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Illustration column

### An ornithophobic's nightmare

Everyone has a phobia, whether it's something as common as spiders or strange as tin foil.

Everyone has a story to tell of when their phobia started.

This is my story about my phobia, ornithophobia, a fear of birds.

I grew up living next to my grandparents. Although my family lived 20 minutes from downtown Salt Lake, just outside our chain backyard fence were fields of fruit trees and vegetable plants and next to these, a chicken coop and a fenced off yard for the chickens.

I spent hours during the hot summer months running around those fields with my older sister and her neighborhood friends. Television shows and video games did not hold the excitement that a rousing game of cops and robbers around the peach trees and bean poles did.

The only place that I was apprehensive about was the chicken coop. I would never go out to the coop by myself, because I could feel their beady eyes staring me down. Even though a fence separated us, I always stood far back, just in case they suddenly learned how to fly and came over the fence to get me.

I never went into the coop to get eggs. That would mean going into their territory. Also, I was only about six at the time. Trusting a six year old with unrefined motor skills to collect eggs is just asking for a scrambled mess.

Although I was wary of the chickens, I would still go out to the coop occasionally with my older sister and for some reason that I can't remember, we would pick grass and put it right up to the fence so the chickens could eat it.

I don't know what made me braver when with my sister, but I would pick up the grass and throw it down next to the chickens. I never stayed there though to watch them come and collect my peace offering; I would jump back as soon as the grass left my hand.

Sheena was braver than I was. She would try to actually feed the grass bits to the chickens, and almost always she would get pecked on her hand.

I think that's what initiated my fear of chickens, but it hadn't grown into a full-fledged phobia. Well, at least not until later that year.

What did cause what my other sister calls my "irrational fear of birds" was a nightmare. I was dreaming that I was out by the chicken coop, by myself. This was strange as I never went to the coop alone, but dreams do put you in unusual circumstances. I was again picking grass to feed to the chickens when I turned around and noticed that the fence surrounding the coop had disappeared. I looked at the chickens and they looked at me; they grew until I could look them directly into their glaring red eyes. And then I started running and they followed me. I ran in swivels, trying to get the birds off my scent, but they continued chasing after me. I reached my house in relief and locked the door. I could hear them hitting the door, pecking at it trying to get in.

This is when I woke up trembling in bed. I was afraid to move in the fear that the chickens somehow in my room. After a few minutes, I had convinced myself that they were at least not in my bedroom. Like any self-respecting child would, I decided to go to my parents' room to receive comfort and have my mom chase away the hellish hens.

As I rose up my covers, I saw a chicken run across my bed and fall onto the floor.

Now, this was probably just my sleepy mind playing tricks on me, but even now, I swear I saw that chicken. After my nightmare, my fear of chickens grew into a fear of birds in general. I hate going to zoos, where they let farmyard birds, like chickens, walk about, rampaging the unsuspecting bird-fearing

visitors like myself. I even fear little songbirds when they dart out of bushes right when I walk in front of the shrubbery.

Life with ornithophobia is difficult at times, especially when telling the origin of my fear to those I meet. They laugh at the absurdity of the scene, claiming that a chicken couldn't have run across my bed.

But it did.