

## PMS —the Paranoid Mind Set

*"The great danger in the world today is that the very feeling and conception of what is a human being might well be lost."*

Richard Wright to Jean Paul Sartre, circa 1940

in *Richard Wright, a Biography*, by Constance Webb © 1968 (?)\—

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*We must be prepared.*

*The best defense is offense.*

*Problems emerge from the predominance of private industry; but always, above all, most important is that we must be prepared.*

*nys the previous president said, Be afraid, be very afraid.*

All of the those sentences should be in quotes, of course. The paranoid mind set. Some country could attack the cyber net. We are being attacked by industries doing industrial spying. We stoke up fears that some bad people are invading banks, government offices, the five-sided building. What if my computer were broken into and someone steal the passwords for my two bank accounts, or my credit card. My bank accounts aren't big enough to interest anyone, and the credit card calls me if the charge is over a thousand dollars. I actually check my monthly statements. The government — I don't know what office, who — already reads my emails, or listens to phone calls to my sister in the Netherlands. I don't have anything to hide, so I don't fear. What if someone would sneak, have a look inside our computers.

They might see the truth... And then?

If the internet would go dead, I would regret, but I would get over it. It would be an impairment if I could not telephone anyone, and nobody could call me. Even that I could survive with ease. Most days nobody calls me anyway and I have not forgotten that for the first third of my life I did not have a phone number or a phone and life was lived as we lived it.

It strikes me that this fear of being attacked is one of those prophecies that prove themselves. We already know that in the first ten years of this century it happened. In retaliation we attacked a country, and then another country for various "reasons," all of them hiding the real reasons for those wars that may well be simply oil. The naiveté of those wars, how they were sold and how they were carried out is not comforting. We will suffer the consequences for a long time, if there is a long time. They did not help how the rest of the world thinks of us; very obviously the previous president cared not about that. The current president seems to have thought he could wish it away, but now it looks more as if he continues the same PMS. After a year and a half he still does not know how to deal with our immediate past history. Not dealing with it carries the price of the continuation of many of the wrongs we never acknowledged.

Never ever have I been the least bit interested in politics, or government — until now that it seems it has been taken away from us, "We the people." I used to think politics to be unwise and politicians not to be trusted. Mostly true, I suspect, and the very reason that we are in such a bad way today.

PMS, also called fear-mongering, has proven to be magic, every time the doldrums come around, our various wars hit a speed bump, a secret report, or a new video of Osama son of Laden — “the experts are still undecided whether it is...?” — but we surge more weapons, more troops, more drones with the greatest of ease. Fear trumps good sense. How could we not fear when the people who should know, the people we elected to know, tell us to be afraid, very afraid.

I have learned that I cannot live with a sort of paranoia, fear for some unknown enemy. Fear wears me out and seriously spoils my days. As the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr said, “*I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.*”

Does anyone remember this:

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I must not fear.  
Fear is the mind-killer.  
Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration.  
I will face my fear.  
I will permit it to pass over me and through me.  
And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path.  
Where the fear has gone there will be nothing.  
Only I will remain.

The Litany of Fear, Bene Geserit rite, from *DUNE*, by Frank Herbert, © 1965 ---the suspense sci-fi tale that we all read in the 70s, now of course forgotten.

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That has always worked for me. I face that the world is full of people who plot how to do us harm. Dangerous as nature can be dangerous. In a storm a tree can fall on my house, I can get hit by lightning. There probably are people who stay up in the night to figure ever more ways to intercept missiles or find out and stop whatever who we now call terrorists plan.

I must let that go. I need my sleep and much prefer friendly dreams.

To tell the truth I am more angry than afraid. It seems inevitable that our overreacting to the destruction of two buildings (and a third that pulverized into its own footprint all by itself) with the destruction of two countries and inevitably recruiting more terrorists. Why do we think we must fight with enormous armies and unmanned planes, and always prisons where what we do to *them* is in the dark, invisible. An obscene asymmetry. “Depleted uranium” bullets, a million bombs dropped from airplanes, manned and unmanned, against peasants who only yesterday exchanged their muskets for an AK47.

I’ve lost respect for the yellers and screamers who wallow in their power, paid for by banks-too-big-to-fail. The party of Hell No, and other parties, so-called blue dogs,

all undoubtedly paid by the same banks. They got their priorities backward: bailing out banks but let the people fend for themselves. As I heard one official say, "after all this is a capitalist country, the market will find a balance eventually." And that imaginary market is more important than we the people? Someone coined the expression casino banking. That is why we, down here, don't see much change, just the slippery slope: the banks are betting with money, not investing it in small businesses as that market theory tells us they ought to do. The banks play their games. So, what market are we talking about? I too can bet that soon there will be two serious disasters, one close after the other. So serious and so close together that what is left of our system will be hopelessly powerless to do much of anything. And then I also bet that I am wrong. That way I cannot lose, right?

I know very little about the millions of laws, but now I know that States, by law, cannot have debts. But the Federal Government can have as much debt as they want. They print money.

Americans do not like the idea of classes — sounds too much like Marx — so, we have only Middle Class. I have no idea what "middle class" means, who is and who isn't. But I know there is another class, at the very top of the heap. The one percent who own half the wealth of this country. And our system for the past many years has shifted from "Government for and by the people" to that magical Free Market, which allows the very rich to pay no more than 15% tax, and those in the middle class up to 35% -- and more, of course, when you add local and State taxes.

Today, all but two (or one?) of the States are in debt, but cannot be, so they cut money for schools, teachers, infrastructure, etc. That assures that the next generation will be more "dumbed down."

Maybe I must pay more attention to what it is I am supposed to fear. Who or what is it we are told to fear? Osama bin Laden? Come now, he is one man, with some dedicated and smart members of his group. He and his group are criminals, and should be dealt with as criminals. He could not be the reason for sending two huge armies to occupy two countries at a cost of a trillion dollars. But evidently the new president thinks that undoing a terrible mistake is equally to be feared. He talks beautiful talk but he has not explained why he cannot, or does not want to, undo the great mistakes done before. In fact under his leadership drone attacks have increased threefold.

I used to smile when I thought of the man or woman who had to listen to my phone calls to and from my sister who lives in Europe, in our own mixture of four languages. All we talk about is how unpleasant it is to get old, or how we each are unappreciated (enough), and about children and grandchildren. We don't have any state secrets to share or even knowledge of a suspicious person. If that is indeed what my government is doing, what a waste. Sifting through millions, billions of phone calls and emails in the hope of finding a "pattern" I read somewhere. They did not clarify what that meant. Probably it is not a man or woman who does all that listening, but computers. And somehow all that is necessary to protect us from bad people, preferably to fight who we designate as bad people overseas.

As a psychologist I know that making masses of people paranoid, and continuing to make them more paranoid, damages our minds. It makes our individual lives painfully difficult — as if we did not have worries enough.

I've been extremely lucky to have spent many years in "dangerous" countries. Parts of the world with real jungles, snakes — some of them poisonous —, I've known tigers in the wild, elephants, I've been exposed to strange diseases. We learned early never to be afraid because wild animals sense your feelings.

If you run away in a panic, they'll come after you. But if I face them with interest, curiosity, hello how are you, they face me. And that's it. Tigers and many other large animals have the uncanny ability to "disappear." That is they melt in the background, become invisible. I've only once faced a cobra, a very poisonous snake, who stood up spreading his "cheeks," we did a little dance, but I did not take my eyes off his eyes. He slowly sank down and slowly, then in a rush, disappeared in the underbrush. I've faced armed soldiers, somehow "knowing" that they could not, would not, shoot. Fear truly is a mind-killer, the little death.

The world would be a different place if we had not started two wars against two countries to punish nineteen individuals. We have made many more than nineteen enemies. Rather than branding some group of people a "terrorist organization" we could have watched and waited. We could even have talked with them, trying to understand each other. Try to stand in each other's shoes — Ooh, I learned that is considered un-American.

Now I cannot quite get over the thought that perhaps all that fear-mongering was not meant to scare an enemy but to control We the People. Scared people are much easier to fool than people who can think for themselves, people who don't see the world in terms of us and them, people who feel comfortable with nuances.

And meanwhile an oil volcano is spoiling (destroying) a large body of water, the wetlands around it, and the livelihood of many thousands of people. Banks too big to fail are making money betting against themselves with money that should have gone to create green jobs. A war all the experts seem to agree can never be "won" is eating up money by the billions and people on all sides. The huge multi-national corporations have been declared persons who can vote with money while ignoring global warming and climate change.

It's going to be a hot summer.

robert wolff, 7 june 2010