

KIRBY MOSS

Women's fear has rational basis

A woman's fear is genuine. How would I — a man — know? I use my imagination.

Purple daylight melts behind the horizon. I walk home from campus along 13th Street (an unlucky number to begin with) and a white car pulls next to me. It rolls in sync with my pace, which now increases speed with every step.

The car's windows are dark, ominous. For a few minutes it haunts me, then it speeds away. My heart rate slows.

A few minutes later, a slow motor hum brushes against my car again. The car is back. Someone behind the dark windows watches me.

My fear propels me to run. Run! Run! My apartment is a block away now. My sanctuary.

At my door, my hand trembles to push the key. I look around. That car is there again, like torment. Parked in front. Those deep, black eyes peering at me. Devouring what little strength and courage I have left.

I push the apartment door open and fall to the center of the room. I sit there, in the dark. Weak and afraid.

Through the blinds, amid the purple dusk I watch the car circle the block like a vulture — hungry, but patient.

My apartment walls close in around me. I dare not move from my spot or close my eyes to sleep. Fear, a cold fright, shakes me violently and I sit there.

My liberty lifted, I am exposed. My life will never be the same.

My frail imagination can take me into a woman's fear only so far. Beyond the point where my imagination ends is the very personal fear women feel.

I seldom, if ever, FEEL the fear of being attacked or physically harassed by anyone. I bet most men feel this way. It's not a macho-sexist or ego thing to say. Rather, it's a reflection of a disparate society dominated by a strange assortment of males.

In essence, no matter what social and economic leaps women have made in this gendered society, ostensibly primal strength and power still rule.

I can't feel the draining agony of a woman worrying about whether a man behind her on a downtown street is going to abduct her or walk by. Neither am I leery of getting in a car wondering whether a rapist is hiding in the back seat.

So before writing this column, I talked to several women about eerie little things that have happened to them.

By far, the following story is the eeriest.

One summer night, a friend was asleep in her first-floor apartment. She said she happened to wake up in the middle of the night. When she opened her eyes she saw a man standing in the shadows at the foot of her bed staring at her. She was shocked, literally. And he just walked away, like a ghost. She didn't know who he was.

Another woman told me a man called her at her job and said in a cheap, grade-D horror/thriller movie voice: "It won't be daylight forever," and hung up. Whether he knew her or she knew him is a mystery.

These are just two examples of the many stories I heard. And the strange part is that most of the women I talked to had more than one to tell.

What odd mental or physical addiction propels such predators? Is it sex? In the case of my friend and the man in her room, nothing happened, but it could have easily. Or is the motivation power, or a combination of both?

These are the stories few ever hear about. It's the snatching and later the killing of women that makes the thrilling headlines. But these are the extreme examples of reality.

I've always heard women tell gloomy stories of some man watching them. Preying upon them like beasts. Until recently, I never actually listened to what women were saying, what they were feeling.

For example, when a woman would ask me to walk her to her car or to a class somewhere on campus, I would growl: "Oh, stop being a paranoid chicken. Your car's only two blocks away."

But now I realize that it's not the distance that frightens her. It's what

or who lurks between the distance in the night.

I walk in a society where my gender hands me the privilege of seldom thinking about harm. Female friends find this amazing.

Maybe my fearlessness is analogous to being a white male in the United States (enter imagination). A white friend of mine once told me: "Man, I've never once in my life experienced discrimination, but you talk about it all the time."

Amazing, I thought. We are all victims in some capacity.

There are twisted men out there, stalking women and imposing a grim fear on their lives. They are invisible, anonymous and find pleasure and power in that.

The question I ask is, what is a woman to do? Short of locking yourself in a room, at night especially, for the rest of your life, there seems no real defense. You could be very careful and cautious, but your capacity to do that is limited.

Meanwhile, blue lights have bloomed on campus like beacons of safety. Anti-assault/Take Back the Night rallies, self-defense classes, seminars and eye sprays are held up like impenetrable shields.

However, these are tissue-thin layers of security. They are reactive measures against an implicit threat that is abstract, formidable and based on brute strength and a morbid mentality.

These lurking men could be anyone of us. Women know that and are leery of us all, to a point. Such generalizations tick us off.

How can men — the indifferent bystanders, the unphased headline readers, the unpreyed upon — understand any of this? Maybe we never will. But a woman's fear is not simply a woman's concern.

The women in fear are our mothers, wives, sisters, girlfriends and colleagues. Imagine if something strange and sadistic happened to them.

Moss is graduate student studying anthropology and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

ALAN PHELPS

Life runs smoothly in commune

Well, Bill Clinton is moving into the big White House, along with his wife and daughter. Around here, at one of the more conservative campuses in the nation, the reaction was mixed.

Some Republicans I talked to were actually afraid for the country, which I find somewhat hard to understand, because whatever plans Clinton has for the nation, he will only be the president, after all.

A few radical right-wingers have gone so far as to foretell doom and destruction, as those evil Democrats slip us deeper into socialism.

Flags will burn, draft dodgers will rule, everyone will be doing crazy things like taking up and sitting on top of poles while listening to really loud music. Alack!

Even if that were the case, I wouldn't mind much. I live in a commune right now, and it's not so bad. Sure, communist living has its downside — Stalin comes to mind — but a small, self-contained unit can be useful.

Any society, however, must have laws that citizens must follow to avoid anarchy. Guys who live in communes have historically come up with a number of time-tested rules. It is my theory that one of the reasons the Soviet Union collapsed was they failed to obey one or more of the Laws.

In my house, everyone gives according to his ability and takes according to his need. For instance, when bill-paying time comes 'round, which in many male living units is approximately one week after the first disconnect notices arrive, whoever has money pays them, and the rest join a Harris Lab study.

Two members of my six-to-seven person commune just got out of a

nicotine study in which they were forced to eat awful-tasting anti-smoking pills. It was worse than most Harris Lab studies because some other inmate recently stole the "Doors" videotape my roommates used to watch.

Another communitarian, Dave, was released from Harry Slab's Fun Palace after 17 days last month, four of which he spent with a tube stuck down his nose. I guess the tube-nose thing would be another downside, like Stalin. But now Dave can loan money for other communitarians who are between studies in these tough economic times.

When commune members are off at Harry Slab's house, there are many fine points of etiquette to be observed by the other, idle members. For instance, any food left out by study participants is to be eaten by the remaining citizens. And if any other junk is left behind, it gets stapled to the wall. The right to revenge is sacred.

I don't think my house is all that different from other houses full of guys. We can easily get along in the communist, Red and Black Café-ish lifestyle. If other citizens keep me awake late at night, I know I can avenge the deed some other time. If someone doesn't clean up a dish or bowl, I know it's OK for me to put it under the offending member's pillow or melt a slice of cheese between two pages of their favorite book. If someone gets really drunk, we can drive his car across town and leave it there — no questions asked.

Everything we do is for the good of the commune. Just folks helping folks.

And when everyone follows the rules, life hums along smoothly. We have time for other pursuits not open to the working class of bourgeois, capitalist societies.

If a member brings something cool home, we eat it, or if it can't be eaten,

we hang it up in the living room — unless it is too heavy, like the big rock we brought home on Election Day. We can watch "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" over and over again. We can call friends up on one of the Harris lines. We can talk to University Operators whenever we feel the urge.

We can live! We can grow our hair and dance and prance and blow bugles and smear paints on our bodies like in "Lord of the Flies." That's what it means to be an American. That's what commune living has done for me.

Most of the women I know haven't caught on to the secrets of commune life. Recently, a female friend of mine, confronted with the glories of our society, a living monument to freedom, said only, "It could use a good cleaning."

Sadly, I shook my head, and shed a tear for my grandchildren yet to come. Did not she see what was about her? It was as though she was a two-dimensional Flatlander, able to see but one aspect of our three-dimensional beings.

Sure, we've got a few dust rhinos lurking in dark corners, and, yes, there could be something living under the sink, something small perhaps that drools and snarls from time to time, but come now! We're in the midst of a glorious revolution, a noble experiment, a big, old, smelly Battle for the Future of Humanity!

Bring on Clinton, say I. Bring on all his friends from his Moscow days. Bring on the Ozone Man. Thousands of guys like me across college towns throughout this country already have been living the dream, breathing the life of plenty.

None of our furniture matches, but our visions do.

Phelps is a junior news-editorial major, the Daily Nebraskan wire editor and a columnist.

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