

**“LIVING WITH FEAR”****5-6-07****REV. SUZANNE PAUL**

**I'M NOT SURE WHEN IT HIT ME – I AM EITHER VERY DENSE OR JUST VERY OPTIMISTIC. BUT SOMETIME IN THE LAST MONTH OR SO, I FINALLY CAME TO THE REALIZATION THAT “FEAR” HAD REALLY BECOME A PART OF OUR EVERY DAY EXISTENCE. MUCH LIKE URBAN SPRAWL, ROAD CONSTRUCTION AND A DEPLETING OZONE LAYER – FEAR WAS NOW AN EVERY DAY EMOTION FOR ALMOST ALL AMERICANS – INCLUDING ME AT SOME LEVEL AS WELL. WEBSTER DEFINES FEAR AS “A DISTRESSING EMOTION AROUSED BY IMPENDING DANGER, EVIL, OR PAIN – WHETHER THE THREAT IS REAL OR IMAGINED.” IT FINALLY DAWNED ON ME THAT THE THREAT OF DANGER, EVIL AND/OR PAIN HAD BECOME MUCH MORE REAL FOR MOST OF US THAN I WANTED TO ADMIT OR ACKNOWLEDGE. IT WAS A SUBJECT THAT WHEN DISCUSSED BY MY CHILDREN, I NEVER COULD NEVER QUITE GET MY HEAD AROUND. I THINK THAT I HONESTLY THOUGHT THAT THEY WERE OVERREACTING MANY TIMES AND THAT WE ARE SO MUCH SAFER THAN THE MEDIA WOULD LEAD US TO BELIEVE. I THOUGHT THAT THE MEDIA WAS WORKING THE CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES INTO SOME KIND OF “FEAR” FRENZY – THAT WASN'T AN ACCURATE OR AT LEAST NOT ACCURATE TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY REPORTED. I HAVE BECOME ACUTELY AWARE OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS THAT PEOPLE YOUNGER THAN MYSELF, ARE CAUTIOUS IN AREAS OF THEIR LIFE THAT I HAD NOT EVEN CONSIDERED. CASE IN POINT: MY CHILDREN, WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG, NEVER WORE BICYCLE HELMETS. WE LIVED ON A DIRT ROAD AND THEY HAD THEIR FARE SHARE OF WIPE OUTS – I PATCHED UP LOTS OF BLOODY KNEES AND ELBOWS AND A FEW HEAD BUMPS AND NUMEROUS BRUISES. I NEVER GAVE IT MUCH THOUGHT. I WOULD WARN THEM TO BE CAREFUL AND SEND THEM ON THEIR MERRY WAY. MY BROTHER AND I GREW UP IN VIRTUALLY THE SAME NEIGHBORHOOD AND I REMEMBER SOME REALLY HORRIFIC FALLS OF MY OWN. THE MOST ONEROUS BEING THE TIME I ROAD MY BIKE ON**

**OUR STREET SHORTLY AFTER IT HAD BEEN “OILED.” WHO REMEMBERS WHEN THEY USED TO OIL DIRT ROADS AT THE BEGINNING OF SUMMER TO KEEP THE DUST DOWN. MY MOTHER WARNED ME NOT TO RIDE ON THE ROAD UNTIL THE OIL HAD HAD A CHANCE TO SETTLE – BUT I DIDN’T LISTEN. WITH NO HELMET AND WEARING SHORTS AND A SLEEVELESS BLOUSE – OFF I WENT. WELL, THIS RIDE DIDN’T END WELL. I SLID IN THE OIL BEFORE CRASHING INTO THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. I WAS COVERED IN OIL FROM HEAD TO TOE WITH GRAVEL IMPEDED IN MY NUMEROUS CUTS AND SCRAPES. I REMEMBER WALKING MY BIKE HOME, BLEEDING AND CRYING ALL THE WAY. WHEN I GOT HOME – MY MOTHER WAS NOT PLEASED WITH ME TO SAY THE LEAST. I REMEMBER SITTING IN THE LAUNDRY TUB IN THE BASEMENT – AS MY MOTHER TRIED TO CLEAN MY WOUNDS AND WASH AWAY THE BLACK OIL FROM EVERY INCH OF MY BODY. IT WAS NOT A PRETTY SIGHT. FALLS, CUTS, BRUISES, BROKEN BONES AND STITCHES SEEMED TO BE A PART OF CHILDHOOD WHEN I WAS A KID, AND NONE OF US SEEMED VERY TRAUMATIZED BY ANY OF IT. WE STILL DID RECKLESS KID STUFF. I SOLD GIRL SCOUT COOKIES AND CHRISTMAS CARDS DOOR TO DOOR AS A KID – I REMEMBER GOING TO MANY HOMES OF PEOPLE THAT I DID NOT KNOW AND BEING INVITED INTO THE HOUSE WHILE THEY GOT THEIR MONEY. ALL MY FRIENDS DID IT TOO – I DON’T EVEN REMEMBER BEING TOLD TO “BE CAREFUL.” AND, OFF I WOULD GO TO PLAY FOR THE DAY AND THE ONLY INSTRUCTIONS WERE TO BE HOME BY DINNER TIME. A REALLY BAD THING HAPPENED WHEN I WAS IN THE FOURTH GRADE. ONE OF THE GIRLS IN MY CLASS WAS KILLED AFTER SCHOOL BY A YOUNG BOY IN HER NEIGHBORHOOD. HE HAD A HISTORY OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND HIS MOTHER FELT SHE COULD CARE FOR HIM BETTER AT HOME THAN KEEPING HIM IN AN INSTITUTION. APPARENTLY HE APPROACHED MY FRIEND, KATHY, AND TRIED TO KISS HER. SHE TOLD HIM TO STOP AND THAT SHE WOULD TELL HER DAD IF HE DIDN’T LEAVE HER ALONE. HE PANICKED AND STABBED HER TO DEATH. IT WAS A HUGE DEAL IN FARMINGTON IN 1955 – AND ALTHOUGH ALL OF US WERE SHOCKED AND SADDENED – I DON’T REMEMBER THAT IT**

**FRIGHTENED ME AND MADE ME AFRAID OF PEOPLE IN ANY WAY. THE BOY WAS FIFTEEN YEARS OLD AND SENTENCED TO A MENTAL HOSPITAL, WHERE HE STILL LIVES TO THIS VERY DAY. I THINK WE ALL THOUGHT IT WAS A FLUKE – A FREAK ACCIDENT AND THAT NOTHING REALLY BAD LIKE THAT WOULD EVER HAPPEN AGAIN TO ANY OF US. EVEN OUR PARENTS UNDERPLAYED THE MAGNITUDE OF THAT EVENT – THERE WAS NO GRIEF COUNSELING, JUST LOTS OF PRAYING, AS I RECALL. THROUGHOUT THE 1960’S AND 70’S – I WATCHED WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD, UNBELIEVABLE EVENTS. ASSASSINATION OF A PRESIDENT, A CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER AND A CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. A WAR THAT COST US 58,000 YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN. RIOTING IN THE CITY OF MY BIRTH AND THE SUBSEQUENT DEMISE OF DETROIT AS I HAD KNOWN IT. COUNTLESS NATURAL AND MAD MADE DISASTERS, ALMOST TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION. BUT THROUGHOUT IT ALL, I WAS NEVER REALLY AFRAID. I ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT AT SOME LEVEL I WAS BEING PROTECTED. MY GOVERNMENT PROTECTED ME BECAUSE I WAS A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. I WAS PROTECTED BY MY FAMILY, MY NEIGHBORHOOD, MY LOCAL POLICE, MY GOVERNMENT. I HAD NOTHING TO FEAR – AS WINSTON CHURCHILL HAD TOLD MY PARENTS BEFORE ME “WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR BUT FEAR ITSELF.” AND THEN SOMETHING HAPPENED. I CAN’T LOOK TO ANY ONE EVENT AND SAY “THAT WAS THE TURNING POINT” BUT LIFE, AS I KNEW IT, HAD CHANGED. MY CHILDREN SAW IT BEFORE ME. IT STARTED WHEN THEY WERE IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL. THE FEAR FACTOR STARTED WITH THE DANGERS OF SMOKING. I HAD SMOKED FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS AND I LIKED IT. EVERYONE I KNEW SMOKED AND WE ALL ENJOYED IT – BUT NOW OUR KIDS WERE COMING HOME AND TELLING US SMOKING WAS DANGEROUS TO OUR HEALTH – AND THEIR HEALTH. THEIR ABSOLUTE FEAR OF THEIR PARENTS GETTING LUNG CANCER FROM SMOKING BECAME THE HOT TOPIC AT THE DINNER TABLE EVERY NIGHT. EVERY TIME I LIT A CIGARETTE – THEY WOULD LECTURE ME ON THE DANGER LURKING IN EVERY PUFF. TO SAY THEY PUT THE FEAR OF GOD INTO ME ABOUT MY SMOKING MIGHT SEEM A LITTLE**

**OVERSTATED – BUT TO EASE THEIR MINDS – I QUIT. AND, OF COURSE, THEY WERE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT. I HAVE NEVER REGRETTED THAT DECISION. BUT IT WAS FEAR THAT MOTIVATED THEM TO ACTION – AND THE DANGERS OF SMOKING BECAME THE FIRST OF MANY, MANY THINGS TO BE FEARFUL OF. WHAT SEEMED TO ME TO COME OUT OF NO WHERE, MANY THINGS IN LIFE WERE NOW VIEWED AS DANGEROUS, EVIL OR HAD THE POTENTIAL TO INFLICT GREAT BODILY HARM. SEAT BELTS, ONCE A LUXURY IN CARS, NOW BECAME MANDATORY – I WON'T EVEN GO INTO THE WAY I USED TO TAKE MY KIDS IN THE CAR BEFORE SEATBELTS, AIRBAGS AND CHILD SEATS. IT IS TRULY A WONDER THEY SURVIVED. ALL OF THESE SAFETY ISSUES THAT WE NOW TAKE FOR GRANTED, DIDN'T EXIST 25 OR 30 YEARS AGO. ALL THE SAFETY EQUIPMENT FOR SPORTS ACTIVITIES IS A RELATIVELY NEW PHENOMENON. IN A RECENT ARTICLE IN NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE ENTITLED “WE PROTECT KIDS FROM EVERYTHING BUT FEAR” PAULA SPENCER THE MOTHER OF FOUR WRITES: “FEAR IS THE NEW FUEL OF THE AMERICAN MOM. IF IT'S NOT FEAR OF HER CHILD BECOMING OBESE, IT'S THE FEAR OF FALLING BEHIND, MISSING OUT ON A SPORTS SCHOLARSHIP OR WINDING UP WITH A THIN COLLEGE REJECTION ENVELOPE. LAST SUMMER WHILE I WAS LOAFING IN FRONT OF THE TV WITH MY KIDS, THE MOST BENIGN THINGS MORPHED INTO MENACES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE SUN: LONG-SLEEVED, UV-PROTECTIVE SWIMSUITS WERE ALL THE RAGE AT MY NEIGHBORHOOD POOL. THE WATER WASN'T SAFE EITHER: AND GOOD-BYE COTTON CANDY AND HOT DOGS. THE PLAY GROUND ISN'T SAFE DESPITE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS AND THEN THERE IS THE DANGER OF MYSPACE AND ON-LINE PREDATORS.” IS IT ANY WONDER THAT MRS. SPENCER SAYS THAT “FEAR IS THE NEW FUEL OF THE AMERICAN MOM.” WHEN I WAS THE MOTHER OF YOUNG CHILDREN, I NEVER OWNED HAND SANITIZER – I'M NOT SURE IT EVEN EXISTED. NOW I HAVE SANITIZING WIPES IN MY PURSE AND MY CAR AT ALL TIMES. I HAVE LEARNED FROM MY CHILDREN THAT GERMS ARE THINGS TO BE FEARED AND THAT I MUST BE MORE VIGILANT REGARDING MY GRANDCHILDREN'S HEALTH. I DON'T DISAGREE – I GUESS THE WORLD IS**

**GERMIER THAN IT WAS YEARS AGO. GIVEN THE REALLY AWFUL STRAINS OF FLU THAT WE HAVE EXPERIENCED IN RECENT YEARS, THERE IS VALIDITY IN KEEPING OURSELVES SAFE FROM BACTERIA AND GERMS. THE FEAR OF CONTRACTING SOME AWFUL VIRUS OR FLU IS MOTIVATION ENOUGH TO KEEP THINGS CLEAN. THE BOTTOM LINE, AS REGRETFUL AS IT IS FOR ME TO ADMIT, OUR CHILDREN ARE NOT AS SAFE AS THEY USED TO BE. WE CANNOT SEND THEM TO SCHOOL COMPLETELY CONFIDENT THAT THEY WILL BE SAFE. SAFETY ISSUES, WHETHER THEY BE REGARDING THEIR HEALTH, OR THEIR VERY LIVES – ARE NO LONGER SOMETHING THAT WE CAN TAKE FOR GRANTED. THE PARENTS OF THE CHILDREN OF COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL OR VIRGINIA TECH WILL ATTEST TO THAT. WE MUST BE EVER MORE VIGILANT IN PROVIDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR CHILDREN –**

**AND NOW I COME TO THE GRAND-DADDY OF THEM ALL – SEPTEMBER 11, 2001. LOOKING BACK, I WONDER WHY IN THE WAKE OF 9/11 I STILL DIDN'T FEEL FEAR. I FELT SHOCK, HORROR, PAIN, AND SADNESS – BUT I DIDN'T FEEL FEAR. I THINK I WAS OLD ENOUGH BY THEN AND HAD EXPERIENCED SEVERAL REALLY SAD AND HORRIFYING EVENTS, THAT I DIDN'T OVER REACT TO 9/11. I WAS NOT SO NAÏVE THAT I DIDN'T THINK THAT BAD THINGS COULD HAPPEN TO US – TO AMERICA. AS PROTECTED AND PRIVILEGED AS WE ARE, BAD PEOPLE CAN STILL PERPETRATE BAD THINGS ON US. THEY CAN STILL FIND WAYS AROUND OUR SECURITY SYSTEMS AND DO INCREDIBLE HARM TO LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE. BUT IN THE WAKE OF THAT EVENT – I STILL FELT CONFIDENT THAT OUR GOVERNMENT – THAT THE PEOPLE THAT WE ENTRUST OUR SAFETY TO – WOULD ABSOLUTELY MAKE SURE SOMETHING LIKE THAT COULD NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN. WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED IN THE INTERVENING SEVEN YEARS, IS THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN SO INEPT AS TO BE ALMOST LAUGHABLE, IF IT WASN'T SO PITIFUL. I SUSPECT ALMOST EVERYONE IN THIS ROOM HAS TRAVELED SOMEWHERE IN THE PAST SEVEN YEARS SINCE 9/11 – AND MOST PROBABLY BY PLANE. WHAT PASSES FOR AIRPORT SECURITY IS JUST PATHETIC. HARRY**

**COOK, FORMER RELIGION EDITOR OF THE DETROIT FREE PRESS WRITES: “WHAT IS TRYING ABOUT THE INCONVENIENCE OF AIRPORT SECURITY IS NOT PARTICULARLY WELL PAID PERSONS HALF-HEARTEDLY POKING THROUGH OTHER PEOPLES’ BELONGINGS, HEARING BUT APPARENTLY NOT LISTENING TO THE INCESSANT BEEP OF METAL DETECTORS BUZZING AND FLASHING ABOUT SOMEBODY’S LOOSE CHANGE. A FRAIL DOWAGER WITH A KNEE OR HIP REPLACEMENT BEING THOROUGHLY FRISKED WITH A BEEPING, BLINKING WAND BY AN OFFICER MAKING WISE CRACKS TO A FELLOW WORKER ABOUT THIS ‘SUCKY JOB.’ ONE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT, AT SOME LEVEL, THE PROCEDURE IS INTENDED TO KEEP LOADED FIREARMS, LIVE GRENADES AND SWITCHBLADES OFF AIRCRAFT. BUT IS IT TOO CYNICAL TO CONNECT THAT PROCEDURE TO THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION’S MODUS OPERANDI OF MAINTAINING A LEVEL OF FEAR SUFFICIENT, AT LEAST IN THE MINDS OF ITS POLITICAL STRATEGISTS, TO RECRUIT CHEERLEADERS FOR THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN IRAQ. GEORGE W. BUSH AND HIS HANDLERS, AGAINST THE EXPRESSED WILL OF THE ELECTORATE, CONTINUE TO PROSECUTE A WAR AGAINST A DIFFUSE ENEMY IN IRAQ ON THE LAME PRETENSE THAT IT IS DOING SO TO PREVENT TERRORISTS FROM SWIMMING ASHORE ON CAPE COD OR LONG ISLAND. NOTHING REMINDS PEOPLE MORE THE BOX CUTTERS OF 9/11 THAN A SHOELSS WALK THROUGH AIRPORT SECURITY, POCKETS TURNED OUT WHILE WATCHING CELL PHONES AND LAPTOPS DISAPPEAR BEHIND THE CURTAIN. THIS IS SO OBVIOUSLY PART OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FEAR.”**

**THE “PSYCHOLOGY OF FEAR” – IF THIS ADMINISTRATION HAS DONE NOTHING ELSE WELL – THEY HAVE SUCCEEDED IN MAKING JUST ABOUT EVERY CITIZEN AND RESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES “FEARFUL.” I ADMIT IT NOW – I AM FEARFUL – I AM LEARNING TO “LIVE WITH FEAR” – WE ARE ALL LEARNING TO “LIVE WITH FEAR.” WHETHER OUR FEAR IS REAL OR IMAGINED – WE OWN IT AND IT BELONGS TO US. THANK YOU VERY MUCH, PRESIDENT BUSH. IF IT WAS YOUR INTENTION, TO DIVIDE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE BY KEEPING US FEARFUL OF ONE ANOTHER – YOU HAVE BEEN A ROUSING**

**SUCCESS. BUT AS IN THE MOVIE “NETWORK” – I FOR ONE, “AM MAD AS HELL AND I’M NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANY MORE.” I REFUSE TO LET FEAR DOMINATE MY LIFE. I WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOME THINGS FROM MY PERCEIVED “GOOD OLD DAYS” ARE NO LONGER A REALITY. I WILL WEAR MY SEAT BELT, AND A SAFETY HELMET WHEN I RIDE MY BICYCLE AND CERTAINLY A HELMET WHEN I’M ON THE MOTORCYCLE. I WILL KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON MY GRANDSONS WHEN WE ARE OUT IN PUBLIC AND DUTIFULLY KEEP THEIR HANDS AND MINE CLEAN. I WILL NEVER, EVER SMOKE ANOTHER CIGARETTE AS LONG AS I SHALL LIVE. AND, I WILL SUBJECT MYSELF TO THE INDIGNITIES OF AIRPORT SECURITY BECAUSE I WON’T DENY MYSELF THE JOY OF TRAVELING. BUT I ALSO WILL NEVER BE SO INNOCENT AGAIN TO THINK THAT ANYONE CAN COMPLETELY PROTECT OR KEEP ME SAFE. I WILL DO THE BEST I CAN TO KEEP OUT OF HARMS WAY – BUT I DO HAVE A HEALTHY RESPECT FOR THE THINGS THAT I SHOULD BE FEARFUL OF. THE EXPRESSION “I LOVE MY COUNTRY BUT FEAR MY GOVERNMENT” HAS TAKEN ON NEW MEANING. I AM FEARFUL OF MY GOVERNMENT RIGHT NOW – I THINK WE ALL SHOULD BE. BUT IT IS NOT A LOST CAUSE – GOVERNMENTS, LIKE PEOPLE, CAN BE BETTER AND DO BETTER. IN THE DAYS TO COME, MAY WE ALL REMAIN MORE VIGILANT AND WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF, AND IT WILL, MAY WE BE PREPARED TO MAKE SOME SIGNIFICANT CHANGES THAT WILL AFFECT OUR CHILDREN AND OUR CHILDREN’S CHILDREN. SO BE IT.**