

How to Battle a Spiritual Predator

"The fear of public disgrace never forced me to keep silent." Job 31:34 CEV

During one of my many prayer walks around my subdivision, I couldn't help but notice that one of my neighbors had a vulture infestation. ☐That's right—a whole herd (gaggle? flock? committee?) of vultures had taken to lining up across the peak of his roof.

Now, vultures aren't cute like sparrows or doves; they're huge, hulking predators with scary, hungry eyes, dagger-like talons, and ominous, sharp beaks that could rip a body to shreds. And often do.

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The thing is, vultures eat dead things. ☐They're raptorial birds that subsist almost entirely on carcasses. So what in the world are those vultures waiting around here for? ☐They wouldn't be hanging around if there wasn't plenty to eat. ☐They'd take off for deader pastures.

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The more I thought about it, I began to wonder if maybe I don't have vultures on my own roof. Oh, not the beak-and-feathers kind, but lowlife, spiritual predators. Fearmongers lurking over my shoulder because I keep them well fed with dead stuff. I discard tons of decomposing debris. . .failed relationships, half-cocked ideas that never came to fruition, incomplete projects, abandoned dreams and hopes, good spiritual intentions gasping their last breaths. Rotting, all of them.

A vulture's smorgasbord of demise, dissolution, and decay.

Yep, they're up there all right. I'm sure of it. Hovering,

waiting to humiliate me by picking at the bones of my failures. To remind me—and the rest of the world—that I blew it. Again.

But I don't want them stalking me anymore, biding their time until I falter at something else so they can swoop down and sink in their blood-smeared, vulture-y claws. I'm tired of feeling paralyzed, afraid to do anything for fear of doing it wrong.

Can you identify?

I believe that most women, at some point in their lives, are assaulted by the saturating fear of humiliation. Of being completely embarrassed. You may be there right now, wrestling with the nagging, colon-knotting worry that you won't fit in. ☐ at you'll look foolish. Or ignorant. Or different. ☐ at you'll be laughed at, shamed, or ridiculed for something over which you have no control.

And that's the bottom line, isn't it? Fear is really about losing control. About things over which we feel powerless sneaking up and whacking us over the head. ☐ Things looming in our future, taking shape in the present, or haunting us from the past. ☐ Things we might not even be aware of. ☐ Things that make us act a certain way for no apparent reason. It's true—sometimes our adult behavior is influenced by unconscious fears from past events that affect the habits, quirks, and perspectives we have today.

Ghosts from the Past

Take my hat fetish, for example. I've worn hats for decades and never really considered why my closet looks like the Cat in the Hat exploded. . . stacks of hats everywhere, clogging wall hooks and overflowing shelves. I just thought I liked hats.

Some women are shoe fanatics or fingernail buffs; I'm a hat

girl. I can no more pass up a cute hat than Lady Gaga can pass up a lingerie sale.

But something happened recently that opened my eyes to the real, vulture-induced reason for my headwear addiction. It all started so innocently. I posted a Facebook comment about my kicky new fedora, and a childhood school chum, Vicki, responded with an out-of-the-blue question: “Just curious, Deb—are you the daughter who never remembered to brush her hair? I started carrying a brush in my purse after your mom (my teacher at the time) told our health class how important it was to keep your hair neat. She mentioned a daughter that she always had to remind of this. . . . Was it you?”

All of a sudden, I was transported back in time, like a scene from a Stephen King movie, to middle school. I began reliving, in writhing agony, a humiliating memory I had apparently blocked. I was a dorky sixth grader at the time and couldn’t have cared less what I looked like. □ There were so many better things for a rough-and-tumble tomboy to think about—hitting home runs, riding my bike, torturing my sister—it simply never occurred to me to glance in a mirror when I wasn’t brushing my teeth.

On this particular day, I had quietly slipped into the back of my mother’s health classroom to stick something—I don’t remember what—in her purse. □The students’ backs were facing me and I was tiptoeing while holding my breath, trying so hard not to draw attention to myself while Mama was up front teaching.

Suddenly, Mama stopped in the middle of her hygiene lecture and told everyone to turn around and look at my tousled hair as “an example of poor grooming habits.” □They were seventh graders—a whole year older than me—and I didn’t know any of them, so I was absolutely mortified. And horror of all horrors, there were at least ten boys in that class. Gulp. I ducked my head and dashed out the door just as the first

giggles began to roll across the room.

Forty years later, sitting in my computer chair, reliving this painful ordeal, my face flamed and I wanted to crawl beneath my desk. In retrospect, as a mother myself, I realized that Mama hadn't meant to hurt me, just jolt me into listening to an admonition I'd ignored a hundred times. She was trying to mold me into a human being instead of a gorilla. My head understood. But my heart still felt that gut-searing shame like the embarrassing episode had just happened.

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The long-repressed memory seemed to roll up the shades in my brain and beam light into a corner that's been dark most of my life. All of a sudden the angels sang that full-bodied, eight-note "Ahhhhh" chord that means something important just happened.

What an epiphany! I finally got it! I've never been able to explain why I continue to wear, year after unfashionable year, those "embarrassing" hats that my kids used to beg me to hide when their friends were around. Why I just have to buy every perky bonnet I see. Why I once chose to leave a basketball game rather than remove my hat when informed that headgear was not allowed in the gym.

My hat fetish was really those nasty vultures all along—those despicable spirit-eaters hovering over my shoulder, threatening further humiliation, and doing their darndest to build a nest in my hair.

So how am I to rid myself of these fear marauders whose circling shadows make embarrassment feel inevitable?

My clue to how to defeat the spiritual vultures came from the real vultures infesting my neighbor's property. As I crossed the lawn to get a closer look at their rooftop hangout, the hideous creatures first stared me down and spread their wings to threaten me. When I stood my ground, they flew away. My

presence frightened them. Vultures aren't intimidated by lifeless carrion, but pit them against a vibrant life force and they're overwhelmed. Outclassed. Outta here.

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Then it occurred to me: □That's it! □That's how we get rid of our spiritual vultures, too—we seek help from the biggest, most powerful life force there is. Those unseen carnivores bringing us down can't remain in His presence. □They're totally intimidated. . . overwhelmed. . . outclassed. □They're outta here.

“□The Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world” (1 John 4:4 NLT). □ at, dear sister, is the difference between an unholy spirit and the Holy Spirit. One has a BB gun and the other has an AK-47. And the Enforcer is on our side.

Spiritual warfare in a nutshell.

I have a feeling your next question is, “So, Deb, are you still wearing hats?” □The answer is yes, but not out of compulsion anymore. When I don the plucky Princess Kate number I bought in England (my, oh my, don't those Brits do hats right!), I hold my head high, smile with confidence, and never glance over my shoulder for hungry, winged predators.

Because I know who has my back. And He's packing some heat.

So. . . are there any vultures lurking around your roof? I know a great Exterminator.

*This is an excerpt from **Debora Coty's** latest book, Fear, Faith, and a Fistful of Chocolate: Wit and Wisdom for Sidestepping Life's Worries (Barbour Publishing). Coty is the author of 10 books, newspaper columnist, orthopedic occupational therapist and tennis addict. Follow Debora on Twitter @deboracoty.*

