

Wild will calms the storm

By Ruth Ostrow

"I DON'T like this, not at all ..." I am grizzling to a girlfriend who has popped in to help me do some work. The storm is lashing against the windows. The wind is so strong the rain is horizontal. Doors are rattling on their hinges. Two flyscreens break off and go dancing across my front lawn.

I grit my teeth and grip the kitchen chair, knuckles white. It has been raining on and off for a couple of days. But suddenly a small storm has turned nasty. The heavens have opened up. This morning it turned brutal. Without warning. Very brutal, very quickly. These are the floods that will make the news that night as the worst to hit northern NSW in years. There will be film footage of cars floating through the debris, shops being flooded. The sort of footage I would watch in the safety of my urban apartment and click my tongue at in sympathy.

Today I am a country girl. Alone on the top of a hill. Exposed to rather violent winds, with my husband and child somewhere out there, in the car, navigating the treacherous conditions of nature.

I feel very weird. It isn't simply fear. It's something worse. Something basic, undeniably primal. It's a hormonal rush rising out of my solar plexus.

I can't remember ever feeling this way in the city, even during the infamous hailstorms of Sydney. The existence of neighbours, emergency services, nearby hospitals and crisis hotlines creates the illusion of safety.

But under the sky, so close to the elements, there is a vulnerability that is alarming. And I'm having an animal reaction. My teeth are clenched. I am pacing about whimpering, snarling and watchful. Were I a dog, the hairs would be standing up on the back of my coat.

The phone rings. I jump. It's another friend. "The roads are completely flooded. They are closing the schools. People are abandoning their cars. I've lived through this before. Get the family home now," he says, sounding calm but firm.

A tree goes hurling across the grass. Water is pouring in under the window. The rivulets are running down the wall and on to my daughter's doll, which has become sodden and deformed.

I'm dizzy with hormones as I reach for the phone and try to get my husband on his mobile.

I hear my own voice on the voicemail, chirpy. Unaware of the danger. I ring again. Again. Again. At \$1 per call, it's getting ridiculous - \$20 later, I can't make myself stop. I keep punching the number over and over until my friend's hand comes down over mine.

"This isn't helping. We've got to send positive energy to help get them home safely," she says kindly.

And suddenly I come back to myself. It's my training. Years of sending energy. Of believing in reiki, chi gung and the power of positive thinking. Some have deemed

me loopy. Certainly scientist Carl Sagan, author of *The Demon-Haunted World*, would sneer at my superstitions. But those of us old witches and shamans who believe the mind can heal, protect and manifest, know that there is wisdom in the old ways.

Where I now live, in such a close dance with nature, most people I know have reverted to pagan type, planting by the moon, healing through herbs, singing and dancing away illness. Animal instincts have sharpened in partnership with the natural world.

So off we go, to the outside deck, hair flying, like two old crones from a fairytale, and stand with our faces tilted to the rain. The animal in my soul howls knowingly as I lift my arms in deference to the wonderful wind, and conjure loving, golden circles to protect my loved ones from the storm.

I feel very Shakespearean as the thunder cracks overhead. No wonder witches laugh. It's so exhilarating trying to catch a breath in the violent winds. So blissful to be in partnership with roaring, powerful nature, rather than be her hapless victim. My dress lashes my legs and wraps me up in a warm cocoon.

At that moment the phone rings. It's my husband. The line is cracking up. "Ruth, Ruth ... We're okay ..." is all I can make out before the line goes dead.

It will be another hour before my family reaches the safety of home. Not long after that the roads will flood and trap us in. But I am deeply relieved.

Call me superstitious, call me delusional to believe we can control outcomes through positive thought, that we have any power over our health, our destinies, those we love out in the grip of nature. But believing it helps me control my own nature. And that is power enough.

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First published in *The Weekend Australian* SAT 17 FEB 2001