

Confessions of a Reformed Worrywart

BY HEATHER BOERNER

As a child in suburban southern California, I used to lie in bed with the covers pulled up to my chin, wide-eyed, listening intently as fighter jets practiced nighttime maneuvers at the nearby Air Force base. I'd done the calculations and was convinced: given our proximity to a military target, my small town would be among the first blown off the map when Russia attacked.

I still remember my body tensing with each swoop and tear overhead. My attempts to coax myself to sleep were hopeless. I was an eight-year-old insomniac.

Decades later, I have outgrown the sleepless nights, but I remain suspicious that all of this — our cushy lives, our modern amenities — could be snatched away in an instant. In quiet moments, I tick off a list of the essential life skills I lack, I inventory the ways I am dependent on so many others for my continued well-being. The daughter of a woman with both a serious pioneer spirit and intense anxiety, I'm always waiting for the bottom to fall out.

With the economy in tatters and our planet getting steamier by the day, you'd think I might be one of those people squirreling away bottled water and canned food, planning a Transition Town or preparing for 2012, the end date of the Mayan calendar that predicts major societal shifts.

Like Dave, a 28-year-old millionaire living in LA, who's stockpiling silver to prepare for the dollar's possible devaluation. He's down with 2012, and calls it a serious societal evolution.

"This is different than anything that's ever happened to modern civilization," he says.

Or Jane, a dear friend of mine in Santa Cruz, who's socking money away to buy a farm with independent water and electricity, and "ad-

equates defense capabilities." She and a friend have discussed starting a group — Librarians of the Apocalypse — to protect knowledge from marauding bands of looters.

"Kind of like Hypatia defending the great library of Alexandria," she explains in an email. "Imagine how much better off humanity would be if it hadn't been destroyed."

I can't argue with her there. In fact, if and when the time ever comes, Jane has invited me to join her on the farm, and I am grateful.

But while I might take comfort in the prospect of Jane's safe haven, I stop short of orchestrating my own. It's not that I think I'm right and others are wrong, it's that I firmly believe two things: We can't know with certainty what will happen, and the world always changes.

In Thich Nhat Hahn's version of the Buddha's Five Remembrances, there is one that goes, "All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them."

I think of that every time I read a hyperbolic headline, every time a friend or a newscaster alludes to pending cultural catastrophe, every time my paralyzing pre-adolescent vigilance threatens to kick up again.

I know it's easy to dismiss me as someone who just doesn't get it, but believe me, I get it. As a reporter, I've written about peak oil, the complications of importing natural gas from Russia and the limits of fuel cells. Besides which, I'm a sentient, observant human being. I can see that several longstanding trends are colliding to create massive change. Are we experiencing a generation-defining cultural and economic shift? Probably. Will it be big-

ger than the Great Depression, the Industrial Revolution or the Holocaust? Personally, I doubt it.

I've done enough spiritual work to know that transitions are painful because they're unfamiliar. During my own transitions, I've felt like I'm coming out of my skin. I can't get comfortable. I'm scared and irritable constantly.

I recognize that look in others' eyes today. And it makes me wonder if how we treat each other now is just as important as how we prepare for what may or may not happen down the road.

Another part of the Five Remembrances says, "all we possess is our actions." When the dust settles from this latest transition, we'll be left to account for ourselves. Did we react with judgment and blame, or compassion and gentleness? Did we allow the tension of the moment to bring us together, or drive us apart?

So I focus on what I can control: I meditate and practice yoga to soothe my naturally hyper-aroused nerves. I avoid caffeine and sugar. I keep a kitchen garden — not because I'm worried about food shortages, but because it reminds me of my mother, whose green thumb filled my childhood backyard with corn, sunflowers, strawberries and boysenberry vines. I pray for the strength to meet the challenges of each new day with a clear head and an open heart. I let go of the rest. 🍃

