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Wednesday afternoon, just a week and a day after the Tuesday when everything in America changed, I was walking through downtown Chicago, trying to catch a train. I was hurrying to pick up my daughter from school, and it was starting to drizzle.

I was thinking about the previous week, how excruciating it had been for everyone I knew. The weekend was especially surreal: I attended a beautiful family wedding, then had to leave early to co-host an interview on post-traumatic stress disorder.

One of those is “getting back to normal”; I’m just not sure which.

I was thinking that we had talked on our weekend radio programs about good coming out of evil. After years of road rage and divisiveness, it seemed like Americans, in the face of this shared trauma, were once again taking care of each other. Right then I walked into a confrontation between a pedestrian and a bike messenger, which went something like this:

Pedestrian: “Did you say something to me?”

Guy on bike: “Yeah, I said, ‘Get your (bleep) out of the (bleep)ing street.’”

“Oh, yeah? Well, why don’t you come back here and say it to my face, you (bleep).”

“Yeah? Why don’t you go *(bleep) your (bleep)ing (bleep)?*”

Hey, is there still time to order more “United We Stand” banners?

I guess I knew last week’s solidarity was a unique moment; I just didn’t think we’d get back to the old rhythms so quickly. An hour after the president’s speech, I was already getting the e-mail messages: Support the government or you’re a traitor. Question the government or you’re a fascist. Root out terrorists no matter what. Preserve civil liberties or we’re just as bad as the terrorists. Go to war. Don’t go to war. Back and forth. And that’s not even counting the

Here in America

Written by Garry Lee Wright

Tuesday, 25 September 2001 18:00

stuff about Nostradamus. One thing everyone had in common: They were angry. In fact, one commentator introduced the president's speech by saying he would "channel that anger." But channeling anger is something you do in therapy, or with a tennis racket. Anger isn't helpful when you need to be clear-headed – which we need now like never before. I believe the president knows that, even if commentators don't.

I grew up in a house in which anger was poisonous. The powers that be threw their frustrations at each other, and sometimes threw furniture, too. I hope the house we all share doesn't go that same route. Debate is necessary in our society; no one knew that better than the Founding Fathers. But we can't tear each other apart having that debate. Everyone agrees that we need to right a wrong; but some of us are still grappling with what those words really represent. Let's not turn into two frustrated guys in a crosswalk getting there.

I am a patriot, and I'll pray that the men and women in uniform who are now at risk get home safely. I'll pray that no more innocent people are harmed in this terrible conflict. Above all, I'll pray for the wisdom to see how, once and for all, we can put an end to violence in the world that our children will inherit.

The president said we should live our lives – excellent advice. One small way I'll do that is to take a daily break, if only a short one, from news. I haven't done that since last Tuesday's infamy, and I'm realizing that I need some balance if I'm going to be clear-headed in the days ahead. So I'll turn off the TV for a while, put away the papers, and hug my kids. The president said to do that, too.

I'm also going to give myself permission to find some humor in my life again, which is the one way I personally keep from going crazy.

Paranoia, you know, is contagious. In a high state of anxiety the other night, I sat down at my computer to log on to the Internet, and the screen suddenly went berserk. I was sure I had been hacked: Those terrorists were in my office! Whom should I call first? The service provider? The police? The FBI?

That's when I realized I had dropped a stapler on my keyboard.

Hang in there, and be well today.