

Confronting our fears can be daunting

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As we approach the festive Halloween season, we're inundated with images of the supernatural and from beyond the grave.

It's all in good fun, of course. Confronting our fears, however, can be a bit of a challenge for some.

I love a good scare and I enjoy horror movies and tales that shake the very foundations of good and evil. I even soak up all those apocalyptic movies and TV shows that follow a band of surviving humans.

I happen to revel in those bone-chilling ghost stories and even have one from my childhood to share.

I was roughly 14, trying to work through a fever on the living room couch. At roughly 3 a.m., my mother heard me scream, saying there was a strange man in the house. What I recall is the shadowy figure of a man, who approached me, placed his hand on my forehead and then went to look out our sliding glass doors. It was not scary, in the least, but rather soothing. My fever then broke.

The next morning we received a phone call from my aunt in Europe who said her husband passed away that night (at roughly 3 a.m. our time). He told her before he went to bed that night that he always wanted to visit his relatives in Canada.

Coincidence? I think not!

I have heard many ghost tales first-hand from those who witnessed some very strange activity. I eat this stuff up.

I can't help but be fascinated, and somewhat empathetic, for those lost souls trapped between here and there.

When it comes to demons, testing the waters on this side of reality, it's another matter. They can be malevolent and quite annoying.

These stories (if you believe) are anything but easy to digest.

I can't get enough. Call it a struggle in logic or a test of faith.

My interest in the supernatural led me to the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto a few years back. When the church openly endorsed exorcism, I jumped at the chance of exploring this issue further. I was hoping to speak to a few priests or even join them in an actual exorcism.

Alas, it was not to be. I was told by church officials that an actual, proven exorcism hasn't been performed in the GTA in the last 25 years.

And yes, I do quite like the new TV series *Exorcist*.

I did see a docu-drama that covered an exorcism in Rome by an American priest. They interviewed him afterward and he calmly relayed the pertinent details. Demons, he said, are major trouble-makers and it's not common for them to seriously harm the person they inhabit, or others. It can be a rigorous ordeal both physically and emotionally. It's as disturbing as it is captivating.

I know that more people are injured falling out of bed in North America than by supernatural forces.

My wife simply can't face her fear of these dark, evil forces. If I dragged her to a movie, I know her head would be buried in my chest through the entire experience.

Creatures of the night are one thing. But my greatest fears centre around everyday things. I have had a fear of heights for as long as I can remember. When I see photos of people doing the Skywalk at the CN Tower, I want to curl up in the fetal position! And I can't walk across those swinging bridges over canyons.

With Halloween Haunt under way at Canada's Wonderland, another of my greatest fears are death-defying giant roller coasters. I've worked up the courage to try those "baby coasters," but any more than that and I shudder at the thought. My kids have been on Leviathan and Behemoth. I can't even watch these things fly down the tracks! Words like "thrilling" and "exhilarating" are used to describe such things. "Terrifying, gut-wrenching, deadly" are more accurate in my opinion. My son once asked me how much money it would take to get me on one. My minimum would be about \$5,000 and even then I'd have to really think about it.

Other than those two irritants, I'm good to go. I don't even have a problem with a big, hairy spider crawling up the back of my neck, or a large snake wrapping its slithering body around my legs (but I know some of you are cringing)!

I love monster movies and the entire "Alien" series. Those creatures are very cool.

Fear does serve a purpose, I believe. In my case, the fear of dying is what prevents me from going on a roller coaster, even though my demise would be quick, indeed. I know that with almost certainty, my parachute would open after jumping out of a plane, but there's always that tiny chance that I'd plummet to the earth and be squished like a bug.

Humans used to fear the unknown. And going back even a short 100 years, there was a lot of "unknown" to go around!

Science has cleared the air on a great many things, and alleviated many of our fears. What was once considered "demonic possession" has largely been explained by various mental illnesses. Even though zombies are great fun, their existence is quite impossible. And I haven't seen a vampire, werewolf or unicorn in a very long time!

Fear can be fun. I love dressing up and scaring the little ones as they clunk up the driveway in search of candy. Being startled makes us feel alive.

There are a few things still beyond our grasp. Lost souls, the afterlife and aliens are included on that list. While fear can be quite paralyzing, human beings have curiosity, hope, wonder and joy - superpowers strong enough to overcome any frightening foe!