A Katie  
I’m afraid of spiders. You won’t hear me scream, but I will certainly get out of the room until someone else has dealt with it. Once, when I was a teenager, and my parents were both working late, I sat on the front steps of the house for nearly five hours waiting for help. There was a spider on the ceiling in the hallway, you see! I couldn’t get into the house! My father was quite angry with me when he got home; he thought I needed to learn to be more independent. “How will you ever survive if you have to live alone some day?” he asked. Well, I’m sure if I had to I would just deal with it, although it would be a challenge. But I’ve never had to live alone. I had flatmates at university, and now I’m married. Luckily my husband has no problem with spiders, and is tolerant of my phobia!

B Ellie  
The most challenging thing I’ve ever done, by far, was trekking in the Himalayas. It was something I’d always dreamed of doing and I was incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to join a trek for charity. I always considered myself fit; I mean, I go to the gym two or three times a week. But as soon as we set out I realised I was quite out of my depth; I’d never even carried a pack before. In retrospect, I can’t imagine what I was thinking. On the first day, we had a six-hour walk and after four hours I was so exhausted I felt that I couldn’t go on. I took off my pack, sat down, and cried. Apparently my reaction was fairly common so our group leader knew just how to deal with it. He calmly explained that we were only two more hours from our first camp, while I’d have to walk for four, alone, to go back! I had no choice. I had to continue. So I did, and when we eventually reached Everest base camp it was the proudest I’ve ever been.

C Daniel  
After high school I was accepted into a very good music school, by merit of my audition. I almost declined; I didn’t want to go to university. It was a terribly difficult time because nobody could understand why I would make that decision. I was just so terrified that I would fail. I’m dyslexic, and I knew that even if I were studying music I would have to write essays for so many classes. I’d had some teachers in the past that were convinced that I was just careless, that I was lazy, when in fact I was spending much more time on the assignments than my classmates. In the end I went, but I had a terrible attitude. I missed a lot of classes; I wasn’t even trying. Eventually I found my way to an office that offered support to students with special needs; I think someone told me that I could get a free computer, or something. That turned my life around. To get the computer I had to attend regular meetings with an advisor, which I hated at first, but eventually I learned to recognise my strengths and be realistic about my weaknesses; I realised I could get help when I needed it, and that was OK. That was the hardest thing; but once I’d understood it, there was no stopping me.

D Jack  
My fear of heights was affecting my life because I had difficulty going up and down stairs or over bridges, particularly if I could see down, beneath me. I would just get paralysed. I would feel nauseous, and my feet would feel heavy, as if they were made of lead. I had read that it was possible to get over phobias by exposure, so I put myself into difficult situations on purpose. It was exhausting, but I knew it was important. I noticed slight improvements, but only very slight. It was frustrating. Then I had the idea; I was going to try bungee jumping. I got a trusted friend to go with me; to make sure I didn’t change my mind. He told the people in charge they would have to push me, because I wouldn’t jump. It was all very fast; there was no time to think. The feeling was exhilarating, to be honest. And I’ve had no trouble in my day-to-day life since then. Though, I admit, I have no desire to do it again.