

Daniel: Hello, I'm Daniel Zomparelli, and I'm afraid of everything and I want to know what scares you, so I've invited people to tell me what they're afraid of. Then I talked with experts to dig a little deeper and get tips on how to deal. This is I'm Afraid That.

Daniel: Cockroaches are disgusting. The worst incident I had with the cockroach was while on a family vacation at what I think was Sesame Street Themed Resort. My siblings and I got wasted at their fake nightclub that had an occupancy of about eight people, after too many vodka sodas I passed out. My sister told me later that I forced them at 2:00 AM to get me a grilled cheese. When it finally arrived, I refused to eat it. The next morning I woke up trying to piece together the night before when I was about to walk to the bathroom to shower a giant cockroach fell out of the air conditioner right on top of my head, into my hair. This is all to say that I am very afraid of family vacations now. Someone who is deeply afraid of cockroaches is Nailed It! Nicole Byer. We you talk with her about her deep fear of the bug and then we also talk with cockroach expert, Dr. Phillip G Koehler to learn more about the notorious pest. So we've got a special guest co-host today.

Gabe: That's right.

Daniel: His name is Gabe Liedman.

Gabe: I'm here. I'm not always here. Just so you know this is special.

Nicole: I heard, I'm very excited that you're here. It's a real treat.

Gabe: I had to be here, for you.

Nicole: Yes.

Daniel: Who is our guest is standup comedian and star of Loosely Exactly Nicole and host of Nailed It! Nicole Byer.

Nicole: It's me.

Gabe: We're so thrilled to have you.

Nicole: Am excited to be here. We should tell your listeners what happened last week.

Gabe: Oh this is good.

Nicole: We set a date. I was like, "Ooh, I'll be there." Then I got on a plane and went to Florida and then the day of I was like, "Oh shit, I'm not in LA." It would be so lovely to have an assistant, but I do not make enough for an assistant. I mean that like...

Gabe: That would be a nice...

Nicole: Mid period.

Gabe: To not be in charge of your own schedule.

Nicole: It would be so great.

Gabe: I was thinking like, wow, that was so easy to sche... Watching that get scheduled I was like, that's probably the fastest I've ever seen anything scheduled was like, "That works for you? Yep. Great I'll be there."

Nicole: I'm not here. Yeah, I get a little confused because then like sometimes dates move and then I'm not quick enough to tell people. It's fun, I'm all that.

Gabe: It's fun and sometimes you just got to go to Florida.

Nicole: You got to go to Florida. Oh boy. Florida.

Gabe: Were you touring?

Nicole: Yes, I was at the Orlando Improv.

Gabe: Love.

Nicole: My audience for the most part were really great except for three men during my 7:00 PM first show. The men just wanted to keep screaming at me.

Gabe: At you. Oh no, no, no, no.

Nicole: And there was one man in the audience you didn't understand a set up to Stand Up. When you ask a question, but you're like, I don't want the answer. It's just how I'm getting into the joke. So then he screamed his own punchline then I brought him on stage. He didn't like that. And then some lady in the aisle was like, "Just apologize." He's like, "I'm Puerto Rican, I'm not apologizing." And I was like, I didn't know ethnicity had anything to do with respectfulness.

Gabe: Right.

Nicole: Now you learn.

Gabe: Bad personality.

Nicole: Go to Florida and you learn.

Gabe: That sucks.

Nicole: Yeah, but I after my last show was like, I didn't make any money that weekend, so I was like, "Oh what do I do?" So I went to Walmart and I smoked some weed and then I wanted around Walmart and I just like ate things and didn't pay for it. I could be just as trashy as you people. My roommate, I was like, "Good one Nicole you're really showed Florida."

Gabe: You showed them.

Nicole: But I recommend it. It's fun to walk around a giant Walmart. I was drinking water, I had some sparkling water. Then I found some chips.

Daniel: And you just leave.

Nicole: And I just left. Well I bought some leggings because I figured, "I should buy something."

Gabe: Right.

Daniel: I like that. That's cool shoplifting, I like that.

Gabe: Casual. It's a statement on guns. That's what it is.

Nicole: Yes, that's my statement on gun.

Gabe: Yeah free chips for all.

Nicole: Yes. Give us chips and ban guns.

Gabe: It's all you need.

Nicole: Have you ever shot a gun, either one of you?

Daniel: No.

Gabe: Yes.

Nicole: Did you enjoy it?

Gabe: Kind of but it was at a range, like it's very contained.

Nicole: Yes, and you feel powerful.

Gabe: I felt really powerful.

Nicole: But then I started thinking, I was like, "This is the last thing some people here before they're dead. And then that got to me."

Gabe: That's scary.

Nicole: And I didn't like that.

Gabe: No, I'm not pro gun. This was like a bunch of guys go into the range. I was like trying to hang and act cool and it was like, "We're going to shoot guns." It was like a plan, we go into the building, we shoot guns, we leave without guns. It was all very like, this is a moment, this is not a lifestyle. My dad was a gun owner though and that freaked me...

Nicole: Did he keep them locked up?

Gabe: He sure didn't, they were just like writing his dresser, anyone could. We knew exactly where they were and it was just like, whew.

Nicole: You got to lock them up.

Gabe: You got to lock them up.

Nicole: I know the argument is like, "What if somebody breaks in my..." And it's like if someone breaks into your house, there's no way you're going to have the wherewithal to grab the gun in your drawer.

Gabe: No, its over.

Nicole: You're not meant for the, whatever. I'm sure someone will hear this and have some lovely to say to me on Twitter. Twitter is a hussy.

Gabe: The gun nuts are cool.

Daniel: What if that's actually our show is only gun nut listeners. We really narrowed in on that audience.

Gabe: Absolutely.

Daniel: It's been fun.

Gabe: They love fear.

Daniel: They love fear.

Gabe: Speaking of fear-

Nicole: Yeah it's good segue.

Daniel: So you gave us a couple of fears. We'll start with one that's quite common, cockroaches.

Nicole: Oh boy. They are disgusting, I do not like them. And I used to live in New York and we lived in a six floor walkup and every summer we didn't have air conditioning in the common spaces. I didn't have air conditioned my room for years, but we would always open the windows, let the air in. And every year, on like the hottest day of the year, we would leave the windows open, leave the apartment come back and there would be like 10 giant cockroaches who climbed up the side of the building and said, "Oh, they left the window open, we're invited." And then without fail, I would scream until one of my male roommates would come in and they were gay, so like they would be screaming too.

Gabe: They are screaming too.

Nicole: We would all just be screaming and trying to kill these roaches. And then every time I see... And then some of them fly argh. [crosstalk 00:07:19]

Daniel: That's a next level.

Nicole: And I did a scene on my show Loosely Exactly Nicole, rest in peace, where I had to hold a cockroach in a jar and I couldn't even do that. And I knew it would not get to me, these cockroaches they don't, they're like hissing Madagascar roaches or something.

Gabe: So they're fancy.

Nicole: Fancy, yes. They were not generic. They don't hurt you, but they, aargh. They just aargh.

Daniel: So you're on a phobia level?

Nicole: I don't like them.

Daniel: If you can't even hold them in jar.

Nicole: Yeah, I guess that is a phobia. They gross me the fuck out.

Daniel: Have they ever been on you?

Nicole: No.

Daniel: So you've kept them very far away.

Nicole: Yes, and if I see them on the street, ones on the ground, I will scream. I saw one at the Emmy's.

Gabe: Oh my god, at the Emmy's.

Nicole: At the fucking Emmy's.

Daniel: Everyone got invited to the Emmy's.

Nicole: They said "Oh a party."

Gabe: Everyone was there but us, the cockroaches.

Nicole: Even the fucking cockroaches.

Gabe: Unreal.

Nicole: And I screamed and then I was scared because I have a long dress on, in case one of them hitches a ride under my dress, but they didn't, thank God.

Gabe: But they didn't, thank God. Okay, that was my next question.

Nicole: Here's a fun roach story, so I stayed at this beautiful Palm Spring Hotel that didn't make any sense. So the pool never closed. So we were like, "Let's go for a midnight fuck and swim." So as we were walking to the pool, a giant roach crossed the walkway and stayed there and we were like, "Eew." So then we walked around, we get in the pool, having a lovely time and my friend goes, "Something's coming at you." And I was like, "What do you mean?" The roach was coming at me in the water swimming like a fucking champion.

Gabe: In the water?

Nicole: Yes.

Gabe: No.

Nicole: And then I screamed and like moved my whole body and then the roach without like a transitional moment went from swimming to crawling and then flew into the night and were like, "We're done, that's a wrap, we got to go inside."

Daniel: I just wanted one quick photo and then it screams in a van.

Nicole: Yes.

Gabe: Yes.

Nicole: He loved Nailed It! He was like, please can venture.

Gabe: He's a fan.

Nicole: He was like please can I have a picture. Ugh.

Gabe: What is it about roaches?

Nicole: They're big. They're disgusting. I don't really like their coloring even though it's close to mine. Aargh, and they don't care about you. We were in... I say we, me and my friends, so is she who I travel with a lot. We went to Hawaii and Hawaii has a roach problem or not a problem it's tropical, is wet, so they just have a lot of roaches and one was in our bathroom. And she screamed and I was like, "What's happening?" And she said, "There's a roach." And I look in this roach is maybe, I don't know, the size of my palm. It was fucking huge and it didn't give a shit that two women were screaming at it. It was like, "Oh, it's a party happening what's going on?"

Nicole: So then a nice man came and he just took it and then I tweeted about it or I Instagrammed it. And then my friend Amanda was like, "Oh yeah, on our honeymoon we were driving a rental car and roaches were coming out of the vents." As they were driving, I would have driven off the road and died. My God, thank God that didn't happen to me. And then everyone I spoke to, is like, "Oh yeah that's the life."

Gabe: Just the trade off the gorgeousness.

Nicole: "Its paradise but big old roaches." Yeah, they're just aargh. And then when you crush them that ooh that sound they make.

Gabe: They are crunchy.

Nicole: Men in Black, one of my favorite movies, favorite franchises. This reboot did not do it justice anyhow, I cried during the third one. That's how much I love Men in Black.

Gabe: Oh my God.

Nicole: But in the first one were Vincent D'Onofrio is that bug and Will Smith is crunching his family to get at him, ooh, ooh, ooh that sound. When they're coming out of his sleeve. I'm like, "I think those are practical. I think Vincent D'Onofrio had roaches on him." I don't know, like fear factor, I don't think I could do. That's a lot of bugs and shit on you. And then acting, I think that's the one thing that I'd be like, "I can't," like I'll show my pussy but like I will not hold a cockroach. Can't do it.

Gabe: Yeah, fair.

Nicole: At least I'm having a spider problem right now.

Gabe: It's a spider summer. Yeah, the webs everywhere.

Nicole: Webs everywhere.

Gabe: It's crazy. You can't walk two feet without a web.

Nicole: No, and it's like in your mouth, but like a little spider. That's fine. I'll step right on you. I'll, like a Daddy Long Legs, I can just mush you out. That's fine. There's like little silver fish, those don't bother me.

Gabe: Interesting.

Daniel: Those gross me out.

Nicole: They're a little gross, but I can just mush them. But like ooh a cockroach.

Gabe: When you come into a room and you see them skitter that's what I don't like about roaches.

Nicole: Yeah. Because you're like where are all of you.

Gabe: Where are you going?

Nicole: Where are you going?

Gabe: How do you know I'm here do here?

Nicole: Yes. I think they do.

Gabe: Do you feel? Yeah

Nicole: I think they hear you, they're smart they can apparently hold like nine times their body weight. Like they're disgusting.

Gabe: Okay, they're strong.

Nicole: They're strong. They don't die.

Gabe: They can crush us.

Nicole: Yes, probably. They all got together to make one big cockroach, they can kill us all.

Daniel: They don't even need to kill they'd literally just have to wait.

Nicole: Yeah because they'll outlive us.

Gabe: So how do they outlet? Everyone's like they're going to survive the apocalypse. Do you know how? Is it just that they have like...

Nicole: They're indestructable.

Gabe: They just the little tanks.

Nicole: The only way you can kill them is like crushing, and you have to like crush them good.

Daniel: You were saying that it happened in New York. Was that when it started or have you always been a little scared of them?

Nicole: It happened in New York. I grew up in Jersey, upper middle class thank you. But we didn't have any roaches in our house and my dad was pretty good about like pest control, so I had never had animals in my house until I moved to New York. Where had roaches and we had mice because we lived with a girl who was a little bit of a hoarder and she had like old food and shit, and we didn't realize that her bedroom was waist deep and trash because her door was always closed. So when she moved out, the mice were like, "There's more, there're other rooms." And those mice were not scared of us. They were also very bougie. They would eat fruit, they wouldn't eat any like cheese or shit that you left in the traps. They loved blueberries.

Gabe: Oh my God.

Nicole: And then they would watch TV with you?

Gabe: No, no, no.

Nicole: You'd be watching TV and you'd hear like a little thing and you'd be like, "What?" And you look down, there'd be a mouse staring at you and you're like, "Ooh." And you'd be like, "Miah." You'd be like, "Can you go?" So I don't mind mice. It's just those fucking roaches.

Daniel: Yeah. Then it's focused, it's always why you're focused on cockroaches. Have you ever thought about trying to do anything to be less afraid of them?

Nicole: No, because I don't...

Daniel: You just don't want to be around them.

Nicole: Don't want to be around them. I don't come in contact with them very often, so I don't think I need to do anything.

Daniel: That's fair.

Gabe: Yeah, that's fair. It's a fear you can easily get through life with. It's not like I'm afraid of even flying is way, like something you might want to solve because it comes up a lot. Cockroaches is like, just don't get near them because they are filthy anyway.

Nicole: Being afraid of flying is confusing to me. You're not going to die on a plane and if you do, you're special.

Gabe: It's over.

Nicole: People always remember the lady who died on the plane, in your friend group.

Gabe: That's true.

Daniel: Maybe you're going to be our expert for fear of flying episode.

Nicole: Yeah, I don't know every time I hit turbulence people are like, "Oh, I go, Great I go to sleep I don't care."

Daniel: Okay. That's the first time I've heard that in a while. [crosstalk 00:14:43]

Gabe: I love that.

Nicole: Yeah, I sleep right through turbulence.

Gabe: Who cares?

Nicole: Because I'm not going to die on this plane, like I know it.

Daniel: You are quite fearless that's what we are learning. [crosstalk 00:00:14:53].

Gabe: I know you're like bre- it's exactly what I saying she's so brave.

Nicole: I am brave.

Daniel: Well speaking of brave, let's talk about your second fear that we're wanting to talk about. What is that?

Nicole: My second fear is going crazy during a show, any type of show. It used to be sketch shows where I'd be like, "What if I enter a scene wrong and I'm wearing this wig?" And I'm like, "Oh aah." And I don't know my lines like that scares me

yeah. And then like not being able to find my place is also scary. Like just being like, "There's nothing left, my head is empty."

Daniel: So not necessarily going crazy like-

Nicole: Both like losing my mind.

Daniel: Okay like losing your mind.

Nicole: Or like finding out I'm like fully bipolar or something and I'm like, "Daah," like daily like just screaming nonsense or something and then they have to take me to a hospital. Like that's scary.

Gabe: That is really scary.

Nicole: Because like when do people lose their minds doing everyday things that they do a lot. I perform a lot.

Gabe: So that's where it's coming for you.

Nicole: Maybe.

Gabe: Maybe, its not going to happen.

Nicole: Thank you. If I came into too early, we're in the wrong wig and the different outfit and I'm just like, [inaudible 00:16:01].

Gabe: Okay yeah, no, that's crazy.

Daniel: What you're saying is like there's like all these structures in place that evolve in set up and lined up perfectly, and so you're feeling like if you take a misstep then all of a sudden everything will tumble with it.

Nicole: Yeah, maybe, or I'm like, before I get on stage have lost my mind and nobody realizes it. They're like, "Oh, Nicole's being goofy." Am like [inaudible 00:16:27].

Gabe: Yeah, Nicole's fine. She brought her own wigs.

Nicole: She brought her own wig, she won't stop barking. She's in a good mood right now. And then you're like, "Oh, no, we got to take her to the hospital."

Gabe: Yeah, that's the danger of being a sketch comedian. It's like no one can tell if you're fully crazy or if you're just in character.

Nicole: Yeah, and that's scary.

Gabe: That is scary.

Daniel: When did this start happening?

Nicole: Ever since I started performing, it was just like turn around.

Gabe: It's so funny that those are the stakes of performing. Not the show is going to go well or people are not going to find it funny. It's like, "Oh, my mind is going to snap and I'll be locked up." It's also the best reviews your schedule ever gets.

Nicole: Yes, I'm like, "Man, she was funny."

Gabe: Man, avant-garde, they're pushing the boundaries.

Nicole: I love this.

Gabe: The new Andy Kaufman.

Daniel: Do hecklers help, do they like make it worse?

Nicole: Heckling is such a strange thing you. You've dealt with hecklers.

Gabe: Yeah, a little bit.

Nicole: I sometimes feel game to play. I'm like, "Sure, let's do this. Let's have a fun back and forth," where I always win because I've been doing this for a very long time and I have a microphone and the [inaudible 00:17:38] on my side.

Gabe: Correct.

Nicole: And then like this last weekend, I just truly was not in the mood to play with these people, so I just stopped the show and was like, "Let's just do some... I'll talk to you people. You guys want to talk? Let's talk." And then they didn't want to talk. The Chatty Cathy's were silent, and it's like, "If you wanted to yell at me, you can do that at home." Don't come out and yell at me, you all have to do that. People talk about spilling the tea, that's not to people's faces. That's like people going over and having like a cup of tea with a friend-

Gabe: At a safe distance.

Nicole: And gossiping about the neighborhood. People are so exhausting. And I've just complained so much about them, but I do love that people come to my shows. I do like my fans.

Gabe: They will keep coming.

Nicole: They're nice people. I hope they do.

Daniel: It's such a small percentage of it is obnoxious.

Nicole: It is.

Gabe: Should we bring out the cockroaches? Just kidding.

Nicole: Lord.

Daniel: Well, there's somebody who was like, there's a cockroach in the other room. You have to go in there.

Nicole: Is it tied up?

Daniel: It's tied up.

Gabe: It's on a leash.

Daniel: Its on the tiniest little leash.

Nicole: What do I have to do?

Daniel: You just have to walk into that room.

Nicole: I think I can do that. I'm not-

Gabe: Would you be screaming the whole time?

Nicole: I might be like, "No, no, no."

Daniel: You get in and it's just a heckler.

Gabe: The cockroaches of people.

Nicole: Yes, wow.

Gabe: They skitter away when you put a little light on them.

Nicole: Anytime I'm like, "Okay, so you want attention. What did you do today?" They're like, "[inaudible 00:19:16]."

Gabe: We would never do that to you.

Daniel: Thank you so much for joining us.

Nicole: Thank you for having me.

Gabe: This was so fun.

Nicole: This was fun. I enjoyed it.

Gabe: You are fantastic.

Nicole: Thank you. Bye bye.

Gabe: Bye.

Daniel: That was Nicole Byer and her fear of cockroaches. Before we check in with the expert Dr. Phillip G Koehler, let's hear another voicemail from our fear line.

Speaker 4: Hi, my name is Emma, and I'm afraid of being laughed at, especially if I'm super upset or having some other emotional reaction, hate, hate, hate being laughed at, which is ironic because I work as a comedian. Been in a lot of therapy. I know that the reason I do it is because I want control over when I'm being laughed at, but even just thinking about it, thinking of being laughed at when I don't want to be makes my skin crawl.

Daniel: Welcome to the podcast. You're a Professor of Urban Entomology, is that correct?

Dr. Koehler: That's correct. And I've been here for 44 years at the University of Florida.

Daniel: Now, can you explain what entomology is though?

Dr. Koehler: Entomology is the study of insects and orbit entomology is the study of insects that occur in and around people's homes. So we deal with a lot of the problems that people encounter on a day to day basis. So I've studied cockroaches and ants and a few other insects as well.

Daniel: What is it about them that made you get into this research?

Dr. Koehler: Actually, I started out as a medical entomologist in the US Navy and I ended up mostly dealing with cockroaches aboard ship and back when I was in the Navy they had severe problems with cockroaches on destroyers, on aircraft carriers, sub tenders, and even submarines themselves. And it was a huge problem. And I got very much intrigued with the problem of cockroaches.

Daniel: And I read that you were never afraid of cockroaches.

Dr. Koehler: Oh no, I'm not afraid of cockroaches at all. As a matter of fact, in our lab we probably have 2 or 3 million at any one time.

Daniel: That's a lot of cockroaches.

Dr. Koehler: It is a lot of cockroaches. But I can tell you there are people that are living every day with more cockroaches than that. And they do a much better job of growing them than we do.

Daniel: That is terrifying. What is the most interesting thing about cockroaches for you?

Dr. Koehler: Well, they've been around for a long time, which most people think would be, that they would be a primitive insect. However, for them to live longer than the dinosaurs, they have had to adapt to a lot of change and the dinosaurs couldn't survive that change, but the cockroaches did.

Daniel: Okay, so this is why people say cockroaches will outlast us.

Dr. Koehler: Yes, they came from before. We even think about earliest times and they're going to go beyond what we think of the end of time.

Daniel: I also read that you offered an informal exposure therapy for someone at your lab. Is that true?

Dr. Koehler: Yes, and as she had this tremendous fear of cockroaches, she went through panic attacks and rampant heartbeat and hyperventilation and said that they were drastically affecting her quality of life, where she had to just stay in her bedroom after dark because she was afraid she would see a cockroach someplace else in the house. So I told her she could come in and we could try to do some exposure therapy for her. So the first thing that we did was we first talked about cockroaches, just visualizing them in her head as opposed to seeing them. She then felt that she would be able to look at a picture of cockroaches after some time that I had some pin to cockroaches that were dead that wouldn't move, and I was able to put a tray of cockroaches in front of her that were dead and pinned. Eventually she became accustomed to the pin specimens and then I had some Petri dishes, which would be laboratory dishes with live cockroaches in them.

Dr. Koehler: So I pulled out the live cockroaches that were contained and not able to get close to her. And after a period of time she became adjusted to the live insects. Finally she said that she would like to see my cockroach room, which has dozens of jars of cockroaches, all filled with different species of cockroaches. And I have the large Madagascar hissing cockroaches that are very slow to move. And after a period of time when she went through the panic attacks in the roach room, she became accustomed to the roaches and the jars. I then got a Madagascar hisser out for her to hold and she ended up being able to hold that Madagascar hissing cockroach by the time we were done. So it was quite a drastic change from her not being able to talk about cockroaches, to being able to hold a cockroach in the end.

Daniel: How long of a process was that?

Dr. Koehler: Oh, that was probably three or four hours.

Daniel: Well, but all in one session is very cool.

Dr. Koehler: Yeah, I did it in one session, but she needed some remedial therapy after that, because it was something that came back for her when she wasn't exposed to it for a period of time.

Daniel: Do you do any prevention to keep cockroaches out of your home?

Dr. Koehler: Yes, I do. As a matter of fact, I usually use cockroach baits either around the perimeter of the house for things that we call Palmetto Bugs in Florida. It's a fancy name for a cockroach in Florida that lives outside around the house. We call them Perry Domestic Cockroaches. And then we also use baits, which would be gel baits usually that can be put into cracks and crevices because cockroaches are lazy when they will feed on the bait. It has a toxicant in it that causes them to die.

Dr. Koehler: One of the benefits of having a cockroach in your house, they would clean up all of the food scraps that you have laying around if you have enough of them. And so you would have to do less cleaning yourself. But other than that, there's not a whole lot of benefit out in the wild. They are good for recycling nutrients so they are going to clean up those dead and dying things and excrete them in a form that can be recycled. So they're an important part of the ecosystem outdoors. There are folks that like to defend the insects and it's really hard to do that for a cockroach. The reasons I got into this was because cockroach control is extremely important and not because I love him and...

Daniel: Okay.

Dr. Koehler: I don't mind having them around. I don't mind working with them, but I'm not so much in the school of thought that we should defend the cockroach except that it is important, an important part of the ecosystem, but it doesn't have to be a part of our ecosystem in our houses.

Daniel: That full agree.

Dr. Koehler: All right.

Daniel: Awesome. Thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today.

Dr. Koehler: Thank you.

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