



ESL Podcast 1215 – A Fear of Heights

GLOSSARY

to fall – to lose control of one’s body and end up on the ground; to quickly and unexpectedly move from a higher position to a lower position

* Blake fell off the ladder, but fortunately, he didn’t break any bones.

to have got (someone) – to be holding onto someone to protect that person from injury or danger

* Don’t worry, I’ve got you! Nothing bad will happen.

fear of heights – feelings of being afraid or scared when one is far above the ground

* Ingrid is terrified of crossing bridges due to her fear of heights.

panic attack – a sudden, severe feeling of fear and anxiety, often without explanation, that makes it difficult or impossible for one to behave normally

* Returning soldiers sometimes have panic attacks when they hear loud noises that remind them of the sound of bombs exploding.

high up off the ground – in the air or on a raised surface, not touching the floor or soil

* Those airplanes seem close, but really they are high up off the ground.

irrational – not logical or rational; not explained in a calm or unemotional way

* Sometimes consumers’ behavior is irrational, such as when they want to spend more than is necessary because others are doing the same thing.

ground floor – the first floor of a building, not an upper floor or an underground floor

* They asked their realtor to help them find homes with the master bedroom on the ground floor.

cliff – a very steep, rocky side of a mountain that goes almost straight down, especially into the ocean

* It makes me very nervous to see little children playing and chasing balls near steep cliffs.

to trigger – to cause something to happen or be; to cause an event or situation to occur

* What triggered Louis’ angry reaction? Did someone say something mean or insulting to him?



ESL Podcast 1215 – A Fear of Heights

vertigo – a feeling of dizziness and disorientation, as if one will fall over

* Drinking too much alcohol can create a sense of vertigo and make it difficult to stand or walk in a straight line.

to hyperventilate – to breath uncontrollably and very quickly, especially because one is too excited or stressed

* The teenage girls almost hyperventilated when they met the members of their favorite rock band.

agitated – nervous, worried, and overly excited

* Is everything okay? You seem agitated. Try to relax.

it wasn't pretty – a phrase used to describe something that was very unpleasant, uncomfortable, and possibly embarrassing for the speaker or the other parties that were involved

* Olivia turned bright red while speaking on stage. It wasn't pretty, but at least she was able to finish without running off the stage from embarrassment.

skydiving – the sport of jumping out of an airplane and falling through the sky for a short period of time before opening a parachute (a large piece of fabric) to slow one's fall

* The hardest part of skydiving is getting the nerve to jump out of the airplane while the wind is rushing by your face.

to react – to respond; to behave in a particular way in response to something, often uncontrollably

* We didn't expect the CEO to react so angrily to the reporter's questions.



ESL Podcast 1215 – A Fear of Heights

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What happens when Christine is up high?
 - a) She throws up.
 - b) She passes out.
 - c) She gets dizzy.

 2. What happened when Christine “hyperventilated until we landed”?
 - a) She cried uncontrollably.
 - b) She fainted.
 - c) She breathed very quickly.
-

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to fall

The verb “to fall,” in this podcast, means to lose control of one’s body and end up on the ground, or to quickly and unexpectedly move from a higher position to a lower position: “Did a lot of objects fall off the shelves during the earthquake?” The phrase “to fall short” means to be less than one desired or expected: “No matter what we do, we always seem to fall short of the boss’s expectations.” The phrase “to fall victim to (someone/something)” means to be deceived, fooled or tricked by someone or something: “How many people fell victim to his scam?” Finally, the phrase “to fall into place” means for everything to begin to make sense: “It took a few minutes before all the pieces started to fall into place and we could make sense of what had happened.”

ground floor

In this podcast, the phrase “ground floor” means the first floor of a building, not an upper floor or an underground floor: “The main entrance is on the ground floor on Franklin Street.” The phrase “sea floor” refers to the bottom of the ocean: “Scientists were surprised to find living creatures on the sea floor, far below the reach of the sun’s rays.” The phrase “dance floor” describes the open area where people dance, typically in a nightclub or a similar facility: “You’re going to love this next song, so ask your favorite partner to join you on the dance floor.” Finally, the “factory floor” or the “shop floor” refers to the large area in a factory where people work to make products, not where the managers and executives work: “We need to do everything possible to eliminate injuries on the factory floor.”



CULTURE NOTE

Common Phobias

People have many “phobias” (fears that cannot be explained rationally) in addition to the “acrophobia” (the fear of heights) covered in today’s episode.

Many people are scared of particular animals or insects. For example, “arachnophobia” is a strong fear of “spiders” (small creatures similar to insects, but with eight legs, that make webs to catch their “prey” (other insects eaten for food)). “Ophidiophobia” is a strong fear of “snakes” (long reptiles with no legs, but with a long, pointed tongue). “Cynophobia” is a fear of dogs, “alektorophobia” is a fear of chickens, and “ornithophobia” is a fear of birds.

Other people develop phobias related to spaces. “Agoraphobia” is a strong fear of open spaces and/or “crowded” (with many people in a small space) areas. People who “suffer from” (experience negative consequences as a result of) agoraphobia are often “reluctant” (not wanting to do something) to leave their homes and almost never go to areas where people “congregate” (for many people to meet), such as “shopping malls” (shopping centers; many stores next to each other in a small area) or “festivals” (large public outdoor parties and celebrations around a single theme). “Claustrophobia” is the fear of small, “enclosed” (with walls and doors all around) spaces. People who suffer from claustrophobia usually choose to take the stairs instead of the elevator.

Transportation is another trigger for common phobias. For example, “aerophobia” is a fear of flying, “vehophobia” is a fear of driving, and “siderodromophobia” is a fear of trains and railways.

Finally, people who are scared of fear itself suffer from “phobophobia.” And even studying the long words for each of these phobias can trigger fear – people with “hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia” have a fear of long words!

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – c



ESL Podcast 1215 – A Fear of Heights

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 1,215 – A Fear of Heights.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 1,215. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Go to ESLPod.com to become a member of ESL Podcast. When you do, you can download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains a complete transcript of everything we say as well as a list of all of our vocabulary terms, definitions, sample sentences, and a culture note.

This episode is a dialogue between Christine and Asahi about being afraid of heights – of being far above the ground. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Christine: Help me! I'm going to fall!

Asahi: You're not going to fall. I've got you.

Christine: Sorry, I have a fear of heights. I sometimes have panic attacks when I'm high up off the ground.

Asahi: Okay, but we're not very high up.

Christine: I know. My phobia is totally irrational.

Asahi: That explains a lot, like why you live on the ground floor of your apartment building and why you didn't want to go hiking near the cliffs.

Christine: That's right. I try to avoid any situations that will trigger my fear.

Asahi: So how do you travel? Do you ever fly?

Christine: The one time I flew in an airplane I experienced vertigo and I hyperventilated until we landed. I was really agitated because I thought I was going to die. It wasn't pretty. That's why I normally drive or take a train.

Asahi: So I'm guessing no skydiving for you.



ESL Podcast 1215 – A Fear of Heights

Christine: Not unless you want to find out how my stomach reacts to heights!

[end of dialogue]

Christine begins our dialogue by yelling, “Help me! I’m going to fall!” “To fall” (fall) means for your body to go down and hit the ground quickly and unexpectedly. You could fall just by walking down the street, or you could be up high – on the top of a building or on a ladder or just on a chair – and fall down. “To fall” and “to fall down” mean something similar. The phrasal verb “to fall down” is often used in the same way as the verb “to fall.” However, the verb “to fall” can refer to things other than just people and objects. You can also talk about prices “falling,” or going down, reducing in value. But here we’re talking about poor Christine.

Asahi says, “You’re not going to fall. I’ve got you.” The expression “I’ve got you” means that I will protect you. I will protect you from injury or danger – from something bad happening to you. Often we use this when we’re actually holding on to another person. “I’ve got you. Don’t worry. You’re not going to fall.” Christine apologizes. She says, “Sorry, I have a fear of heights” (heights). A “fear of heights” is when you are afraid of being far above the ground. Some people, for example, don’t like to go up in a tall building and look out because they have a “fear of heights.” They’re afraid even when there is no danger of them falling down.

Christine says, “I sometimes have panic attacks when I am high up off the ground.” A “panic (panic) attack” is a sudden feeling of fear and anxiety, often without any logical or rational explanation. A panic attack makes it difficult for a person to behave normally. Christine says she gets panic attacks when she is “high up off the ground” – that is, when she is in the air or on a raised surface, when she is perhaps on a ladder or on the top of the roof of a house or just high up in a building. If she’s “high up off the ground,” she has panic attacks.

Asahi says, “Okay, but we’re not very high up,” meaning we are not very far from the ground. Christine says, “I know. My phobia is totally irrational.” If something is “irrational” (irrational), it is not rational, it is not logical. It cannot be explained in any logical or reasonable way. A “phobia” (phobia) is normally a fear of something. If you have a phobia of something, you have an irrational fear of something.

Just because you are afraid of something, however, doesn’t mean it’s a phobia. It doesn’t mean it’s irrational. I have a fear of someone who has a gun killing me. That’s not an irrational fear if the person is pointing the gun at you, if the person



ESL Podcast 1215 – A Fear of Heights

is aiming the gun in your direction. A phobia is something that would be irrational – something you have no good reason to fear.

Asahi says, “That explains a lot, like why you live on the ground floor of your apartment building.” The “ground (ground) floor” is what we call in the United States also the “first floor.” It’s the floor or level of a building that you can walk into without going up any stairs or steps. That’s called the “ground floor” or the “first floor.” In other countries, the first floor is what we would call in the U.S. the “second floor.” That’s the floor that you get to by going up steps or one set of stairs – “one flight of stairs,” we would say.

But in any case, Asahi understands now why Christine lives on the ground floor of her apartment building: because she’s afraid of heights. He also understands why she didn’t go “hiking near the cliffs.” “To go hiking” (hiking) means to go walking outdoors, outside, usually for a long distance. “Cliffs” (cliffs) are very steep, rocky sides of a mountain that go almost straight up and down. Sometimes next to, say, an ocean there are cliffs. The water has worn away the side so that there is a straight up-and-down surface right next to the water. That would be an example of a “cliff.”

Christine says, “That’s right,” meaning yes, that’s why I don’t live above the ground floor and that’s why I don’t go hiking near cliffs. “I try to avoid any situations that will trigger my fear.” “To trigger” (trigger) is to cause something else to happen, to cause an event or situation to occur. Interestingly enough, we call the part of the gun that you use your finger to fire the gun the “trigger.” The “trigger” of the gun is the part of the gun that is used to actually cause the bullet to go out of the gun. That’s a “trigger” as a noun.

As a verb, “to trigger” means to cause something else to happen. You can understand the relationship, however, here between the noun and the verb, because you “trigger” the bullet from leaving the gun by – we use the verb “to pull” – by “pulling the trigger.” Asahi says, “So how do you travel? Do you ever fly?” Do you ever go up into an airplane?

Christine says, “The one time I flew in an airplane” – that is, I went in an airplane up into the air – “I experienced vertigo and I hyperventilated until we landed. “Vertigo” (vertigo) is a feeling of dizziness, that you’re going to fall over, when you are up for example on a ladder or any tall structure. You may have seen the great Alfred Hitchcock movie Vertigo – that’s what it’s called in English, anyway – precisely about a man who gets dizzy when he goes up high, when he is high above the ground.



ESL Podcast 1215 – A Fear of Heights

Christine says she experienced vertigo when she was in an airplane, and because of that, she “hyperventilated.” “To hyperventilate” (hyperventilate) is to breathe very quickly and uncontrollably, especially because you are very excited, or perhaps you are under some stress. “To hyperventilate” can be dangerous, and it’s important if you are hyperventilating to try, of course, to breathe normally, to calm down. Christine says she hyperventilated “until we landed” – that is, until the plane went back down onto the ground.

She says, “I was really agitated because I thought I was going to die.” “To be agitated” (agitated) is to be nervous, to be worried, or to be very excited but in a bad way. “It wasn’t pretty,” Christine says of her experience on the airplane. That phrase “It wasn’t pretty” doesn’t refer to how good-looking something or someone is; rather, it’s used to describe something that is very unpleasant or uncomfortable or perhaps even embarrassing. Christine says, “That’s why I normally drive or take a train.” She doesn’t fly in an airplane.

Asahi says, “So I’m guessing no skydiving for you.” “Skydiving” (skydiving) is the sport of jumping out of an airplane, falling through the sky for a short period, and then opening what’s called a “parachute” (parachute), which is like a large piece of fabric – well, it is a large piece of fabric – that slows you down so that you don’t kill yourself when you hit the ground. That’s “skydiving,” and some people do that for fun. Not me. Not Christine, either, because of course she’s afraid of heights.

Christine says, “Not unless you want to find out how my stomach reacts to heights.” “To react (react) to” something is to respond to something. It’s how you behave or something behaves in a certain situation. Christine is making a joke here. She’s saying that she would probably get sick to her stomach if she went skydiving, because of course she’s afraid of heights. I’m not afraid of heights, really. Although I don’t think I would go skydiving or close to a cliff.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Christine: Help me! I’m going to fall!

Asahi: You’re not going to fall. I’ve got you.

Christine: Sorry, I have a fear of heights. I sometimes have panic attacks when I’m high up off the ground.



ESL Podcast 1215 – A Fear of Heights

Asahi: Okay, but we're not very high up.

Christine: I know. My phobia is totally irrational.

Asahi: That explains a lot, like why you live on the ground floor of your apartment building and why you didn't want to go hiking near the cliffs.

Christine: That's right. I try to avoid any situations that will trigger my fear.

Asahi: So how do you travel? Do you ever fly?

Christine: The one time I flew in an airplane I experienced vertigo and I hyperventilated until we landed. I was really agitated because I thought I was going to die. It wasn't pretty. That's why I normally drive or take a train.

Asahi: So I'm guessing no skydiving for you.

Christine: Not unless you want to find out how my stomach reacts to heights!

[end of dialogue]

If speaking English triggers fear in you – if you have a phobia about how you do in speaking English – you need to listen to more of ESL Podcast's wonderful episodes and wonderful scripts. Those scripts, of course, are written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for coming, that is, thanks for listening. Listen to us next time right here on ESL Podcast.

English as a Second Language Podcast was written and produced by Dr. Lucy Tse, hosted by Dr. Jeff McQuillan. Copyright 2016 by the Center for Educational Development.