**Phobias case studies – what is the evidence that each of these is or is not a real phobia?**

Dolores tells everyone about her phobia of flying, but has agreed to go with her friend Francine to a Mind, Body and Spirit convention in Bulgaria. On the journey to the airport she explained how nervous she had been feeling all week. “I’ve thought of nothing else all week”, she said, gesticulating so wildly that she knocked Francine’s fedora off. When they got to the airport, she had a gin and tonic. “I think it’s my sensitive nature”, she said, “I just don’t feel safe in a plane, I’ll probably have a panic attack!” On the way to the plane, and all the way up the staircase, Dolores talks animatedly about her fear of flying, and how she once nearly fainted in heavy turbulence. Once they are in their seats, Dolores spends a few minutes deciding whether to read “Spirituality Monthly” or “Healing Magazine”, then announces that she is going to have a gin and tonic as soon as the cabin crew start serving, to help her recover from the take off.

Desdemona is so afraid of open spaces that she has not left her home for over a year. Her friend Doris doesn’t understand and pops round to see her and suggest outings. “It’s the Strictly Come Dancing live show at Sheffield Arena”, she says, “We could go on the train”. Desdemona feels anxious at the thought of going out, even just going to the door when Doris leaves makes her feel a little panicky. “I know it’s stupid, I don’t understand it myself”, she tells Doris. Desdemona’s husband now does all the family shopping, and Desdemona has even asked her frail mother to visit, as she feels unable to go and see her. Desdemona’s husband, Florian, has tried to talk to her about her fears, but this causes her great anxiety, so he does not pursue the matter. “I can’t understand it” he says to friends, “it’s not like there was any cause – nothing bad happened to her, she’s never had anything wrong with her, and now look – she won’t step outside the house!”

Denzel has been terrified of dogs for over 7 months now. This is difficult for him as several of his friends have dogs and he finds he is avoiding going to their houses, so that he won’t encounter their dogs. He will soon be eight years old, and his family are planning a camping holiday in Cornwall, but he is so anxious that there might be dogs around, that he is not looking forward to the holiday. The last time he saw a dog was when one bounded towards him on his way home from school. As the dog got near him he froze; his face was white and he could not move. When the dog had gone he burst into tears and ran home. Ever since that day he has avoided that road and taken a long way round that adds a mile to his walk home.

Chuck is afraid of strangers. He spends all his time listening, watching, so that he doesn’t get taken by surprise. He recognises that his fear is a little extreme, but doesn’t want to take any risks. He lives alone and spends much of his day pacing up and down. Occasionally someone does come to his door with a delivery, and he finds it distressing having to speak to them. He has been like this since he was invalided out of the army with post-traumatic stress disorder.