

For The Birds...

by Mark Fihn
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When I was young, Alfred Hitchcock's movie "The Birds" elicited a feeling of sheer terror within me – to the point that I still shudder a bit whenever I see a bunch of grackles or even a single a crow... The thought that birds could attack me in my home, pluck out my eyes, and kill me, was something I just couldn't deal with rationally as an 8-year-old. Radical ornithological terrorism probably doesn't affect all that many of you, but it was very real to me. Thankfully, I came to learn that birds just don't kill very many people and I've (mostly) overcome my pre-pubescent phobia.

Years later, (in about 1983), a friend of mine, a Vietnam War veteran who witnessed some of the most agonizing horrors of war, was a hiring manager at a company in Austin, and he refused to interview a young professional woman who was of Vietnamese descent, (even though she was born and raised in the United States). He said he just couldn't even stomach being in the same room as someone from Vietnam. Viet-phobia doesn't impact too many Americans any more, but it was very real to my friend. Although young professional women of Vietnamese descent really pose no danger to anyone, I praise God that my friend, now nearing retirement, has finally overcome his phobia and now has multiple Asians working with him on a daily basis.

In the early 1950s, my grandparents hosted an exchange student from Germany – which unbelievable as it might seem today – was a big deal back then, given huge fears and negative anti-German animosities in this country emanating from the war. Even though famous Americans of German descent had a major part in the war (Dwight Eisenhower and Chester Nimitz, for example), at the time, the anti-German bias in our country was a huge political football. I am proud of my grandparents for bucking the prevailing fears from their friends and neighbors... Thankfully, these phobias dissipated over time, in small part thanks to my grandparents, to the extent that anti-German sentiments really don't exist anymore in this country.

Fear is a normal coping mechanism when we're confronted with perceived dangers (whether real or imagined). Courage is one's ability to address one's fears appropriately. Killing all the birds, refusing to hire Vietnamese people, barring Germans from studying in this country – those are not courageous responses to one's phobias.

I understand how some politicians are willing to prey on our fears. It's easy for a politician to focus on our fears – as truly, fear breeds votes. Paint your opponent in a way that somehow suggests they support the things that supplement our fears – and maybe you get some votes. What I don't understand is the gullibility of so many Americans to endorse such blatant fear-based political pandering.

Statistically you are far more likely to slip in the shower and die as a result of the fall, than you are to be killed by a terrorist. Are you going to let some politician tell you to stop taking showers?

Friends -- have courage! It is simply embarrassing to me to see so many feckless commentaries about the “threat” of Syrian refugees. Our nation is better than the prattle of some opportunistic politicians appealing to your phobias. A good man once said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:26-28). He added, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven”. (Matthew 5:43-48).

I do understand how phobias come to roost in our psyche. But I don’t understand the relentless and mindless willingness by so many to discard courage in the face of fear, to the point they are willing to abandon fundamental feelings of human compassion towards others.

To those of you on Facebook reading this who truly think our nation should deny a place of respite for Syrian refugees, go watch “The Birds”. At least then you’ll be distracting yourself with something that is truly scary...

