

# Slashings and faulty cranes are making New Yorkers more anxious than ever

By Reed Tucker

February 18, 2016 | 6:37 am



When Manhattan filmmaker David Lanphier walks down the street, he casts a wary eye upward.

“I saw that cranes were falling, and I made the decision that if I didn’t have to walk under one, I wouldn’t,” says Lanphier, 51. “Does lightning strike? Sometimes. You live with it. But cranes I can avoid.”

For 65-year-old Ann Wintergurst of Queens, it’s the spate of knife attacks that have her spooked. “After reading about the subway slasher, I took the express bus instead,” she says.

The recent crane collapse on Worth Street and the increasing slashings around town are just two of many city-specific horrors that plague New Yorkers, who are significantly more likely than adults nationwide to say they feel they're not doing enough to manage stress, according to a study by the American Psychological Association.



Some New Yorkers don't tempt fate when it comes to crane collapses like the one earlier this month (above).

Photo: Paul Martinka

"My anxiety support group is always full," says Carla Mannino of Gotham Psychotherapy. "New Yorkers are just a bit more anxious by nature."

Many locals, however, are beset by less rational fears (a.k.a. phobias). They're the result of "faulty wiring" in the brain and may be a product of evolution, says Robert Reiner of Behavioral Associates.

"Our ancient ancestors — the ones who survived — were quick to spot danger," Reiner says. "They were always looking around waiting for something bad to happen."

You don't have to look far. Some of the most common NYC-related phobias involve elevators and subways.

"Whenever I get into an elevator, there's this weird thought process about how I might get out," says a 39-year-old Brooklyn fashion designer, who declined to be named for privacy reasons. "If the elevator is questionable, I'll take the stairs up seven or 10 flights. I have a feeling the fear comes from something in my childhood, or maybe something happened to me in a previous life."

One local photographer who lives in Hoboken, NJ, and requested anonymity, fears taking the PATH and often gets the bus instead.

"I get kind of anxious right before the doors close," the photographer, 52, says. "It's like I want to jump out. I have been riding the PATH train since I was a teenager, then all of a sudden, some bizarre fear just happened out of the blue."

"Phobias come from stress," says Jayme Albin, a cognitive behavior therapist. "Sometimes there's a traumatic event associated with it. Often there's not. It's just a buildup of stress."

Phobias come in all sorts of strange forms. Psychologists who spoke to The Post say they have treated a man who was terrified of making a left turn in a car and a woman who was deathly afraid of pigeons.

The good news is phobias are generally curable. One tip: Don't avoid what you fear.

"Continue to put yourself in those situations," says Meredith Owens, senior clinical psychologist at the Columbia University Clinic for Anxiety and Related Disorders. "A full-blown phobia grows out of a pattern of avoidance — if someone starts to let that discomfort drive their choices."

Should you find yourself overcome by anxiety in an elevator or subway, try to control your breathing. Then, think about why you're there and how you don't want fear to control your life.

"There isn't a block without at least one [danger]," says Stephanie D'Abruzzo, a 44-year-old actor who avoids cranes. "If you walk a lot, like I do ... you don't really have a choice but to plow on and hope that life gives you another day."

Or, at least, doesn't drop a piano on your head.

**The Post asks New York pedestrians: "What are you most afraid of in NYC?"**