

Is There Any Other Way?

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September will be always be etched in my memory as the month when on one day in 2001 our world changed. I was far from home on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia, Canada. On a bike trip, we had selected a hostel for our night's accommodation, inexpensive lodging for travelers. After we all learned of the attacks on the World Trade Center, what I remember most is the expressions of warmth, kindness and concern shown to us--the only Americans at the hostel--by fellow travelers from around the world. We cut our trip short, feeling a strong urge to get back to our homeland. Before arriving on American soil, however, I was struck by the condolences and support offered on signs along the highway, in front yards, outside restaurants—"We're with you in spirit." "Stay strong." "Our prayers are with you." In the midst of our sea of chaos, we felt supported by a net of human kindness, which only grew stronger after we arrived home and our nation united.

Now, ten years later, many of us feel disconnected and vulnerable. We're angry and divided. Our economy is tenuous. We've lost trust in our government and we're disgusted with politicians. Our homes are worth less, and our retirement accounts have shriveled. Unemployment is sky high and the middle class dwindles as the rich get richer. We worry about the environment and the life our children and grandchildren will inherit. It's easy to feel hopeless. According to a recent Newsweek report, the biggest threat to America isn't even terrorism, but the wrath of Mother Nature. We need only look to recent earthquakes, severe flooding, intense hurricanes, droughts and wildfires to see the evidence.

Regardless of the direction from which the next disaster comes, it's time to realize that they whoever we perceive they to be may not be able to save us. We need to save ourselves. What better place is there to learn and practice the skills needed than in our small rural communities where we already know and care for each other? We need to ask ourselves some tough questions:

- Are we willing to do what it takes to care for one another as members of the human family?
- Are we healthy and fit enough to carry a pack filled with essentials uphill over a distance of a mile or more in the event of a tsunami?
- Do we have a three-day emergency kit in our car and home, an emergency plan and First Aid and CPR training? (Training is coming up in Nehalem & Manzanita this month & next.)
- What are we doing to build a strong community?

I think it's important to keep our spirits healthy and strong as well. We all need little victories to keep us going, and now's a good time to savor the gifts of summer—the joys of family, friends, play and travel. It's time to remember what contentment and wonder feels like, to bear in mind the patience we developed in waiting for those tomatoes.

- Do we really see the people around us, listen to them and reach out a helping hand?
- Do we have a network of friends and support?
- Know our neighbors?
- Are we striving to live from a place of openness and understanding rather than skepticism or hatred?

A cell phone call on September 11, 2001 records the message:

I love you, I love you.

That is all that has ever mattered.

Live your full life and I will always be with you.

Live your full life--a mandate worth remembering. Human history will always be filled with uncertainty and tragedy. Now, more than ever, it's time to be the change we want to see in the world, to embrace hope once again and be ready for whatever comes next. It's time to become fit in body, mind and spirit. Most importantly, it's time to take the lessons we've learned from our struggles and move forward knowing we can absolutely count on the instinctive resilience of our human hearts. Is there any other way to live?