee: Again, they will be, I think that they're worth having because they'll be what we call a conditional deterrent. They're a nuisance. If someone thinks,, a dog, or they can hear a dog barking, whether it'd be a big or a small dog, it is going to attract people's attention, when they're trying to get into a property. But it's very rare that a burglar will have a definite house in mind when he goes out to burgle. He'll think of vulnerable areas unless he's stealing to order, which does happen, but less often than you think.

Dr. Nee: So if he's going out, a general burglar burglary spree, he'll go to an area that he knows presents good opportunities and then have a look at what different properties look like that evening. So if there were dogs barking like crazy and there isn't one in the house next door that's just as good to burgle, he's obviously going to go for that one.

Dr. Nee: You know, there's been a lot of research over the years, burglary is one of the crimes that people worry about the most. And it's understandable because like I say, it's not considered an interpersonal crime, but it's utterly horrible as you well know. If you've been burgled, I have as well. I mean you've got the triple whammy of the financial loss and damage, losing irreplaceable items and also the horrible violation of the sanctity of your home.

Dr. Nee: And I think whenever we know from all kinds of research that whenever you've had any kind of unpleasant trauma, your brain is desperately trying to make sense of it. And our imaginations come into play and we often imagine the intruder as a monster who's very aggressive and is going to kill us, et cetera. And you know, unfortunately that can lead to about PTSD in about 20% of people.

Dr. Nee: Most people feel horrible for a few weeks and then kind of get over it, especially if they've had a good response from police and other services that would come to help you. But a really helpful thing to do is to remember that it's highly likely this person is an extremely disadvantaged individual with very little education, often has a very serious drug habit and they're more scared of you than you are of them. They really, really don't

want to meet you. And it's not personal from their point of view. So that may help people who've either been burgled or who worry about it.

Daniel: That is helpful. Yeah. This was delightful. Thank you so much. You really just gave us so much information. It was wonderful.

Dr. Nee: Thank you very much.

Daniel: I'm Afraid That is produced by me, Daniel Zomparelli, Gabe Liedman and Little Everywhere. If you have a fear you'd like to hear on the show, please share it with us at I'mafraidthat.com where you can get more info on the guests and experts. That's I'mafraidthat.com. If you enjoyed the podcast, please subscribe, review, and share. It helps other people find the show. And thank you for listening.