

REFUSE

TO BE

AFRAID

Free yourself. Dream.

...

B.W. Richardson

and Warren Bluhm

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Refuse to Be Afraid eBook

Version 1.1

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Who It Is

Brian Wilson Richardson is the pseudonym of an award-winning journalist from New Jersey who has spent more than three decades making a modest (different) name for himself in one of the other American states.

When not writing and journaling, he lives quietly in a house in the woods with his life's mate and a variety of furry and fishy creatures.

He is the author of *The Imaginary Bomb* and *Preserve the Embers; Stoke the Fire* and editor of a version of *Thomas Paine's Letters to the Citizens of the United States*. The latter two are available as free eBooks at his blog, *Montag ... and the clocks were striking thirteen*, which can be found at bwrichardson.com.

Warren Bluhm is the real name of an award-winning journalist from Wisconsin who has served as B.W.'s voice in the podcast version of *The Imaginary Bomb* and has a few things to say himself about fear. He is the author of *The Adventures of Myke Phoenix* and *Wildflower Man*.

All of these books are available from Richardson & Bluhm publishers at <http://stores.lulu.com/wpbluhm>. For more information see the back of this eBook.

Et Cetera

This eBook may be distributed freely to anyone. But you may do so only if the book remains unchanged. To contact the authors, e-mail bwrmontag@yahoo.com or wpbluhm@netnet.net.

Of waking in the night
to find my life was wasted,
Of thinking as I die
of all the things I've never tasted,
I've been afraid —
But I won't be anymore.

I've been worried if I step outside,
I'll have to take a breath.
I've been worried if I care too much,
someday I'll confront death.
I've been afraid —
But I refuse to be afraid anymore.

A time comes now and then
when it's time to look around,
assess your dreams to see which fly
and which are shattered on the ground.
I've been afraid —
But I won't be anymore.

Everyone who's ever seen the sky
is bound to feel some rain,
and if you never reach that high,
it's just a lonelier kind of pain.
I've been afraid —
But I refuse to be afraid anymore.

All of the days of my life,
I've waited for the night;
All of the ways of my life
I've hidden from the light.
So many times I've yearned to step outside
and couldn't reach the door —
I was afraid,
But I refuse to be afraid anymore.
I need to open that door,
and I won't be afraid anymore.

w.p. bluhm
1992, 1995

Most things I worry about never happen anyway.

Tom Petty

Introduction:

The fear

A funny thing happened on my way to writing a book called *Refuse to Be Afraid*: I stopped taking my own advice.

It has been my experience that fear has become the motivating factor in this contemporary world of ours. Life is portrayed as a maelstrom of forces beyond the power of the individual to tame. Terrorists lurk on every street corner seeking to strike fear into our hearts and destroy our way of life. Odd chemicals seeping into the air and water threaten to poison us or raise the temperature of the world to the point where, again, our way of life is threatened.

But the terrifying things aren't all so world-shifting and broad. Gangs roam urban streets and commit violence daily (pay no attention to those reports that suggest violent crime is on the decrease). Chemical additives in our food cause unhealthy and potentially fatal changes in our body chemistry. If you get sick you may not be able to afford your care; thousands already are being denied the treatment they need. The economy is so shaky it could collapse at any moment — or at the very least your employer might be forced to lay you off.

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Politicians tap into these fears and present themselves and/or their political party as the safe and sane solution to the troubles that plague our nation. The solution to these fears is very often a restriction on freedom: After all, the safest place in the world is inside a cage, where no one can reach through the bars to harm you.

The private sector works the same way: Advertisements address a scary thought and then offer you a product that can solve it. Heartburn getting you down? Having trouble sleeping? Having trouble, err, loving? Ask your doctor to prescribe this pill for you.

We don't even need much help to get scared. We've all heard of the flight-or-fight instinct: When presented with something scary, we either run to safety or — usually if there is no other recourse — stand and fight the menace. This instinct works on such a primal level that we can end up scaring ourselves into submission.

That's what happened to me, your humble host and writer. Thank you for downloading this eBook, by the way; you have provided proof that my fears were exaggerated.

As I attempted to assemble these thoughts into a coherent whole, I got scared. What if everyone already knows this stuff and I'm the last to figure it out? What if I help everyone overcome their fears and it turns out it was good to be afraid — after all, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean someone isn't really out to get you? What if I'm just writing a collection of clichés that no one can take seriously? What if — What if — ?

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What's the worst thing that can happen? That's usually the focus. And very occasionally, the worst-case scenario does happen. On Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes and slammed three of them into buildings in two U.S. cities. Everyone was killed in a successful attempt to prevent the fourth plane from doing the same.

Acting from fear, laws were passed and regulations set into place and cameras were installed, and blue-haired ladies and their belongings were searched before they could enter another plane — all of these draconian measures taken, all of this privacy invaded, to prevent such a horror from ever happening again.

And sure enough, for eight years now, it hasn't happened again. But why? Did the laws and regulations and cameras and humiliation of blue-haired ladies prevent further plane hijackings — or were the hijackings a rare event that weren't going to be repeated anyway?

Terrorism is the ultimate reason why we should refuse to be afraid, because more than anyone else, and by definition, a terrorist wants us fearful. If we are afraid, if we act primarily from fear (here comes a cliché), the terrorists have won.

But there are hundreds of smaller reasons not to fear — or more accurately, not to let your perfectly natural fear paralyze you. Fear keeps us from asking that pretty girl out for a date, it keeps us from starting that business or writing that book, it keeps us from standing up for ourselves — it keeps us from living the fullest life we can live!

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So, just as the words were starting to flow, just as the self-imposed deadline to produce this book was within my grasp, I became paralyzed with fear. Days went by, then weeks, then the deadline passed, and then one day on my blog, I confessed my fears.

Well, no, I didn't.

I started my blog in the summer of 2005. For reasons that don't matter anymore, I needed not to write using my "real" name. Brian Wilson had finally finished and released his masterpiece *Smile*, and he was on my mind a lot that summer, and I watched his glorious band perform *Smile* in person. My father's name is Richard. And so I became B.W. Richardson.

Three of the books that have most shaped my outlook and attitudes about fear are Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, George Orwell's *1984*, and Robert Heinlein's *The Moon is A Harsh Mistress*. The protagonist of Bradbury's book is Guy Montag; a friend suggested I call the blog "Montag." The surname is German for "Monday," and picking up on the theme of time, I took the blog's subtitle from the first line of *1984* and posted a Simon Jester drawing from *Mistress* in place of my profile portrait. And so was born "Montag ... and the clocks were striking thirteen."

It soon became clear that when I wrote about overcoming fear, the message resonated with my small cadré of readers. Before long I added "Refuse to be Afraid" to the banner. As I wrote about freedom, I began to see that liberty was an individual choice, not something granted from the

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outside, and so I added "Free yourself." And finally, I realized that dreams can only be made real by someone who has overcome his or her fears and become free. And so now the banner reads:

Refuse to be afraid. Free yourself. Dream.

Time went on, and I decided to assemble these thoughts into book form. That brought me to the day in early summer 2008 when I let my fear paralyze me. And that's the day when I didn't confess my fears in the blog.

Instead, I wrote:

Of course the book will be late.

I had a cup of coffee with a friend the other day and told him I was writing a book called *Refuse to Be Afraid*. By the startled look in his eyes, I could tell that just the title strikes a chord.

These are timely times for such a message. The whole purpose of this drama we call a "presidential election" is to strike fear in the darkest depths of our souls, and offer one of these two champions as the solution. There are dark whisperings the price of gasoline and food will never go back down, and the economy will collapse within weeks. The news brings word daily of new deaths abroad, new murders on our urban streets, new layoffs in our businesses and industries, new sources of cancer in everyday foods and even in the air and water.

It's almost as if, perish the thought, our rulers had gathered in a room and decided that the little people needed a few lessons to remind them "why - they - need - us!" (A little *V for Vendetta* reference there, don't ya know.) Well, we don't need them, and the source of their fear is that we will figure that out, take charge of our

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own lives and lead a peaceful life based not on their tyranny and fear but on, oh I don't know, "My freedom has no limit except so far as I don't infringe on your freedom" or "Do unto others as you would have them do to you."

So of course a book called *Refuse to Be Afraid* could be like a hand grenade tossed into a crowded room — no, strike that, your honor — a book called *Refuse to Be Afraid* could be a lighted candle carried gently into a room that has been sealed off from the daylight for far too long. The reaction could be as, um, electric as my friend's.

And of course, then, the book will not be ready by July 15, 2008, my arbitrary deadline. I am, after all, the fellow who wrote *The Imaginary Bomb* in 1988 and first published it this past winter. My collaborator is the guy who wrote *The Adventures of Myke Phoenix* in the early '90s and *Wildflower Man* in April 1996. Only this year are they all out there. How could we possibly publish a new book on time?

I do expect to complete it soon. This has been the dominant theme of this blog and may be perhaps the most important advice I can pass along in these times, and I do want to say these things and have them be heard as soon as possible. It will, however, be late. I hope and pray it won't be too late — I'd say I'm "afraid" it may be too late, but that would be a bit ironic, don't you think? The fearful little man holding a candle in the dark, hands shaking and saying, "I'm afraid I'm too late, but we all need to refuse to be afraid"?

While you're waiting, feel free to stare at the seven words at the bottom of my banner until they sink in a bit: *Refuse to be afraid. Free yourself. Dream.* That's the whole book anyway.

It was a little ironic, because the fearful little man was holding a candle in the dark, hands shaking and saying, "I'm afraid ..." I wasn't quite ready to offer that full a confession, however.

My readers, bless them, were understanding. The first comment was

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from CK who said simply, "It has been my limited experience that books and babies arrive when they damn well please. It ain't the timing of the arrival that is important; it is the quality of the delivered."

I wish I could say the book flowed uninterrupted from that day until the moment you picked it up and started reading. Of course it didn't. I needed to hear the soothing message from my friends more than once, and I often needed to smile at myself in the mirror and say, "Refuse to be afraid. Free yourself. Dream."

But here it is at last, dear reader, and it's not a complete book but a glimpse of what might have been, and what could yet be. Upon discovering the potential of eBooks, we decided that getting the concepts out there was more important, for now, than completing the book. Thank you for investing your time into these little tidbits of (I hope and pray) wisdom that I've collected here.

You have more time than you realize, and you have less to fear than you realize, but if time seems short, let me summarize what I have to say in three points and seven words, again.

Refuse to be afraid. Free yourself. Dream.

If that's all you have time to read, you've now read the gist of what this book says, and thanks for visiting. If you have a little more time, turn the page and let's get rolling.

B.W. Richardson

Living in fear is an oxymoron.

Leonard Pitts Jr.

Introduction:

The cliff

I learned everything I need to know about fear on a steep hill overlooking Lake Champlain in Vermont. To my younger-than-10-years-old eyes, it looked more like a cliff than a hill; my impression was informed by the shale-like formations that reached to the beach and disappeared into the pine forest above. From the cabin our parents rented for a week every summer, the forest appeared to grow to the edge of a steep incline that I wouldn't be able to scale if I had to. And one day, I had to.

I can still smell the pine trees, I can still feel the soft but prickly bed of needles against my chest, and I still have a dark spot in my heart from the terror as I lost my tenuous grip on the hillside and plunged over the cliff.

Somewhere around 1960 when I was 7, my brothers and I had gone for a walk through the woods near the cabin. Along this stretch the pines

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clung precariously to the side of a steep hill, and through the brush you could see the stones and shale of the beach below.

The pine needles were thick underneath, and I underestimated how unstable the footing would be, wandering far down that nearly vertical hillside. Next thing I knew, I had slipped. The bed of needles was thick, so thick that I couldn't really get a grip, and when I did try to climb, every move I made caused me to slide a little farther down.

I was clinging to the side of the nearly vertical slope and unable to climb upward.

"Go get Dad," I heard my older brother say to my younger brother. "Hang on, War," he called. Hang on to what?

It didn't take long for gravity to do its work, and I slid to the edge and then fell, screaming, over the edge of the embankment to the beach below.

The drop from the edge of the cliff to the beach was four, maybe five feet.

When my brothers ran the long way around to the beach, they found me on the ground unharmed, laughing in relief, laughing at myself for being so terrified.

I think about that cliff a lot, when it seems that life has left me hanging by the fingernails. Fear of the unknown makes us scream. Taking on

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those fears makes us triumphant — perhaps it even makes us giggle uncontrollably.

This is a book about fear, the fear in your heart that makes you want to scream when you're not hanging on to keep from sliding off the side of what you think is a high cliff. It's a book about harnessing the fear long enough to take the plunge. You'll probably find, as I did, that the paralyzing fear of the drop is a whole lot worse than the actual fall.

It's a book that says refuse to be afraid and go ahead and take the leap.

Warren Bluhm

**The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed
(and hence clamorous to be led to safety)
by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins,
all of them imaginary.**

H.L. Mencken

1

It starts when you're always afraid

It is the summer of 2009 as I prepare this eBook. Parts of this chapter are from a blog entry I wrote in October 2005. As you read this, you're sometime in my future. But no doubt you're afraid of something, or you wouldn't be reading this.

It's nothing to be ashamed of. I'm scared, too. We all live with fear, ranging from little anxieties to sheer, stark-raving-mad, paralyzing terror, and everything in between. Fear of failure, fear of success, fear of getting started, fear of being stopped before we're finished, fear of what to do next after we're finished. Fear of hate, fear of love, fear of hating, fear of being loved. Fear of sickness, fear of health, fear of other people's habits, fear of our own.

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Fear of death.

We've come a long way from "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Turns out Franklin Roosevelt, who was so wrong about so many things, had that one thing right: Nothing can stop us as dead in the water as cold, stark fear.

From the amount of fear flying through the air on a daily basis, it seems a lot of people have figured out what a great motivator fear can be. Every action our government takes seems to be based on making you afraid and then giving you a false sense of security by tightening your chains. Many businesses thrive on making you afraid of something, then selling you escape or protection.

We are constantly reminded that terrorists would like to do worse things to us than simply fly airliners into crowded buildings — we're told they have suitcase bombs, poison gas and all sorts of other horrors waiting in store for us.

And once we're good and scared, we don't mind having cameras everywhere and screeners feeling us up when we want to enter public places.

After Katrina, we were afraid of hurricanes, but we were told "never fear," because Homeland Security and FEMA were given billions of dollars to shield us from the impact of the next big wind. Storm troopers on every corner in New Orleans made people feel so safe that now there's talk of sending in the military to enforce quarantines on the odd chance that

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avian flu mutates into a strain that affects humans, not just birds.

We're afraid that children will be molested, so we repeal the double-jeopardy law for "sexual predators" and keep them locked up after their prison terms expire. We're afraid of pain, so we put warning labels on everything that could possibly hurt us. We're afraid of cancer, so we verbally abuse anyone who smokes near us and get the city council, the state legislature and anyone who'll listen to ban smoking.

Fear sells, and if paranoia strikes deep enough, fear enslaves. That might not be heartburn, it might be acid reflux disease, but don't worry, here's a pill. Good Lord, what if something terrible happens to you while you're driving? Never fear, we have global positioning equipment and people standing by to find you wherever you may stray. What if the next terrorist, the next hurricane, or the next flu bug were to attack you? Never fear, we have troops at the ready to disarm you, oops, that is to say, ready to protect you.

In every political campaign, it seems, the issues are our fears. One candidate plays on our fear of being unable to make ends meet, of living from paycheck to paycheck, and the terror of what might happen if the paychecks stop coming, of what might happen to our loved ones if anything were to happen to us. Another candidate plays on our fear of those terrorists, of the people with difference faces than ours who want to destroy our way of life. Both candidates promise that if we will turn ourselves over to them, we will be safe and secure.

In the news as this book heads to press, a deep economic downturn is

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playing on fears in a palpable way. And politicians are reworking the health insurance industry, playing on the fear that we won't be able to gain access to care when we need it — or that we'll be bankrupted by the cost of the treatment we need. It seems like the one constant in life: There's always something to be scared of.

There's really only one place where you're totally secure: A jail cell. Surrounded by four walls with barred doors and windows, you can't be hurt. (We'll set aside your fear of earthquakes for the moment.) Government leaders who promise you safety from outside influences can only deliver by caging you — by stripping your liberty away, either one freedom at a time or all at once.

Benjamin Franklin was right, presuming he really said these words attributed to him: "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." What does that mean, in the end? It sounds good in a speech, but where was he going with it? Roosevelt himself manipulated fear of economic hard times into a redesign of the U.S. government, creating a taxpayer-financed safety net against another Depression. He trained generations to expect government to be the engine of the economy, changing the very structure of America.

It was a classic political bait and switch — he told people not to be afraid, then used their fears as a means to his political ends. That's a perfect example of why the only thing we have to fear is fear itself: Fear

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makes us susceptible to manipulation. We must refuse to be afraid, or rather, we must be on guard when we are afraid so that we are not deceived into actions we regret later.

And what is it, in the end that we are afraid of? Ultimately, we are afraid of death. No matter what our "quality of life," to use a well-worn term, we don't want to be not-alive.

We are afraid of dying, but you know what? Everybody does it. Nobody wants to die before "our time," But there are fates worse than death. One such fate is being afraid to live. Another is making security a higher priority than freedom.

You have no guarantee that you'll take another breath, no guarantee that when you woke up this morning you would see the sunset tonight. Don't be afraid of that thought; instead, let it liberate you and motivate you to live as fully as you can – and don't surrender your liberty for a false sense of safety.

The booklet is called *Refuse to be Afraid*, but you're not human if you're not afraid from time to time. What I hope to encourage you to do is to keep your fear at bay. Don't let it control your thoughts and actions. I've been writing about Big Fears, the fears that lead to airport checkpoints and surveillance cameras and sometimes even to wars, but little fears make us miserable, too. We don't speak out for something we believe in, because we're afraid of the repercussions. We don't ask that attractive person for a date, because we're afraid of being turned down. We don't start writing the Great American Novel or quit our jobs and start that

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business we really want to start – because we're afraid it won't work out. Worse, we're afraid of the changes success will bring in our lives.

When I say, "Refuse to be afraid," I'm not telling you to deny that anxious little feeling or that paralyzing terror. The fear is real. I'm just suggesting that the thing that terrifies you can't possibly be as awful as the paralysis. And yielding control of your life, i.e., your freedom, is likely to produce scarier results than an environment where everyone is free.

Would you rather be safe or free? Too many today would rather be safe, and wily people understand that, tempting us to give up just a little more freedom to be safe.

The New Hampshire license plate says it all: Live free or die. Without freedom, we are the living dead anyway.

2

What this eBook is, and is not

This eBook does not contain a system; merely an exhortation.

I happen to believe that every human being is an individual, and it is dangerous to group individuals into a collective or make generalizations based on apparent similarities between individuals.

We are snowflakes, not assembly-line products.

No two snowflakes are alike, they say, while assembly lines were invented in order to churn out items that are identical in every possible way. Keep in mind, as well, that even two products that come off an assembly line are not exactly alike.

What works for me in overcoming fear may not work for you. You may find a ritual or habit that brings your fear under control, but it may prove meaningless to someone else.

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I can't tell you how to dissolve your fear. I can merely show you how fear works.

It's good news, actually that there's no one-size-fits-all fear-killing solution. The reason is that you are a unique individual; no one in the world is quite like you.

Even ideas that have worked for me, most of the time, don't chase the fears away permanently. The trick is to recognize the paralysis — and that's not so hard really. Have you stopped moving forward? You may be paralyzed with fear.

Most important is to find a way to work through the fear, because the paralysis is the worst thing. But it has to be your own way, your own system. Doing it my way won't work.

Author and psychologist Sunni Maravillosa calls it "S.E.S.S." — Someone Else's System Syndrome.

... it's alluring to think that we can plug ourselves in to some sequence of steps, and if we follow it accurately, we'll see success. It relieves us of some of the burden of thinking for ourselves or attending to all that's going on: The System has us covered.

But what happens when part of the system becomes problematic, or impossible? Or, despite one's best efforts to follow the system, success doesn't blossom? Most individuals, I suspect, would place the blame on themselves: it's their fault the system doesn't integrate seamlessly into their lives; or there's some hidden failure that keeps success from emerging from the effort put into the system.

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I think we tend to overlook this important detail: *It's someone else's system*. It isn't designed for our unique circumstances and idiosyncrasies. And to the degree that one tries to shoehorn oneself into an ill-fitting system, there'll be concomitant difficulties.

... There are no shortcuts or easy outs in life; other people can offer us helpful ideas, but because each of us is in a unique place, with a unique context (our individual combination of history, present situation, and future hopes and goals), any system is best treated as a set of rough suggestions rather than marble steps leading the way to paradise.

What we offer here are thoughts on the nature of fear, and the way it's used to manipulate us, for reasons as innocuous as to sell us acne medicine and as sinister as robbing our freedom. We also offer thoughts about the way we let fears trap ourselves in a place where we'd rather not be — a safe but unfulfilling job, for example.

Many authors have conjured systems and programs to help overcome fears. One or another may work for you, and many may not. We're not suggesting a one-plan-kills-all-fears approach here, just offering some ways to recognize when you're afraid and help you refuse to succumb to the fear.

**Do the thing you fear,
and the death of fear is certain.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

3

Janis, Bobby McGee and Freedom

What an interesting statement Kris Kristofferson wrote and Janis Joplin sang into immortality: "Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose; Nothin' ain't worth nothin', but it's free." I got to thinkin' whether "Me and Bobby McGee" did any favors for the concept of freedom.

Not that it's not true. There's something liberating, in a desperate way, about being broke, or alone, or out of a job. When you have nothing to lose, no one else you're responsible for, you're free to try anything, go anywhere. It's hard times, but you're free, and that feels strangely good.

But that word just puts a big qualifier on the statement. If freedom is only accessible when you're broke and alone, who wants to be free?

Joplin's life seemed to exemplify the free spirit, and she died young. If it means working and playing so hard you're dead before you're 30, who wants to be free?

Please don't get me wrong: I loved Janis Joplin. Not just her music; I

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remember watching the Dick Cavett Show and hearing her sing “Move Over,” when she made my adolescent hormones rage. Afterward as she talked with the talk-show host, I thought I felt an unspeakable sadness and loneliness behind her bravado, I wished I could rescue her from the demons that made her sing the blues so well.

But if freedom’s just another word for nothin’ left to lose, maybe being a well-fed and comfortable slave is a better life.

The thing is, freedom’s *not* just another word for nothin’ left to lose. Freedom is the default position in life; we’re born with what the signers of the Declaration of Independence called “certain unalienable rights.” Fear mongers work constantly to drive the free spirit out of us — in fact, “she’s a free spirit” is not always intended as a positive statement.

But make no mistake, you were born to be free, and fearless. Freedom is everything, not the absence of anything to lose.

On the other hand, it’s a good inner image to have: If you treat life as if you have nothing to lose, you likely will find you have everything to gain. Our fears of losing our fat and sassy lifestyles lurk behind our reluctance to set ourselves free — and oh, by the way, you are the one who sets the limits on your freedom most of the time, not some government or other external force.

Refuse to be afraid, live like you’re dying, live like you have nothing left to lose, and you’ll find the path to freedom.

4

We're all gonna die

My eye was caught at the antique store the other day by a thick, well-worn book titled "Modern Medical Counselor." By its condition it was clear the book was anything but modern, and the price (\$2) was right, so, figuring it would be an interesting excursion into the past, I brought it home.

What actually caught my attention was the section that I casually opened to, even before I brought the book home: "Survival in Atomic Bombing." The copyright date of the book is 1951, so browsing through this book will be a trapeze through an era where communism and nuclear death were our greatest fears.

With the knowledge of what was to happen in the next 54 years, we know the fears were largely unfounded. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still the only cities ever destroyed by atomic bombs, and while the great communist bogeyman reared his ugly head many times over the years, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics fell apart under the weight of its totalitarian follies and China has decided to try burying us the good old

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American way, by establishing government-subsidized monopolies.

In other words, the fear that was used as an excuse to impose on our liberties never came true. Communism and nuclear catastrophe did not destroy us.

Today, the fear is of small groups of terrorists (and "rogue nations") with nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. The fear is that an influenza virus that kills birds will find a way to migrate into humans and cause a pandemic. The fear is that standing too close to a person smoking a cigarette will give you cancer. We can let those fears control us, we can let others use those fears to justify locking us into cages, or we can refuse to be afraid and live our lives as free men and women.

Here is the fear that lurks behind all of these fears: We are afraid to die. We are especially afraid to die before we experience a ripe old age.

Here is the truth: We all will die, some of us "before our time." The real choice we all have: We can live and die as slaves, or we can live and die as free men and women.

Most of our lives we exist in the gray area between freedom and slavery, convincing ourselves that we are making our choices freely: When we hand the chains to our government and our bosses and our creditors, we rationalize that we are making a free decision to enslave ourselves. And it usually is a freely made choice - in the beginning.

Like Jacob Marley's ghost, we accumulate shackles as we progress

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through life, usually out of fear - fear of poverty, fear of going hungry, fear of not having a reliable car. And the biggest fear of them all is the fear of death.

Accepting that you will die is the beginning of freedom. I've never heard the song "Live Like You're Dying," but its title is the message.

These thoughts could be misconstrued as advocating violent resistance against the slave masters. Nothing could be further from the truth. The revolution I advocate is an internal one.

Refuse to be afraid. Resist the impulse to yield to the fear and let someone strip your liberty in the name of security and protection. Live like you were dying - because you are, someday, so better to live free than in chains.

**Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear —
not absence of fear.**

Mark Twain

5

Would you rather be safe or free?

WB here.

In April 1999 a couple of kids at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., committed an atrocity, shooting 35 students and teachers, killing 13 of them, before turning the guns on themselves. In the days immediately after, there was much talk about clamping down on the possession of guns and adding great layers of security to the classroom experience.

I was writing a newspaper column in Green Bay, Wis., at the time, and this is the column I wrote the following week:

Would you rather be safe or free?

Those are the choices, you know. There are ways you can try to protect yourself and your children from the possibility that the events of Littleton, Colo., never again happen. But the only way to do it is to lock us all in cages.

You can have a society where no one tells you what church to attend,

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where no one monitors what you read, write or say, where no one keeps you from going to a Packers game or driving to see an old friend in Missouri.

But you run the risk that someone else may worship Satan or Hitler, that someone may read, write or say persuasively hateful things, that someone at the Packer game may try to sell you a \$40 ticket for \$250, that bad people will use the Interstate to transport illegal goods or kidnap your daughter.

So the solution is to regulate what church you can go to, what you read and write and say, and place checkpoints at city limits and state borders.

You can have a society where you are free to protect your property or defend your person, or to hunt and feed your family.

But you run the risk that someone with a sick mind will arm himself and kill you or your children.

So the solution is to make sure only the police and military have weapons.

You can have a society where, if you obey the law, no police officer or military unit will ever knock on your door and search through your personal belongings or drag you down to the county jail.

But you run the risk that your next-door neighbor is manufacturing narcotics in his basement or scheming to overthrow the government.

So the solution is a police state.

You can have a society where, if you are accused of a crime, no one can throw you in jail without proof, or torture a confession out of you, or force you to testify under oath that you did it — even if you did it.

But you run the risk that murderers will occasionally escape justice, or criminals get out of prison and commit new crimes.

So the solution is to lock us all up.

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When you have a free society, there will be times when someone abuses his or her freedom and harms someone else, perhaps even kills someone else.

The only way to try to prevent such abuses is to take away our freedoms.

And the bad things will not go away.

Confiscate our guns, and criminals will use knives or bombs made of pipe or fertilizer — or steal guns — and we will be defenseless.

Regulate what the media reports, and you lose the right to know what's happening. Regulate the Internet and you depend on the government to inform you. Regulate what singers can sing, writers can write, and painters can paint, and you begin to lose life itself.

And even then, you will not be safe. You will only have built a cage and crawled in. It will be easier for evil to find you when it decides to look.

So how to prevent future school shootings?

Teach children right from wrong. Teach them to cherish life and other living things. Teach them good choices from bad. And punish them when they do wrong, when they harm living things, when they choose badly.

Our nation, this bold experiment, has thrived because of the notion that the only limit on my freedom is that it not impose on yours. The most defining speech of our history concludes, "Give me liberty or give me death!"

Sometimes the people of the world look at America and says, "How can they tolerate such things!" But most of the time they envy America and wish to live in a society as tolerant as ours. Immigration has always outpaced emigration because of our promise.

We must live free. Or we die.

* * * * *

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Two years and five months later, 9/11 happened. This time the calls for greater security went far beyond the schoolhouse doors, and I found myself revisiting this theme. The fear in the air was palpable, but so was the anger and the desire to do something — anything — to make sure it never happened again.

It took me more than a week to overcome my own fear this time, the fear that readers would choose safety over freedom. I had already been raked over a few coals for questioning the wisdom of passing the USAPATRIOT Act while emotions were still running high, so I wasn't sure how readers would react to these thoughts. In late October 2001, I decided I'd refuse to be afraid:

A year or so ago I wrote a column around the question, "Would you rather be safe or free?" The question is more relevant today than ever before.

We can be as safe as humanly possible if we are willing to give up our freedom and privacy. Just let security personnel pry into your bag, your car trunk, pat you down, monitor your telephone calls and your mail and your e-mail, track your purchases and the company you keep and the books you read and the TV shows you watch, and keep a camera on you 24 hours a day, and you will probably be safe from harm.

In Ray Bradbury's most famous work, *Fahrenheit 451*, about a dreary world where it is illegal to own books or you and they will be burned, he even notes that people voluntarily relinquish their freedom for the comfort of safety, or in the context of the book, happiness.

The idea was that books exposed you to contrary beliefs that hurt people.

"It didn't come from the government down," a character explains.

“There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation and minority pressure carried the trick ... Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time ...”

The common consensus is that on Sept. 11, the question became more than hypothetical. We have sent soldiers abroad to protect our freedom while launching a debate about how far to restrict our freedom to keep America safe.

And for the most part, people are cheerfully surrendering their liberty. When Russ Feingold was the only senator who said, in effect, “Wait a minute, this antiterrorism bill might be used to harm freedom of innocent people at home, I can’t vote for this,” it was everyday citizens, not the government, who cried out against him.

When this newspaper wrote a couple of lines praising Feingold for that vote, it was not the government who took us to task, it was a local radio personality, who added, “Maybe they want to get one of those anthrax letters over there.”

On Oct. 8 Larry Ellison, founder and chief executive officer of Oracle Corp., wrote a column in the Wall Street Journal arguing that the time may have come to issue everyone a national ID card.

“On the face of it, issuing ID cards does seem a significant step,” Ellison wrote. “Trusting government to maintain a database with our names, addresses, places of work, amounts and sources of income, assets, purchases, travel destinations, and more, seems a huge leap of faith.

“But we should remember that these databases already exist, and that we willingly helped in their creation.”

He goes on to say that by creating a huge, credit-card style, government database to track each of us — and Oracle has “generously” offered to give the government the necessary software for free — we can

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ensure our safety.

“Only by giving our intelligence and law enforcement agencies better tools can we expect to save life and liberty together,” Ellison said.

Save life, yes. Liberty? Well, would you rather be safe or free? The database could alert the police that you checked the Koran and the Unabomber’s book out of the library. Does that make you a suspect or someone who wants to understand your enemy?

Forget the ID card — the technology now exists to implant a microchip in a person. Perhaps we would all be safer if we “forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he has the mark.”

Ellison is said to have pitched his idea to Attorney General John Ashcroft, a devout Pentecostal who surely has read the book of Revelation often enough to know when he is on the wrong side.

The House of Representatives wisely added a five-year expiration date to the brave new police powers in the antiterrorism bill, to give us all a chance to review how well they have worked.

It’s a trick question — we can be safe *and* free, if the authorities are required to give us back our liberty after the danger has passed. Do you think they’ll be willing to give it back?

A few more years have gone by, and more than one senator have questioned the wisdom behind that antiterrorism law, but as we take this book to press, we’re still waiting to get those freedoms back. Fear can be that powerful.

W.B.

6

Gandhi's personal mission statement

Let the first act of every morning be to make the following resolve for the day:

** I shall not fear anyone on Earth.*

** I shall fear only God.*

** I shall not bear ill will toward anyone.*

** I shall not submit to injustice from anyone.*

** I shall conquer untruth by truth.*

** And in resisting untruth, I shall put up with all suffering.*

* * *

Sometimes a personal slap upside the head comes in the most

unexpected places.

After dabbling around the edges and not using my Franklin Planner to, well, plan, one morning I thought I'd review some of the instruction sections and get serious about using this little device that I spent 40-50 bucks a year on. There's more to using a planner than just keeping track of your appointments, doncha know.

My eyes had started glazing over — prioritize, urgent/non-urgent, plan weekly, plan daily, yeah, yeah, yeah, and then I came across several examples of "personal mission statements."

There, they included Mahatma Gandhi's "Resolution," which I recognized from deep in my long-ago memory. Reproduced above, that's one darn complete personal mission statement, especially that last line, because if you set out to fearlessly stand for truth and refuse to submit to injustice while bearing no ill will toward anyone (which includes those who perpetrate injustice), you'd better steel yourself for it to hurt a little.

The time since I last encountered Gandhi's "Resolution" had been measured in decades. That morning I used the wonder of modern technology, e.g., my handy-dandy computer printer, to ensure that I encounter these words on a daily basis. It's one of a handful of "mission statements" taped to the front of my iMac, just under the screen, where I can't miss it.

7

Refuse to be afraid

It's been about four years now that I've used the name Brian Wilson Richardson. I like the name, and when I recently visited some newly acquired friends it felt odd but comfortable to be addressed as "B.W."

Not long after I started writing Montag regularly, the coda began to emerge: Refuse to be afraid. It came up so often, I made it the "subtitle" of Montag. That was a reminder for me as much as for you. It's so easy to let fear direct our lives, even though our basic nature yearns to be free. It's just that so many people, whether they intend or not, try to influence our behavior - restrict our freedom - by making us afraid.

Here's a problem - so much of what draws my outrage and ends up being discussed in this space could make a person fearful, too - afraid that so many people are doing so many things to deprive us of so much freedom, there's nothing we can do to stop them or reverse the trend. Sometimes I look at stuff I've written over a period of days, or on and off

over months and years, and I detect that kind of resignation creeping in. “What’s the use? The statisticians have won: A vast majority wants the government to take care of all our problems.” And that may be true. Hell, it IS true: Not that the statisticians have won, but it’s true about the vast majority.

So what’s a self-respecting freedom-loving individualist individual to do? Well, first, refuse to be afraid. There are worse things in life than being alone. (For one thing, there’s being not-alone in a roomful of rabid statisticians.) And you’re not alone, anyway: If you believe you have the freedom to live your life as you please as long as you don’t step on someone else’s freedom, I’m with you. And so are the folks I’ve provided links to over there on the right, and so are a lot of the other folks they’ve provided links to. We’re a minority, but we’re a pretty feisty minority, and you may not know this, but a pretty feisty minority is what made 13 free and independent states out of the American British colonies.

(No, I’m not suggesting we take arms against the oppressors - England initiated the violence we now know as the American Revolution. The former colonies just wanted to go their way in peace, and the king didn’t cotton to that. Oppressors tend to do violence even to nonviolent free people - but don’t be afraid of that, either: They can’t hurt the idea of freedom, and they can’t make you not-free without your permission.)

I suggest simply that as we share the various outrages against freedom in this supposedly free nation, we remind ourselves why we’re outraged, and that is: It’s not supposed to be this way. By accumulating the evidence, we slowly but surely are building a case to prove our

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contention that we are not free, and slowly but surely that contention is being heard. How else does a movie like *V for Vendetta* get made, for example?

There's nothing we can do to win back our freedom? Balderdash. For one thing, we can write little essays like this one and share them as far and wide as we can. The war of ideas is never over: If today a majority is content to let the Vast Machine run their lives, tomorrow a handful of people will read this and decide not to be content, and they will share this little essay with a handful of others or, even better, write or speak these thoughts in their own words. And that's just the beginning. Claire Wolfe wrote a book called *99 Things to Do 'til the Revolution* and then thought of 78 more ideas.

Agitating for freedom in an increasingly unfree society may win you more adversaries than friends in the early going especially, but it will win you friends. And it all begins with a decision: Refuse to be afraid.

Richardson & Bluhm books

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Letters to the Citizens of the United States

by Thomas Paine; edited and with an introduction by B.W. Richardson

Even as the ink began to dry on the Declaration of Independence proclaiming a break from the tyranny of European-style government, a faction began plotting to reforge the chains and re-establish Europe in the new world. When Thomas Paine returned to the United States in 1802 after a decade and a half abroad, he saw the leftover effects of a presidential administration who didn't trust the people to exercise the blessings of liberty appropriately. And so he wrote a series of eight letters, seven of them in fairly quick succession, with his thoughts about revolution, liberty and the state of the young nation he helped create. These letters remain relevant to this day.

Preserve the Embers; Stoke the Fire

by B.W. Richardson

"Renewal is an everyday task. Stoking the fire requires a constant vigil. Life is an endless struggle against forces that will beat you down, but only if you let them. Your greatest power is control over your own personal actions and reactions." Thirteen essays from B.W. Richardson's blog "Montag ... and the clocks were striking thirteen."

The Imaginary Bomb

by B.W. Richardson

Scientists have harnessed the power of the imagination as a source of energy. Of course, whenever a new power source is discovered, some idiot finds a way to create a weapon with it. Bob Whelan and Pete Wong are independent interstellar truckers caught in the middle between those who have developed a bomb based on the principles of imaginary physics — and those who want to stop them. Along the way they find a new friend, an old friend and a small pile of adversaries.

Wildflower Man, and other short writings

by Warren Bluhm

Sam Tucker's fight to save his yard full of wildflowers from a glazed-eyed city council committee was chronicled in a well-received podcast. Now it's the lead story in a small collection that also includes "The Radio Guy," "Speedbump Rescues My Soul," "Losing A Leg" and a handful of other short stories and musings.

The Adventures of Myke Phoenix

by Warren Bluhm

The year was 1995, more or less. The cold war was over, people were still allowed to smoke on the job, and 9/11 was still six years off. The universe shifted, and something dark burst from a yawning crack in the nature of being. Mankind needed a hero, and that was the real reason radio newsman Paul Phillips and his devoted girlfriend, Dana Dunsmore, walked into that antique store one stormy evening.