

Altitude Adjustment

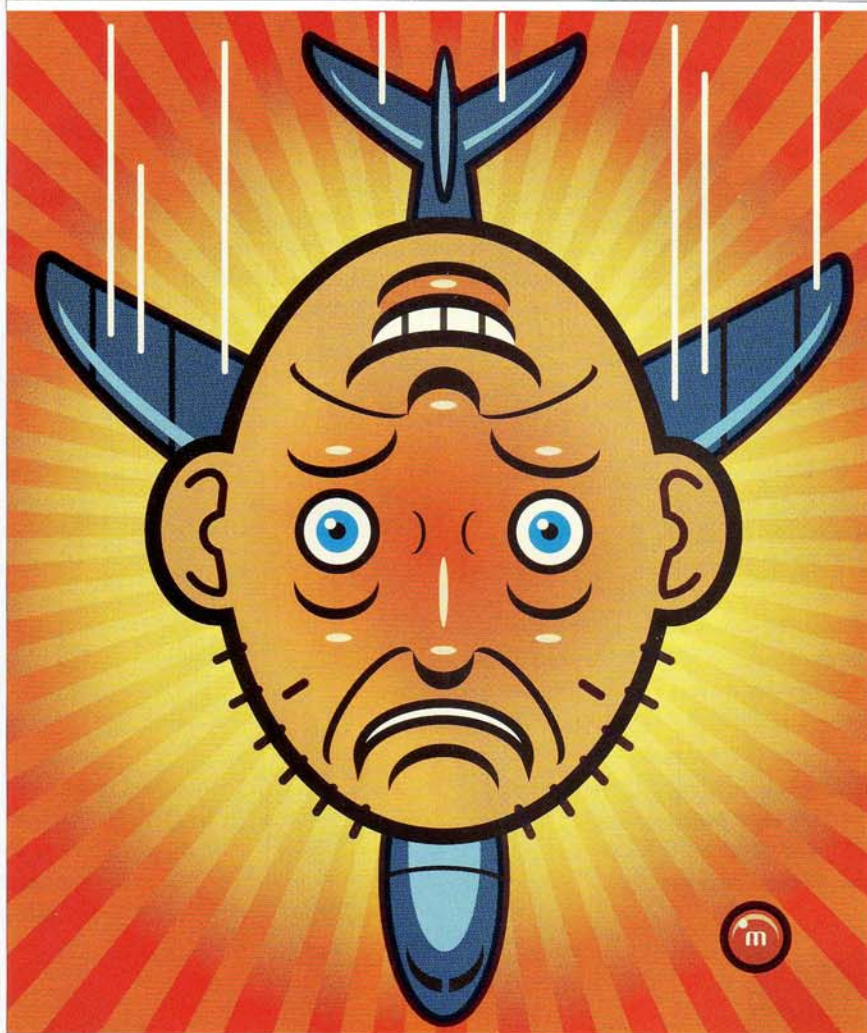
CAN NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING CURE A WHITE-KNUCKLE FEAR OF FLYING?

BY JENNA MCCARTHY

MY SIX-FOOT-THREE-INCH husband takes issue with the cramped seats and lack of legroom. Others find the food to be the biggest turnoff. What bothers me more than the fleeting physical discomfort is being miles above the earth's surface, hurtling through the air in a tiny metal capsule, my life in the hands of a complete stranger who for all I know is hungover, depressed, or simply not the brightest bulb on the porch. You know, the flying part.

It's not just that the act of being airborne seems to defy the most basic law of nature (let go of a pencil in midair or—better yet—leap off your roof and see what happens). Nothing about flying makes sense. Why, for instance, do they instruct passengers in the use of the flotation device on a flight from Boston to Chicago? What masochist decided to name the departure area a "terminal"? Why is it that I can "feel free to roam about the cabin" when we're soaring through the stratosphere but am risking life and limb if I unbuckle my seat belt before we're parked at the arrival gate? I can appreciate that automobile restraints can stymie the grim reaper, but one wonders: Has a lap-placed strip of nylon—worn by a seated passenger while the plane is on the ground—ever prevented an on-board casualty?

A friend suggests Neuro-Linguistic Programming as a possible cure. Though the name smacks of *The Manchurian Candidate*, I am assured that this New Age therapy, which has been around since the mid '70s, has been used successfully to treat all kinds of



phobias, including flying. Self-help addict that I am, I sign up for a two-hour session. "I hope this works," I'm thinking. "It damn well better," I add when I fork over the \$400 fee.

THE NAME SAYS IT ALL I greet Doug Swain, Santa Barbara-based NLP master practitioner, with a mixture of apprehension and excitement.

"Are you going to make me cluck like a chicken?" I ask.

Swain sighs. Although we will be using some hypnosis techniques, all the work we do today will be done by me. "I'm just the tour guide," he says.

First on the agenda is an intro to Neuro-Linguistic Programming. When we have an experience, Swain explains, we bring in infor-

mation through our five senses, then process and store it—a function of our neurology. To describe that experience, we translate it into language—hence "linguistic." To explain the "programming" part, Swain likens the mental process to the PC.

"A computer does what we program it to do," he says. "Likewise, we create patterns of behavior within ourselves through the language we use." According to Swain, if one were to change the phrase "I have to go to work" to "I get to go to work," the mind would gradually be persuaded by the lexical suggestion that work was as exciting as a Lakers game. With enough repetition, even Dilbert could find himself looking forward to his daily cubicle stint.

Practitioners describe NLP as a collec-