

Daniel: Hello. I'm Daniel Zomparelli and I'm afraid of everything. I'm on a mission to find out what you're afraid of so join me and special guests as we delve into their weirdest and worst fears. Then we check in with experts to try to dig into what those fears are really about. This is I'm Afraid That.

Daniel: Most of us have slipped and fell on our butt. Some maybe have slipped and fell so hard it broke something. Some maybe have just bruised a thigh or twisted an ankle on some slippery ice. Slipping is a day to day experience for humans who should probably still be walking on all four limbs. I first learned about Gabe Leibman's fear when we were on a short trip to Whistler BC. A friend of ours, Max, had mentioned that Gabe was afraid of slipping and it was only in Whistler did I see Gabe walk slowly and methodically over any frosted surface.

Daniel: This was probably one of the very few times I didn't really relate to a fear. Growing up my family lived near a hill and in the winter it was usually a pretty icy sidewalk and street situation, although most slushy. And as I remember if you put one foot forward and push off your back foot you can slide your way home. Obviously there were many falls, one of the worst being when I slipped twice and bruised both sides of my butt to the point where it hurt to poop for an entire week. No stranger to pooping is today's podcast guest and honestly my favorite husband, Gabe Leibman.

Daniel: We also talk with our resident expert Stacey Slate to try and figure out what is behind his slippery fear. We're here with comedian and writer and actor ... Oh and you like that?

Gabe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Daniel: And husband.

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: Gabe Leibman.

Gabe: Hi.

Daniel: Can you describe your fear please?

Gabe: Sure. I'm afraid of slipping and falling.

Daniel: In general, like-

Gabe: In general.

Daniel: Okay.

Gabe: I'm afraid of like walking on slippery surfaces. That really freaks me out, the idea of slipping.

Daniel: When did you first notice that you had a fear of slipping and falling?

Gabe: My mind immediately goes to when I used to live in New York City and there was really icy sidewalks. Also the stairs down to the subway on like rainy days really scared me.

Daniel: What is it like when you're on a slippery surface?

Gabe: My body gets really tense and my heart races and taking every step seems like a huge risk. I'm thinking about the fall and with every step I'm like, this is the step that gets away from me. I know it. And if I hurry ... Like I can't hurry up and I can't take normal strides. It's like I shuffle almost.

Daniel: And I'm guessing you don't have the same feelings as much here in LA.

Gabe: No. Not at all. It's actually a huge relief. Moving to a dry climate has been huge for me.

Daniel: Because LA has pretty bumpy sidewalks but-

Gabe: Yeah. I don't know why. I don't care about tripping.

Daniel: Okay.

Gabe: It's slipping.

Daniel: I remember first seeing you get nervous around slipping in Whistler.

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: Normally you're a faster walker than I am. You usually have to slow down for me but it was finally when I was the fast walker and I turned around and you had a serious look on your face.

Gabe: Yeah. It's serious business to me.

Daniel: Can you describe the worst-case scenario for you of slipping and falling?

Gabe: Yeah. It would be like taking a step and that leg goes kind of sideways and it's either like a tear ... It's bodily injury so it's either like a tear in my hip or I can see myself falling all the way and breaking teeth, smashing my face. So it's either kind of like a leg pops out of where it's supposed to be in my body or I make it all the way to the ground and smash my face up.

Daniel: Did you fall often as a kid?

Gabe: Not that I remember. I mean I had one bad fall where I broke my ankle but I was like, that was in middle school and that was running down the stairs. I don't feel traumatized

by that fall. Never broken any of my teeth or dislocated my hip or anything like that but it is what I think is kind of going to happen-

Daniel: Right.

Gabe: When I start slipping.

Daniel: You have all your normal teeth, your natural teeth right?

Gabe: Yeah. I have all my teeth.

Daniel: Yeah. Just because it's easier for them to pop out if you have like-

Gabe: Oh yeah.

Daniel: Veneers or something.

Gabe: No. Yeah. It's all bone in here. I've still never gone off a diving board because I remember walking out onto a diving board with my feet wet and the end of the board was wet. And I remember thinking if I start the bounce thing where you get momentum here, one of the bounces I'm going to land, my leg's going to go sideways and I'm going to smash my face on the board.

Daniel: Right.

Gabe: And so I just didn't ... I just sort of lowered myself into the pool and I've never gone off a diving board.

Daniel: Okay.

Gabe: Still.

Daniel: Okay. So far all the things you've described have all been public so is embarrassment a part of this fear?

Gabe: Definitely. Definitely embarrassment is part of it.

Daniel: Is there moments when there's slippery surfaces around and you feel a little less scared or is it still-

Gabe: I mean I'm still scared but I don't feel like I'm holding anyone up or I'm in anyone's way or anything like that. That part of the anxiety, if I'm by myself is less but I'm still scared of slipping. I think honestly, it's like I can't ... it's like I would be taking a step which is like a normal thing and I don't know the outcome of it. That's what freaks me out.

Daniel: Right, because I feel like it's not just slippery surfaces because you definitely didn't want to rollerskate.

Gabe: I definitely did not want to rollerskate.

Daniel: When we went rollerskating.

Gabe: When we went rollerskating which is sad to me because that was my favorite thing to do as a kid. I loved rollerskating. And it never struck me as particularly dangerous but then when we went to that roller rink this year and I put on skates and took like one step out onto the rink I was like, oh absolutely not. Not a chance. And that would have been embarrassing because we were with some-

Daniel: Yeah. That one felt public as well.

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: Because you didn't even ... You barely gave that one a try.

Gabe: No. For sure. And also we were with friends that-

Daniel: Are good at it.

Gabe: Are good at it and are also people that we don't hang out with all the time who are kind of cool if that makes sense. Like I would ... They are some of my friends that I would like to fall in front of the least.

Daniel: Right. I felt fine if I ... I did fall.

Gabe: You did fall.

Daniel: I fell pretty hard.

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: I was like, I don't know, I was doing a better job than one of the people there.

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: Do you fear when you're not in control of your surroundings?

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: Because it is like an instability thing, which is truly a human, like humans standing up instead of being on all fours. Maybe we should test this by making you go on all fours on [inaudible 00:08:33]

Gabe: Well okay. Here's an example. So there's like you know I like to walk in Griffin Park.

Daniel: Yeah.

Gabe: But there's one trail I actually hate doing because there's a part of it that is so steep that you kind of like have to run it, run down it.

Daniel: Right.

Gabe: And if you don't then your momentum's such that you'll sort of like tumble forward. You know you just have to take it really fast but it's like kind of sandy and not like very stable ground. It doesn't seem to bother literally anyone else in the entire city including people I go on that trail with. But embarrassingly during that part I would prefer to scoot down it on my butt than to walk it upright and I have done it-

Daniel: Right.

Gabe: ... in front of people and it's embarrassing. So when it's hey want to go, want to take a hike in Griffin Park I have to kind of like pray that it's not that trail.

Daniel: What about fear of stairs?

Gabe: Yeah. Stairs, like slippery stairs like the stairs down to the subway stations in New York. Like if it's raining they're this particular type of stone that gets really slippery. And also like they're always covered in vomit and litter and feces and stuff which is all super slippery and people just sprint down those stairs trying to catch their train. But I always felt like I was the one person in the city who would rather catch the next train than go down those stairs fast.

Daniel: Right. Did you ever see anyone bail?

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: Okay.

Gabe: For sure.

Daniel: So you've had enough experiences that you would like-

Gabe: Oh my God. Yeah.

Daniel: You know that that's-

Gabe: It's really dangerous and also people are like very flippant about flip-flops in that city in a way that they shouldn't be.

Daniel: Flippant about flip-flops.

Gabe: Flippant about flip-flops. Running in the rain in New York in flip-flops seems like it should kill more people than it does.

Daniel: Right. I mean, maybe it does.

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: But the flip-flop industry doesn't want you to know.

Gabe: No. I guess we just lost our Havaianas sponsorship. And it is getting worse with age so buckle up my friend.

Daniel: Well it's like a normal fear for old people so-

Gabe: Yeah. But I'm 36.

Daniel: Yeah. No, but you're going to get there.

Gabe: Right. Okay. I'll grow into this fear.

Daniel: Then I'll meet you there.

Gabe: Okay. Great. And it does feel like being an old lady that you would zip by on the sidewalk and think "Ugh. Get out of the way." Or whatever. But I feel like her.

Daniel: That's why I married you.

Gabe: Yeah.

Gabe: That's your type. Yeah.

Daniel: He's walking so slow. I can catch up to him.

Gabe: Yeah. I know as a trend I don't like unpredictability at all.

Daniel: Yeah.

Gabe: I don't like surprises.

Daniel: Yeah. You hate surprises.

Gabe: Yeah. I don't like being caught off-guard. I don't like to feel like I don't know what's about to happen and that feels like the essence of slipping-

Daniel: Right.

Gabe: To me.

Daniel: Sounds right.

Gabe: I hate surprise parties. It seems like the surprise part of walking is walking on ice. This is maybe something that ... I mean I just keep thinking about it so I'm going to say it but also you surprised me by proposing.

Daniel: That's true.

Gabe: Which was like-

Daniel: And that was like-

Gabe: Not great. I can say that now that we're like married and have been together a while but remember?

Daniel: Yeah. And it wasn't something ... Like we had been talking about it for a while.

Gabe: Yeah. Like I had every plan of getting engaged and stuff but it was like the fact that there was a surprise proposal, like took me like a couple of days to get over.

Daniel: Yeah.

Gabe: I'm sure you remember.

Daniel: Oh yes.

Gabe: That couldn't have been fun for you.

Daniel: It was very stressful. It was like we don't have to be engaged and you were like, "No. No. No. That's not it."

Gabe: That's not it. That's not it. I just don't like surprises. Yeah.

Daniel: Yeah. Like to went to the bathroom immediately to go like-

Gabe: Calm down.

Daniel: Calm down.

Gabe: Yeah. But that was like we were on a trip and the trip was perfect and then there was a surprise at the end that freaked me out. And I just remember being like, "So you knew about this the whole trip. Did you even have fun on the trip?" Remember?

Daniel: Yeah. And I was like, "Yeah, of course if did."

Gabe: Yeah. Yeah.

Daniel: It was like, "I'm not being surprised."

Gabe: Yeah. Right.

Daniel: Do it way more heavily on the embarrassment side of things or the injury side of things for fear?

Gabe: I think they go hand in hand. I'm definitely afraid of both. My mind goes to the injury first before the embarrassment but the scenario that makes me walk slow and want to not walk is the idea of the injury. But also the humiliation sucks.

Daniel: Did you ever have publicly embarrassing things growing up? [crosstalk 00:14:00] I assume everyone has that.

Gabe: Yeah. For sure.

Daniel: Like you go through high school.

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: That's enough.

Gabe: Saying dumb things, falling down, you know.

Daniel: Getting pantsed.

Gabe: Getting pantsed. That luckily never happened yet.

Daniel: Not until our anniversary dinner tonight.

Gabe: Yeah.

Daniel: That was Gabe Leibman and his fear of slipping. Before we check in with resident expert Stacey Slate let's listen to some of the voicemails you left on our fear line.

Caller 1: Hi. My name is Hailey. I'm 38 years old, very hormonal, a professional woman and I am terrified of frogs. The smaller the worse it is, like the smallest little cutiest, sweetest little baby, tiny baby frog you can imagine strikes fear in my heart like nothing else. For example there was a very small frog on my Mom's porch when I went to visit her the past summer and I was 37 then and my 47 year-old brother had to pick me up and carry me into the house because I couldn't walk past it because I get frozen.

Caller 1: Which I know they can't hurt me and one jumps from my garden into the front door of my house one time. And I ran out of my house, locked the door and called someone and sat on my porch for about an hour and a half until he got there to find it and chase it out of the house. And it was about two inches long. Anyway, yeah I have an extremely irrational fear of little baby frogs and it's pretty embarrassing. Okay. Thanks. Bye.

Caller 2: My name is Charles and I have a fear of flying although I didn't have it up until very, very recently. For most of my life I was a very, very good flier and when I was a kid I found flying to be very fun. I don't know what happened but at some point in my mid-twenties I became really, really afraid of flying and now it's very hard for me to fly if I haven't taken some type of anti-anxiety medication. If I have taken enough anti-anxiety medication then it's a piece of cake. But I forgot some the last time I flew and I was really, really surprised at how scared I was to fly because of how much I used to love to do it. All right. Bye.

Daniel: And we're chatting with our resident expert Stacey Slate. Hi Stacey.

Stacey: Hi Dan.

Daniel: Can you say again what your title is?

Stacey: I am a mental health counselor.

Daniel: Cool. And we're going to talk about someone who I do not know at all, my husband Gabe Leibman. So Stacey, as you know, he has a fear of slipping and slipping specifically on icy floors or sidewalks.

Stacey: Yes.

Daniel: I asked him if there was anything like preexisting or anything like ... if any history and kind of nothing came up. Is that like a ... Is it common for fears to pop up out of nowhere?

Stacey: I think that it can appear that way. I think it's-

Daniel: Ooh.

Stacey: ... oftentimes, yeah I know. Oftentimes people may say an out-of-the-blue I started feeling this way or thinking this way and underneath the appearance there is a meaning to the aversion and wanting to avoid or be far away from a fear that may seem foreign. And there could also be an understanding that the fear itself could be a memory of something that is repressed so sort of the stimulus that comes up around slipping and falling produces anxiety that you many not consciously remember with that experiences. So maybe you'd explore more of the past to illuminate some of that repressed pattern if there is a connection.

Daniel: Okay.

Stacey: And you'd use talking to kind of open up the exploration.

Daniel: Right. The other thing that Gabe ... A couple of other things that Gabe was bringing up was just the general fear of embarrassment-

Stacey: Yeah.

Daniel: From like slipping and falling and is that a common influence in fears? Are we all very afraid of being embarrassed?

Stacey: Mm-hmm (affirmative) I think that if a fear lies within the social world like let's ... anything that would be seen by others I imagine that embarrassment can mean a lot there. I think in a world where a person is fearing something happening and doing that thing will also be seen by other people that there can often be a viewpoint that the world would be unsafe in that moment. Like there would be maybe judgment or rejection or criticism if something negative was revealed in that moment then I think embarrassment can make oneself feel like a victim instead of a threat to other people. And in that way very much a relational exchange.

Daniel: Oh. Now I want to test Gabe's fear of slipping in a closed skating rink just to see if that, see if it's lessened.

Stacey: Nobody's there. Like that.

Daniel: I did want to ask if, I mean and this may be a silly question but do you think fear of slipping is like fear of slippery surfaces could be like an animal instinct that we're not really like supposed to be on ice or something?

Stacey: I always like to leave room for the evolutionary parts of our experience. I think you could be on to something. I think we're sort of talking about fear of our surroundings like the icy sidewalk or slipping at the pool and the sense that sort of like survival calls for that kind of appraisal of danger. So what's safe, what's unsafe? How we can scan the environment in that way And if you think of maybe slipping and falling could be like venturing into an unfamiliar place or drowning or suffocating or being attacked by a predator. So it could very well be that there's some instinct of danger, sort of a deeper layer of that knowledge.

Daniel: The other question I had is that there is ... Gabe brought this up about connecting a fear of slipping to a potential fear of losing control. Like I guess this kind of plays off your last answer, like an inability to control environment.

Stacey: Yeah. And the fact that Gabe even brought it up I feel like is just an actually a gift sometimes for somebody to have that insight and hopefully be curious about it. Like that would be ... I feel like that would be a wonderful question that I'd want to ask Gabe is, more about becoming clear on that association to the fear and finding other places in life where that fear of losing control could be appearing. And if we even took it one step further what does it mean to lose the ability to choose your outcome and maybe how does that affect somebody who really places a high value on autonomy. I'm not speaking for Gabe there but just a sense that you lose voluntary control when you slip and fall.

Daniel: Well it's his birthday today so I'll bring this up during dinner. 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 with us at ImAfridThat.com where you can get more info on the guests and experts. That's ImAfridThat.com. If you enjoyed the podcast please subscribe or view and share. It helps other people find the show. And thank you for listening. Next time on I'm Afraid That-

Ali: I am very, very afraid of being tired. I'm just afraid of ... I'm afraid to expend energy. I hurt myself in water aerobics. I have to look in the mirror and know that.