



A creative, nurturing response to fear

People are pretty predictable when it comes to terror.

We have a short behavioral repertoire that seems to be instinctive. Our survival mechanism is often called “fight or flight.” Sometimes “freeze” is added.

A local, well-known farmer, may have found a more productive way to respond.

Sept. 11, 2001, was a terrifying day for most Americans. One of those Americans was Cashmere orchardist, Randy Smith.

Randy is on a national agricultural committee which was meeting four blocks from the White House when the twin towers were hit. No one seemed to know what was happening. Washington, D.C. absolutely emptied according to Randy.

He wanted nothing more than to come home, but flights were cancelled, no rental cars were available. Life was suddenly very precarious and precious.

As Randy recounts the events following one of the most traumatic moments of his life — and probably our collective lives — tears well up. He can barely speak of how profoundly meaningful it felt to sing *Amazing Grace* when he finally was able to get back home among



Randy Smith and his orchard buddy, Goldy: Figuring out how to break out of the grip of fear and be creative.

church friends and family. He knows the event fundamentally changed him.

Randy started thinking about what he could do to help — what he could do to make a better world. He had no real idea, but he was ready to do something. Then, about a year later, an opportunity dropped into his lap.

He was asked to host a delega-

tion from the Central “Stans” (including Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) through a contact he made when he was on the Ag Forestry Leadership Foundation. He put together a tour of north central Washington with no vision of where it would ultimately go, but hoping for some real connection with the people of “the Stans.”

Fast forward 12 years later. Randy has brought in countless colleagues, Rotarians and acquaintances with certain types of expertise who have collaborated with him and sometimes travelled with him. His primary focus has been Kyrgyzstan.

He has evolved an idea for connection around a “farmer-to-farmer” theme. This has allowed him to continue to deal with changing governments and high ranking officials.

Governors and diplomats from foreign provinces have sat beside Randy and his friends at his dining room table creatively imagining and planning how they might work together. Randy has become an expert on the “Stans” region — learning about people’s values, hopes and problems. Over these years he’s cultivated, planted and nurtured a crop of friendship and goodwill through reading, listening, studying and through the experiences of bringing people here and going there.

Successful farmers, like Randy, know how to observe, be consistent, diligent and patient. A good harvest takes a lot of time and attention.

One of Randy’s major desires is to help the ordinary people begin their own Rotary clubs. Smith is a long-time Rotarian and found that the people he hosted were fascinated by the idea of business people getting together. He feels that Rotary clubs would allow the people stability and mutual purpose despite ethnic and religious differences and common governmental collapses.

Let’s pause the story here. It is worth our while to consider





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 ... try a different, more creative behavior, that could possibly make the planet a more habitable place.

how very unusual this story is in terms of human action potential.

Somehow Randy was able to free himself from that old stimulus-response instinctive behavior to terror. He chose none of

those survival behaviors of fight, flight, or freeze. Instead he tried something unfamiliar to most of us when threatened.

Smith farmed. He cultivated. It was strange, confusing, challenging, enlightening and profoundly meaningful for him.

It is fitting that a farmer figured out that we could be different, that we do not need to be slaves to our cave world programming. We can shake ourselves loose and be creative.

This April is a fine time to begin learning more about farming.

Look around. Maybe you can

see a metaphorical messy, wild thicket that worries you. Instead of denying it, being paralyzed by it, or instead of attacking it, try a different, more creative behavior, that could possibly make the planet a more habitable place.

Experiment with some listening, observing, learning, tending, befriending, cultivating and nurturing. Be patient. You may even want to listen to the old autobiographical hymn, *Amazing Grace*, written by John Newton after his ship was badly battered by a storm.

You may find that you, too, are capable of behaving differently

to terror, fear, anxiety, or worry. Maybe you also will find that you are able to respond with a fourth "f" action — not to fight, not to flee, not freeze, but to farm.

How might we all move up to The Good Life by learning that we are not bound by our instinctive behaviors to fear?

June Darling, Ph.D. can be contacted at drjunedarling1@gmail.com; website: www.summitgroupresources.com. Her books, including 7 Giant Steps To The Good Life, can be bought or read for free at Amazon.com.

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