

## By Ruth Ostrow

In the wake of the Bali bombings I got to wondering what terrorism means to us and how it has really changed our lives. Though most of us feel sick to the pits of our stomach by the gruesome possibilities, the truth is we get on with our lives anyway. I still flew to Asia a couple of weeks ago despite travel warnings to the region; I still put my daughter on a plane to Melbourne; and my close friends are still planning their next trip to Bali.

The fact is, while terrorists aim to terrify us by arbitrarily targeting civilians, most of us have always been mega-league worriers anyway.

Terrorism simply joins the long list of other things we normally fear: mechanical problem on plane (several planes went down the weeks before I travelled), Asian bird flu, SARS, death by car accident, fire, devastating earthquake and tsunami. Then there are the day-to-day terrors: cancer, cardiac arrest, hospital negligence. Hell, someone healthy I know recently died of nothing, or nothing the doctors could find anyway.

For our children there has always been a plethora of shuddering terrors - careless bus driver (God forbid), meningococcal virus, bike accident, predators. A little girl on school camp was recently killed by a falling tree in a freak storm.

When it comes to living, most people feel the fear and do it anyway, knowing that even crossing the road is a reckless, dangerous game of chance. Despite their existential crises, people returned to the London underground, to Manhattan, to Bali after attacks, because the compulsion to live, love, and procreate is intrinsic to the human spirit and has always overridden our daily terrors.

And there is a positive side to the fears. Living with the real and omnipresent threat of annihilation has made life somehow more precious, more valuable, and has given us in the West a deeper spiritual context to live by. There is a renewed awareness that each moment is a blessing; each time our loved ones return we feel silent relief and an overwhelming sense of joy that we've been granted happiness for one more day - a religious perspective that life in a war zone can bring.

Terrorism is a terrible, terrifying prospect. But despite elaborate efforts to spook us, in many instances terrorists are responsible for creating more love, more compassion for the less fortunate, and a greater determination to be happy in the moment.

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