**INTRO**

Warning: Hey, everyone… This episode contains a contextual reference to suicidal ideation. We wanted you to know that up front so you can take care while listening.

We've posted some resources in the show notes if you or anyone you know needs help, or wants to know more about the topics we're talking about in this show.

**Nate Hegyi:** Is everyone recording?

**Justine Paradis:** Yes.

**Felix Poon:** Yeah.

**Nate Hegyi:** Perfect. Cool. So this is outside in. I'm Nate Hegyi, here with producers Felix Poon and Justine Paradis. Hey, guys.

**Justine Paradis:** Hiiii.

**Felix Poon:** Hi.

**Nate Hegyi:** Hello. So we're all gathered here because I want to tell you a story. Something that happened to me before I started this job. I took a week off and I went down to southwest Utah for a solo vacation. You know, just going around, camping, running with one of my dogs. And one day, I decided to go to Zion National Park. And there's this really famous hike there called Angel's Landing. You guys heard of it?

**Justine Paradis:** No.

**Felix Poon:** No, no, I have not.

**Nate Hegyi:** You essentially climb up this really skinny spine of a mountain hundreds of feet up. **At one point, it’s only a couple of feet wide**. **It is dangerous, I mean, A few people have died doing it,** but also tens of thousands of people hike it every year.

**Justine Paradis:** Sometimes you're like, How does this exist in, in like a public lands setting?

**Nate Hegyi:** Yes. Yes.

**Justine Paradis:** What?

<<Music swells>>

**Nate Hegyi:** And so I'm hiking, I'm walking, feeling like this is no big deal…

But the trail is getting skinnier and it's getting skinnier. And then at one point, the trail is only about a foot wide, there’s a sheer drop on either side, and the only thing that's keeping me from falling hundreds of feet to my death is this chain railing that is bolted into the rock

**<<string sound>>**

And it's at that very moment

**<<string sound>>**

 that a little voice inside of my head.

**<<string sound>>**

Says Let go.

[let this pause last longer]

Let go of the chains and jump.

**Felix Poon:** No, Nate, don't let go. Why?

**Nate Hegyi:** Felix That's exactly what I was also saying. I was like, No way. I am not letting go of the chains. That's ridiculous. I don't want to die.

**Justine Paradis:** Oh, my God

**Nate Hegyi:** And so I slowly start walking back.

**Justine Paradis:** You turn around.

**Nate Hegyi:** I turned around. I was like, I can't do this. And I sat down and I was just, like, in disbelief. I mean, like, what is that little voice? Because this was this is not the first time this has happened to me. I've always had, like, this little voice, this little urge that tells me to jump when faced with a really high place. have you guys ever had that? Have you ever had, like, an urge to, to just jump?

**Justine Paradis:** Yes.

**Felix Poon:** No.

**Justine Paradis:** I would not describe it as a little voice, but it's like it's like a pull [00:03:00] or a like a what if and yeah, it's like I'm I'm at the viewpoint of a hike and the sort of like it would be so easy. It would be so easy. It would take almost nothing to take a step.

**Felix Poon:** Wait, wait. Who's. Who's the little voice inside of you?

**<<theme fades in>>**

**Nate Hegyi:** That's what this episode is going to be all about, is the little voice.

**Justine Paradis:** Who is talking to me.

**<<theme swells, then under>>**

**Nate Hegyi:** You're listening to Outside In. I'm Nate Hegyi **here** today with Felix Poon and Justine Paradis. And on this episode, we're going to find out why roughly a third of us experience what is ominously known as the call of the void. and maybe even how to cure it.

**<<THEME SWELL, THEN FADE out>>**

So we're all journalists here. And as naturally curious people, when faced with something strange or weird, what do we do?

**Justine Paradis:**  Run toward it. Leap off a cliff?

**Nate Hegyi:** No, not.

**Justine Paradis:** Really.

**Felix Poon:** Talk to the experts.

**Nate Hegyi:** or in my case, we Google the stuff. And so when I got down from Angel's Landing, after feeling this urge to jump, I went down an internet rabbit hole. And I found all these blogs and pop science articles about this phenomenon that the French supposedly call. L’appel du vid. That actually translates in English to the Call of the Void.

**Nate Hegyi:** So that actually translates in English to the call of the void.

**Justine Paradis:** It's so beautiful. I love that [00:04:30] phrase.

**Felix Poon:** It's very ominous. The call of the void.

**Nate Hegyi:** And people have been feeling this call of the void for a lot longer than the Internet's been around. In 1919, a travel writer described an uncontrollable urge to throw himself off the edge of the Grand Canyon. Winston Churchill called the feeling his black dog and he didn’t like to stand by the side of a ship, looking down at the water.And Edgar Allan Poe actually wrote about this in his short story called The Imp of the Perverse.] Essentially an imps, a little mischievous demon who makes us do dangerous or completely outrageous things. Have you ever had that sudden impulse to say or do something completely chaotic? Like for me, like what if I was live on NPR actually being interviewed by a host? Yeah. And I just casually dropped ten f bombs. Like that would be the end of my career. And I've actually been on NPR, by the way, and I've had that very thought.

**Justine Paradis:** Oh, my.

Have you ever had that?

**Felix Poon:** Yeah, I think so. Yeah. I'm trying to think of an example. I'm pretty sure I've done it before. Not done it.

**Justine Paradis:** I've had the thought, I can do it.

**Nate Hegyi:** Anyway, the most dangerous of these little demon thoughts is falling to your death from a very high place. So I actually want to play an excerpt from the story read by The One and only… Vincent Price.

**Vincent Price:** Yeah, there is no passion in nature so maniacally impatient as that of him, who shuddering upon the edge of a precipice thus meditates a plunge. To indulge for a moment in any attempt at thought is to be inevitably lost.

**Justine Paradis:** That sigh meditated a plunge. I was a.

**Felix Poon:** He’s got a very perfect voice for that.

**Nate Hegyi:** And so, you know, this could be this could be one explanation of what I was feeling when I was on Angel's Landing. I was possessed by an imp. And it is funny because I do actually imagine the tiny little voice in my head as a little mischievous devil. Well, actually, it doesn't really look like a devil. He actually looks like the Monopoly man for some reason. And he's got, like a little top hat and a monocle.

**Justine Paradis:** It's a more realistic devil, though. He's like, I am an oligarch.

**Nate Hegyi:** Yeah, exactly. He's like a tiny little oligarch that, like, sits on my shoulder and whispers bad things for me to do. So, you know, we could just call it quits here and just say call it the void caused by imps. End of story.

**Justine Paradis: It’s very** Scientific.

**Nate Hegyi:** BUT… I did more Googling, and that's when I stumbled on a 2012 peer reviewed paper published by the Journal of **Affective** Disorders. And it was all about this urge to jump. And so I actually gave the author a call.

**Jennifer Hames:** Hi, this is Jen

**Nate Hegyi:** Jen, and her name is Jennifer Haimes. She's a psychologist at the University of Notre Dame. And I told her my angel's landing story and she got right to the point.

**Jennifer Hames:** So first off, what you're experiencing is super, super common. And what we've named that experience is the high place. Phenomenon.

**Felix Poon:** The high place phenomenon. I mean, it's very literal.

**Justine Paradis:** I still like Call of the Void, the.

**Nate Hegyi:** Best I know, it's kind of like it's very scientific sounding, very clinical, maybe less exciting than Call of the Void. But Haimes says that this high place phenomenon, as she calls it, is actually caused by our brains misinterpreting safety signals. So these safety signals are like flares and they fire off every time that we think we're in danger.

**Jennifer Hames:** They exist to try to [00:08:00] keep us safe. They exist to try to help us as the human race survive. And sometimes these safety signals can go off and they go off so quickly in our minds that we start to react before we even realize that that safety signal has really happened.

**Nate Hegyi:** So, for instance, if you're on the edge of a cliff.

**Jennifer Hames:** you might have something firing in your brain saying Back up, wait, you might fall. This is dangerous.

**Nate Hegyi:** And so you immediately back up, you freeze in place, you grip tighter onto those chains [00:08:30] as I did whatever. And you do all of this before you even really understand what's going on. Your body is having an instant physical reaction, and this is taking place before the slower, more analytical part of your brain can catch up. And when it finally does.

**Jennifer Hames:** We can start to believe that we actually wanted to jump because we don't really understand why our body reacted that way.

**Nate Hegyi:** So essentially, these safety signals are trying to keep us out of danger, but then our mind can misinterpret why they were fired off in the first place.

**Felix Poon:** So something's just it's just lost in translation.

**Nate Hegyi:** That's exactly it. Our brain just assigns a meaning to a safety signal that might be completely wrong and that's when the weirdness begins. I mean, it's not just having this sudden urge to jump off a cliff, but maybe standing up in the middle of a classroom and screaming at the top of your lungs or.

**Jennifer Hames:** I see a knife and I then have this image in my head suddenly that like, Wow, I am just about to stab somebody with that knife like these. These are actually relatively normal experiences [00:10:00] for us as humans, and we start to get into problems and start to become really distressed about it. When we start to attribute that to meaning, there's something wrong with me because that weird thought just popped in my head.

**Felix Poon:** This, this, this feels very validating.

**Nate Hegyi:** It does, doesn't it? It feels really.

**Felix Poon:** Validating, especially the part about the knife. I've never admitted [00:10:30] this to anyone, but sometimes in the kitchen I'm like, Oh, I need to get the knife like a butcher knife from the drawer and there's someone else in the room. It's like, I could literally just stab this right through them right now. And then I'm like, Oh, my gosh, why did I have that thought? Like, That's terrible. Oh, my gosh.

**Nate Hegyi:** I have had that EXACT same thought felix!

**Justine Paradis:** I think I have that every time I see a knife actually.

**Felix Poon:** I hope my roomate never listens to this podcast.

**Justine Paradis:**  Or my husband!

**Nate Hegyi:** And most of us can shake these thoughts [00:11:00] off and move on with our day, right? Like you feel like you have that thought of the knife, and then you're just like, Oh, no, no way. And you move on with your day. But what if you couldn't? What if the call of the void became so intense that you almost acted? That story? It's coming up next after the break.

And if you experience the call of the void, that urge to jump from a high place, let us know on our website, outsideinradio.org or tweet us AT outsideinradio.

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**Remember how we mentioned that this episode contains a contextual reference to suicidal ideation? Well, that part is coming up now. And there’s also one instance of the f-bomb so take care while listening.**

QUICK TRIGGER WARNING AGAIN

"there's one instance of the f-bomb in the second half."

Hey, [00:11:30] you're listening to Outside In. I'm Nate Hegyi, here with producers Felix Poon and Justine Paradis.

**Justine Paradis:** Indeed.

**Felix Poon:** Hello.

**Nate Hegyi:** We just heard from psychologist Jennifer Haimes, who is the first person to give an actual clinical name to that urge to jump. Some people have when they're standing on the edge of a cliff, it's called high place phenomenon. After Haimes published that research paper in 2012, she started receiving dozens and dozens of emails from people all. [00:12:00]

**Jennifer Hames:** Around the world saying, Wow, like this makes me feel like I am not crazy, that there is not some something wrong with me, that this is a normal experience in being human.

**Nate Hegyi:** Because it totally is normal, right? **AGAIN**, Hames’ research found that roughly a third of those surveyed felt the urge to jump. but we keep them to ourselves because we think we're weird, because we have them.

**Jennifer Hames:** And I think that when we put out research like this… that can be so incredibly powerful to to know that I'm not the only one. And yet this is also a scary experience that I've had in my life.

**Nate Hegyi:** And for most of us, you know, this experience is just that they're briefly scary, but then they pass. But for others, they can become traumatic. And that's what happened to Stephen Hunt.

**Stephen Hunt:** My name is Stephen Hunt. I live in Sydney, Australia.

**Nate Hegyi:** He's married three kids.

**Stephen Hunt:** Oh, just [00:13:30] to apologize, I've got a young person crying in the background.

**Nate Hegyi:** And he says he’s always been a little bit afraid of heights.

**Stephen Hunt:** There was always this sort of irrational pull to jump. And and it's something that had always been there, but not not severe.

**Nate Hegyi:** But all this changed one cold autumn night in 2010.

**Stephen Hunt:** I'd been out, like burning the candle at both ends, working really hard, and I'd been out late with some friends, one of which had to get an early plane. And and I said to him, You know what? I think I'm good. I can drive you to the airport. Turned [00:14:30] out the airport he was going from was over an hour away in a place called Avalon. So I drove all the way out there, and at this point I'm super exhausted. It's like probably four in the morning or something. And and I start driving back and on the way back from Avalon to Melbourne, you've got to cross over this massive, really high bridge. And it's probably something equivalent of like the Golden Gate. It's really high up. There's a bit of water underneath, but there's actually a lot of concrete. [00:15:00] And in the middle of crossing, this big bridge had this uncontrollable urge to steer as hard as I could to the side and drive my car right off it. This uncontrollable, almost uncontrollable subconscious urge was was basically willing me to end my life. By the time I got to the other side, I was had my foot off the accelerator. I was rolling in [00:15:30] to what ended up being a stop on her side of the lane. And and then I actually got out of the car like it was the first thing. I just shut the engine off, got out and, and I was in tears and just hyperventilating, going, What the hell just happened? Like if I'd just lost my mind, you know? Is this a mental breakdown? I had no idea what it was.

I [00:16:00] started researching it straight away. I went to see my doctor and my doctor just said, oh, you've you've had a panic attack. I didn't really draw too much from the heights. And but I was surprised because I know everybody actually feels this sensation to some extent. Like I had talked about it to friends my whole life. Like we always kind of go, Oh, don't you sometimes feel that urge to jump? Yeah, but it's never like, you know, my life's [00:16:30] actually at risk from doing that, right?

**Nate Hegyi:** I know it's a sensitive question, but I mean, was this has this been a have you ever had suicidal ideation? Have you ever experienced that? Or do you or is this not tied to that?

**Stephen Hunt:** No, I think aside from the, you know, these experiences, which are really suicidal ideation, the answer would be no. Like, I love life. I've got three beautiful kids who are five, seven and ten. Like, we're in the the best part. And so it's it's definitely life's worth living. I don't don't have any intention of leaving unless I have to.

**Nate Hegyi:** And [00:18:00] that's why Hunt tries to avoid tall places these days. It means no balconies, no cliffs, no rooftops. Because if he gets too close to the edge, he'll start feeling the urge.

**Stephen Hunt:** It's kind of like almost like being hungry or something. Like, you know, like if someone puts a delicious sandwich in front of me and I'm going to start feeling really hungry, like I really want to eat it, and and that's kind of the urge, like the temptation of jumping is there the opportunity [00:18:30] to is there. And I'm tempted. My body is like just willing itself to go and have a crack and see what happens. It's almost like that. But yeah, my conscious mind is like, fuck, no, sorry. Probably can't swear, but like hell no.

**Justine Paradis:** So he keeps feeling this. He like every time now.

**Nate Hegyi:** Absolutely, yeah. Every time he goes towards any kind of high place, he, he it can trigger in some cases a panic attack. And [00:19:00] so he just he tries to avoid him at all costs.

**Felix Poon:** Well, has he seen a psychologist or someone to try to cure this or alleviate this?

**Nate Hegyi:** Yes. Yeah. He sees he sees he's tried therapy and he's trying to take care of himself, abstaining from alcohol, that kind of thing, just to to put himself in a in a in a better space where he's not burning the candle at both ends.

He’s also developed this trick to help him calm down after an episode: music.

**Stephen Hunt:** Specifically, I found that song Weightless by Marconi Union is actually a really powerful [00:23:30] way to do it.

**Nate Hegyi:** For instance, after he had an episode on a balcony during a work meeting, he excused himself and ran down to his car, shut the door.

**Stephen Hunt:** I put on that song and just breathed, went through my breathing exercises until I could calm down. And yeah, it's it's pretty, pretty effective.

**Nate Hegyi:** When [00:24:00] I listen to this song, it makes me feel like I'm putting on like a warm weighted blanket. It's a really calming, calming song.

But the most extreme thing he’s tried, to cure himself of High Place Phenomenon, was bungee jumping.

**Stephen Hunt:** Bungee jumping was actually the most interesting attempt [00:19:30] at dealing with it.

**Felix Poon:** What? Well, it's kind of like exposure therapy.

**Nate Hegyi:** Exactly.

**Felix Poon:** Right. Like like exposing yourself to the thing that you're terrified of, but in a kind of controlled way in which, like you have agency and you're deciding to do a thing, you have support.

**Justine Paradis:** I feel like that could go either way.

**Nate Hegyi:** Well, so. So Hunt is is pretty well versed in that idea, as Felix you said, of exposure therapy, that when you have a phobia or when something traumatizes you, a good way to try and get over that fear is to essentially face it head on. So last year he was on a work trip in New Zealand and his buddy was like - hey, you want to jump off a cliff? Well here’s your chance. .

**Stephen Hunt:** And I was kind of [00:20:30] a bit nervous about it, but I signed up, went up to this massive bridge underneath is like rapids. And walking out onto the bridge I felt the sensation, but it was kind of controllable. When I get this, I tend to just sort of do box breathing or vagus nerve breathing depending on the type, and that generally helps control it a little bit.

**Nate Hegyi:** So Hunt is standing on this massive bridge in New Zealand above these roaring rapids.

**Stephen Hunt:** Which [00:21:00] is kind of info for all for two and then out for six.

**Nate Hegyi:** Just trying to keep himself in check.

**Stephen Hunt:** And I was kind of just holding on to something like, I can't remember what it was like. There's a rope up there or something. I was just always anchoring myself and but then when it came to my turn to get up and jump, I was totally fine.

**Nate Hegyi:** The uncontrollable urge and the panic disappeared.

**Stephen Hunt:** And I [00:21:30] just jumped and I had an awesome bungee like went down, came back up and then they put me in the boat and then I went straight back up and was totally fine. Like, you know, after doing that, I could stand on the bridge with not feeling a thing. And I got up for my second go and I actually just did it backwards. Like I turned around and just jumped off and did this big backwards swan dove and, you know, relished it like it was awesome. Wow.

**Justine Paradis:** A swan dive?

**Felix Poon:** So it's gone. He doesn't [00:22:00] experience it anymore at all?

**Nate Hegyi:** Not exactly.

**Stephen Hunt:** I didn't expect it would have cured it. I think, you know, I felt at the time that it was just mind over matter that my my mind felt there was no option to [00:22:30] to I guess it's to suicide, right? That's what this is. It's like, is there an option to suicide or not? And if there is, then in comes that internal conflict. If I can rationally prove there's no option, which I guess I experienced there, then it's all gone. It's all like it all goes away.

**Justine Paradis:** And almost like it wasn't the same situation. Like there was a rope, right?

**Nate Hegyi:** Exactly. Like essentially what he's saying is once he knew he was safe bungee jumping, the call of the void disappeared. He was able to experience a fall without the danger [00:23:00] of dying. But you take the rope away, put him on the edge of that bridge with no harness and that urge to jump returns.

I mean, it's kind of like how we're comfortable on a roller coaster whipping around corners at 60 miles an hour. But if we were in a car with a friend doing that, we'd be totally freaked out. And so Stevens doesn't know how to permanently stop this high place phenomenon.

And so I told all this to the psychologist Jennifer Hames. She’s the researcher we talked to in the first half of the show who came up with that clinical term… high place phenomenon. and not to put a damper on everything. But, she says playing music or doing bungee jumping, all of these things, she calls them safety aids.

**Jennifer Hames:** The thing with safety aids is that we can start to believe that then we can't get through that situation unless we do that thing. And so in this example, the equivalent would be I can't drive across a bridge unless I'm playing this music. So it might lead that person to then feel like, let's say their phone battery [00:25:00] dies and they don't have access to that song, then they can't go across the bridge.

**Nate Hegyi:** It becomes a coping mechanism. What Hames recommends instead is actually just leaning into the feeling.

**Jennifer Hames:** So the idea would be we actually want people to feel high levels of anxiety when you're doing an exposure, like when you're doing the thing that makes you anxious. We actually don't want you to calm down. When anxiety is as high as it is, then [00:25:30] the feared outcome doesn't happen. That creates a really great environment for that learning to actually happen. That what we call safety learning, that I can be incredibly anxious in this situation and I can still make it through and not fall off or not steer my car off the bridge or whatever it might be.

**Nate Hegyi:** So this is real deal exposure therapy. Unlike bungee jumping which… as extreme as it sounds… isn’t the thing that Hunt is actually afraid of.

And, also like bungee jumping, this isn’t something you just jump into… It’s something you want to do with guidance from a professional, and take one step at a time. Psychologists call this a fear ladder. Maybe first you start 20 feet away from a cliff. Feel a mild urge to jump… and let it pass. Then move 10 feet away… 5 feet away… always feeling the urge and then letting it pass.

Because The whole idea with this is to show ourselves that just because we might have urge…s that we have imps of the perverse living in our brains, it doesn't mean that we actually have to listen to them.

**Jennifer Hames:** There is always an opportunity to intervene. And we we don't have to be at the mercy of what every urge or impulse within us tells us to do.

[mux swells and fades]

**Felix Poon:** So Nate, I’m curious. After learning all this, does it change anything for you and the little Monopoly guy in your head?

 **Nate Hegyi:** Well, first off what I experience - not as serious as what Stephen Hunt experienced. That being said, it’s really nice knowing there’s a scientific reason behind the call of the void, behind this high place phenomenon. So I find that really heartening, because now when I experience that urge to jump I can just ignore it and be like, that’s just my brain misfiring. And making mistakes. That’s okay.

**Felix Poon:** Or that you’re not just going to murder your roomate.

**Nate:** You’re not going to murder your roomate, exactly.

**Justine Paradis:** Do you think you would ever do Angel’s Landing again?

**Nate Hegyi:** Um, yes. I would love to but I would definitely like to do it with my wife and not just by myself.

**Justine Paradis:** So the idea is, you know that you’re not alone in that other people experience this, and you wouldn't be alone literally!

**Nate Hegyi:** Exactly.

**Felix Poon:** Send us pictures when you go!

**Nate Hegyi:** I will.

[theme mux swells]

If you want to see pictures of Angel’s Landing, or if you want to see a video of Stephen Hunt bungee jumping you can visit our website outsideinradio.org. We also want to know whether you feel the Call of the Void and how YOU handle it. Shoot us a tweet AT outsideinradio.

**Justine Paradis:** Also, a quick reminder that Outside/In is a public radio production – we really do rely on listener support. If you’re able, please consider donating to support the show – the link to do that is outsideinradio.org/donate.

**Nate Hegyi:** Outside/In was produced this week by me, Nate Hegyi, and edited by Taylor Quimby, with help from Jessica Hunt, Rebecca Lavoie, Justine Paradis and Felix Poon.

Rebecca Lavoie is our Executive Producer.

**Felix Poon :** Music in this episode came from Marconi Union, Sour Mash, Dew of Light, Gavin Luke, and Christopher Moe Ditlevsen. Okay Nate… This is your chance to let out the imp.

**Justine Paradis:** Ready for a little exposure therapy? Nobody listens this far anyway.

**Nate Hegyi:** Okay, let’s do it Outside/In is a [bleep] production of New Hampshire [bleep] Radio. [bleep] yeah! That felt great, that felt really really good.