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2009: YEAR IN REVIEW

The man and the hour have met. —William Yancey

2009: POLITICS, LAW, AND ECONOMY—2009 marks a pivotal point in our nation's history. While the United States remains embroiled in an economic quagmire, China, our major trading partner, an Asian juggernaut, is forging ceaselessly forward with an insatiable appetite to build and conquer. Given the speed of its economic, social and military progress, as well as its financial surplus, the world will soon have two superpowers, one in the east and one in the west. In China, people are saving more money and borrowing less, driving more and pedaling less. For the moment, their future seems brighter than ours because debts can destroy families, states, and even nations. But bleak as our tomorrow may look at this moment compared to our eastern counterpart, this nation is too young to shrivel away and crumble into dust. We are simply shifting gears to prepare for the next phase of growth. Like a young adult outgrowing the gawkiness of his teen years, our balance will eventually be restored. When that time comes, this nation will be bigger, stronger and better.

This year alone, a sea of changes took place in the United States. Some were good and others were bad. In the field of science, we made a quantum leap. Our scientists received more Noble Prizes than any other nation. More importantly, a team of researchers at the Joint Quantum Institute of the University of Maryland achieved atom-to-atom teleportation. This landmark breakthrough, being able to teleport data from one atom to another in a container a short distance away, will have a major impact in the future of computing and information technology.

In politics, President Obama won a Noble Prize—a sign of the changing times. Rarely in history has possibility, potential, and popularity equated to a lifetime of accomplishments and achievements. But if there is any doubt whether President Obama deserved this prestigious award, there is no doubt about the weight of responsibilities that he carries. He and his administration are faced with a mountain of problems: dealing with a failing U.S. economy, stabilizing a global crisis, waging two wars, reforming a failing health system, rebuilding foreign relations, and more.

On the consumer side, this country was marked by a year full of recalls. It appeared every time I turned on the TV, there were food recalls, drug recalls, baby crib recalls, toy recalls, window blind recalls, and recalls that I never heard of 10 or 20 years ago. U.S. companies, American consumers and the U.S. economy bear the brunt of these actions. Hundreds of millions of dollars are lost in the process.

Furthermore, the partisan bickering over big government versus small government is out of control. The louder each side shouts, the noisier it gets. Their argument concerning over-regulation and under-regulation has not only been transformed from an economic issue into a political issue, but a menacing issue filled with outrageous claims of socialistic and capitalistic indulgences. The implication and reality of our health, safety, and wealth have become nothing more than a political punching bag, and some so-called unbiased news media are nothing more than a propaganda tool to spread weighty political views. I take great caution whenever a journalist or anchorperson declares beforehand that he or she is broadcasting a fair and unbiased view. Why doesn't he or she just broadcast the news and let the viewers decide?

Regardless of the gloom and doom predicaments, not all was bad in 2009. The economic turmoil, it turned out, has forged family relationships, lowered divorce rates, and forced people to return to the basics by cutting costs and finding the good old way of doing things together without spending a fortune. This year alone, we became more innovative, creative, efficient, hardworking, and humble. A bruised ego won't kill us. As we recover, I've seen evidence of our becoming more responsible citizens. Raising windmills and driving hybrid cars may not sound like much, but it is a start. Neither is stressing concerns for global warming issues, as long as we don't fool ourselves into thinking that glacial melting is an indisputable result of man pouring hydrocarbons into the atmosphere. Let's not forget that the earth has been changing since its creation. There once was one continent and now there are five. Man did not spread his arms and split the earth into five pieces. That was the work of Mother Nature.



RICHARD QUAN

Managing Editor

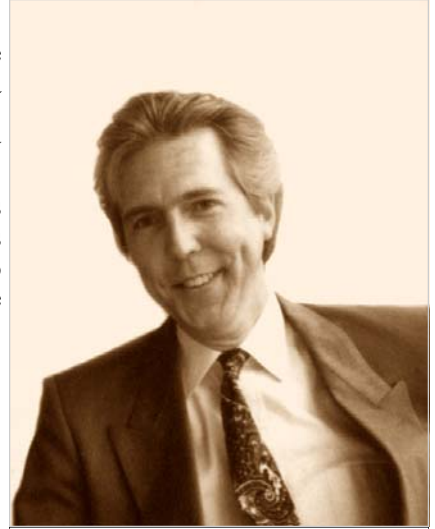
LOOKING AHEAD WITH A NOD TO THE PAST—Barack Obama took office not quite a year ago, behind a vote to leave behind the same old same old, kindling hope for a better tomorrow; yet today his approval ratings are at their lowest.

So what of the future? Are you hopeful that the economy is on the rebound? Are you making resolutions to eat more organic foods and lose weight, exercise more, find a better job, quit smoking, perhaps pay off a debt?

Will you go on with your life in 2010 and beyond, same old same old, devil may care, don't sweat the big picture because I can't make a difference anyway?

One thing is certain: change is on the way, perhaps as a result of our unwillingness to do something when we still had the chance. Whether the Mayan calendar forecasts December 21, 2012, as the end or a new beginning, perhaps it's time to resolve to do something, regardless of whether its impact will cause ripples, simply because it's the right thing to do.

A toast, to new. It can't be any worse than the old.



J. Conrad Guest
Contributing Editor

CHRISTMAS IS THE TIME childhood memories resurface in a ramble: The first Christmas after my father re-married and we became a family of ten, we blindly carried on our usual process of everyone buying a gift for everyone else. Do the math: that comes to 90 gifts, plus the ones from Santa. When our tree was *literally* half-buried in packages, everyone was flat broke, and the wrapping paper alone filled two garbage cans, even we kids agreed enough was enough. From then on we drew names from a hat.

The hat thing was never as exciting as that first insane Christmas. On an earlier Christmas, just before my mother died, I recall one of my older brothers (we'll call him Randy) got a dart gun for Christmas. It was one of those plastic spring-loaded jobs with the plastic-stemmed darts topped with little rubber suction cups. Randy got bored licking and sticking darts to the plate glass window (the only thing the silly darts would actually stick to) and before too long we heard odd sounds coming from the living room - sharp pops followed by the soft tinkle of glass. Clever Randy had discovered if he removed the suction cups, the remaining projectiles were perfect for shooting the ornaments off of the Christmas tree. So much for family heirlooms. Mom scolded him, but we could tell she was trying really hard not to laugh. Ornaments break without much provocation anyway, but in our house the process was usually coupled with high drama like this, and Randy did-in close to a dozen with his dart gun antics.

We lost a bunch the year our cat, Sabrina, decided to climb the Christmas tree. We started making paper ones and stringing popcorn to fill in for the losses. It wasn't all us kids fault either. Dad had a habit of bumping into the tree. We'd all laugh and he'd curse. When our step-mom entered the picture, she had always set up one of those tidy trees with all the same colored balls on it. Her red balls wouldn't be caught dead sharing a tree with our eclectic, mis-matched pile of cheap baubles, cut paper, and stale popcorn, so from then on, there were *two* trees: one in the living room and one in the family room. I always preferred the homely one, truth be told; the living room looked like a generic shop window, the family room like a home.

Our nativity scene had the same issues. Some of the wooden animals had gone missing and been replaced with Crayola-colored plastic ones from my youngest brother's barnyard play set. One of the wooden magi was missing an arm and was left with a splintery scar - you won't find any account of that in scripture. And we stuck a cheesy angel made of white nylon fabric and wire on top of the roof. The angel had dots of gold glitter and a wrapped cotton ball for a head with a drawn on expression that resembled a happy-face sticker. This crèche was also banned from the living room - our step-mom had her own fancy, hand carved one from Sweden, or somewhere. Soon we were all banned from the living room too, but that's another story.

My favorite memory was from one of the Christmases after Mom died and before Dad remarried; it's really an after-Christmas memory. We were without adult supervision while Dad was at work, which left time for a lot of right-brain thinking. My sibs and I collected all the discarded Christmas trees out of everyone's trash heaps, dragged them into our own back yard, and

with them, built a forest of Christmas trees. Some were flocked, some had strands of that old, heavy lead glitter still dangling from them. It looked amazing.

Magical. We played and ran around in our forest all afternoon. When Dad came home we proudly showed it to him. His reaction? He pitched a fit, of course - you see, there was only one day that the trash guys were to collect old Christmas trees and this had been it. I guess we didn't think about that practicality, but it still seems sad to me that Dad couldn't experience the magic in that moment. Mom would have. Now that I'm older, I get it, and get him better too, but there's a part of me that wishes he could have run around and played in that forest with us - just for an hour or two.

Here's hoping this holiday season brings you all fond memories and forests of magic.



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“We didn’t start the fire/It was always burning/Since the world’s been turning/We didn’t start the fire/No, we didn’t light it/But we tried to fight it.”

—Billy Joel

WHEN I WAS EIGHT OR NINE, my parents let me stay up to see in my first New Year’s. I toughed it out, fought off the Sandman and managed to stay awake. I don’t know what I expected, but surely it would be something grand, unlike anything I’d ever before experienced in my brief existence on the planet—Christmas morning, birthday and the World Series all wrapped into one.

I watched the ball drop in Times Square. Nothing spectacular considering my parents had a black and white TV. Mom and Dad whooped and hollered, tipped back what might’ve been champagne, shared a kiss, and I went to bed thinking, *That’s it? What’s the big deal?*

It didn’t help that the next day was business as usual. The news reported on the war in Vietnam and peace demonstrations turned violent. Race tensions ran high, although the 1968 riots in Detroit were still a couple years away, and the Cold War with Russia was escalating.

Even at my tender age I could see it was the same old same old, despite what the calendar said.

Forty-five years later, I can honestly say New Year’s hasn’t changed all that much. People make resolutions to eat better and lose weight, exercise more, curse less, find a better job, quit smoking, budget better, spend more time with family. Sadly, within two weeks, certainly before the end of January, most people revert to the same old same old, perhaps finding comfort in old habits, even if they are bad habits.

The war in Vietnam is over, as is the Cold War, replaced by an occupation of Iraq and a troop buildup in Afghanistan. Racial tensions have been replaced by a broken healthcare system, an ailing economy, and unemployment higher than at any time in my life. The planet grows smaller with greater technology even as the incongruence between the haves and the have nots continues to grow at an alarming rate.

The faces and names change, but each generation has its obstacles to overcome. My grandparents rose up out of the depths of the Great Depression. My parents left the Baby Boomer generation a better world in the aftermath of World War II. But I sense the Boomers left Gen X a much colder world in which to live. Time will tell what the Millennium generation will make of what Gen X left them.

Barack Obama took office not quite a year ago, behind a vote to leave behind the same old same old, kindling hope for a better tomorrow; yet today his approval ratings are at their lowest.

So what of the future? Are you hopeful that the economy is on the rebound? Are you making resolutions to eat more organic foods and lose weight, exercise more, find a better job, quit smoking, perhaps pay off a debt?

Or are you fearful for our way of life in this country, fearful for the future of humanity and of Planet Earth? Are you concerned that the Mayan calendar ends on December 21, 2012, or that the predictions of Nostradamus also end in 2012? Perhaps you buy into the theory of a major shift in the earth’s poles that will have catastrophic effects on the future of life on our planet, or a major blackout the result of sun storms disrupting our power sources.

Will you go on with your life in 2010 and beyond, same old same old, devil may care, don’t sweat the big picture because I can’t make a difference anyway?

One thing is certain: change is on the way, perhaps as a result of our unwillingness to do something when we still had the chance. Whether December 21, 2012, is the end or a new beginning, perhaps it’s time to resolve to do something, regardless of whether its impact will cause ripples, simply because it’s the right thing to do.

A toast, to new. It can’t be any worse than the old.



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WE ALL HAVE CHALLENGES to tackle in our lives. Regardless of the nature of the challenge, what matters is how we perceive the condition and whether we are willing to shift our perspective. Rather than clinging onto the condition and become obsessed with it, the key is to rise above it and detach from the outer circumstance.

The challenge I have been facing for the last three years is let go of any preconceived notion of how I should look like and learn to transcend my physical reality. I intend to let go of becoming obsessed with my facial appearance as the more I resist what is staring me right in the face, the more the condition will prolong. Through vipassana meditation and reiki, I am cultivating an awareness to surrender and accept my condition as is without judging self. Through visualization techniques as explained by Adam the Dreamhealer in his books and DVDs, I am learning to build a holographic image of my body and go through daily intensive visualizations until I attain the optimal result. I am also assessing my environment and letting go of people and things that serve no purpose in my life. Nutrition plays a key factor as I am cultivating a deeper awareness of and listening intuitively to what my body requires.

Each time I react to a physical facial discomfort, I become more aware and more mindful of my thoughts. From the time I lay my eyes open to the time I shut my eyes and pass into a deep slumber, I feel pain. It is difficult not to scratch my face when the facial nerves become stimulated and elicit certain neurological responses i.e. prickling, tingling, and burning sensation. It is difficult not to rub my eyes when I feel sand in my eyes or the feeling I get when I wore contact lenses years before I underwent laser surgery. Upon waking up, I look in the mirror and see my face seemingly drooping with one eye looming or protruding and the other sunken.

This is a spiritual test, one in which my ego finds difficult to accept. Many years ago, I lived a different life. Never appreciated my own existence and always took life for granted. As a result, I contracted the herpes virus. I also happen to have downloaded my parent's template and cultivated a false identity. In my earlier years, I rebelled against the authority and self-destructed. I am talking about sex and other forms of addiction that I found comforting at the time. Came from a culture where sex was taboo - a forbidden subject in the household. I had to get married but did not want to. I only wanted to be loved and to love but the concept was a distant reality at the time.

Love is conditional and so I thought. If I do as I am told, remain obedient and submissive, and conform to a certain standard, then I am labeled as a good person. Now as I have read Gregg Braden's book *The Spontaneous Healing of Belief*, I understand that all those character traits I resented to embody were not my own but rather my caretakers'. What I wanted and needed the most from my caretakers were love and acceptance. As a child, I became seemingly frustrated that my viewpoints were not acknowledged, heard, or validated. I ended up ad-

ressing these frustrations by breaking the rules and withdrawing from society. Following Gregg Braden's paradigm, I identified my patterns in the following manner. I attracted people into my life who were angry, unavailable, and judgmental. I wanted them to be loving so that could attract love and companionship. I prevented myself from attracting these traits by withdrawing from the world and breaking the rules.

To know thyself is to go deep within, to that inner space, and remain still. Answers will come at their own time. My job is to cultivate a more authentic and intimate relationship with self and accept myself as I am. After all, I am not my body and I am not my emotions. I am a creative expression of this big cosmic force, call it consciousness or oneness.



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WORKFORCE DIVERSITY suffers the same plight as political diversity. Often, power is entrenched by a sustained history of big teeth players, predominately from a single gender and race in the U.S.—the white male. We frequently elect our country's officials in a similar way, and base our belief on their ability to lead by judging their race or gender. The stakes increase when women are vying for positions generally held by men. In Hillary Clinton's pursuit of the highest government position, United States President, she found herself fighting for respect and support from minority women.

The reasons were complicated since many of her critics and supporters were women themselves. These female critics were largely African American faced with two issues of discrimination often resulting in harassment—being female and being black. As black women, their struggle is intensified because they do not have double indemnity releasing them from gender and race distinctions. Without careful consideration, one might feel that African American women were resentful of Hillary Clinton, but to the contrary, they struggled to make the choice between Hillary Clinton, a brilliant, experienced, female political elite and Barack Obama, a brilliant, dynamic, Prince Charmingly black male.

Unlike African American women, Hispanic women did not face the same dilemma—having to choose between a white female candidate and an attractive and charismatic Hispanic male candidate. It made sense that Hillary would have a much easier win with the Hispanic female vote. With good conscience they could vote for Hillary—much more experienced, knowledgeable and prepared, as opposed to the newly branded Barack Obama or a ticket with Sarah Palin, the unknown late entry.

The same dilemma emerges in the workplace. Professional women are mentored and sometimes exploited by their white male benefactors. Women often place a higher value on relationships with males in the workplace for two primary reasons. Job security is a major reason women disenfranchise themselves from other women. Secondly, women recognize that other women will present competition. Thus Obama was able to leverage his race against Hillary's gender with African American women. An example of this dilemma occurs where two women are considered for a job. If both women are African American with similar qualifications, the process may select the one who is more attractive or more likeable to the interviewer(s). On the other hand, if one woman is white and the other African American, there may be other considerations not necessarily related to qualifications, such as race, attractiveness, or identity with the interviewer(s), whether black or white. Although rarely if ever admitted, it is likely that discrimination will surface and take precedence over candidates' qualifications.

Educating both women and men that having more women in decision-making and hiring roles will help end this outmoded dilemma. If choices aren't based on race and gender, the decision will become less complex and less difficult. Electing or hiring should be based solely upon qualifications, ability

and desire to do the job or serve the public. In the utopian world of no bias, prejudice or nepotism, all determinations should not be based on the color of one's skin (or whether one wears makeup on it or not) but by the content of one's character.



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The clock tick tocks, it never takes a break.

Unless it breaks.

How awful it must feel, putting on a never ending performance.

And not for it's own benefit, but for some tardy executives.

Clock, I'll watch you, not only when you're on seven.

One, four, eight or eleven.

We'll call it a date, and never be late.

And while my heart bump pumps, and your hands tick tock.

It won't matter the time.

It won't matter the wine.



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I visited you at your grave today.
I laid fresh flowers in a vase and said a prayer for you.
I still can't get used to the fact that you are gone.
Our little girl has gotten so big. She looks more and more like you every day.
It is getting a little easier now. I am actually starting to move on with my life.
Our daughter asked me how you were doing today.
She still thinks that it is her fault that you are gone.
I told her she was not to blame.
I told her it was that man's fault (the drunk driver that hit you).
She told me something that made me start to cry.
She said: I know daddy is no longer here but I know that everything will be okay.
I can feel his love around me and I know that he will always be watching over us.
I know he is in Heaven and is one of God's angels.
As soon as she said this I fell to my knees and started to cry.
I thought about what she said that night and I realized she was right.
I know that even though we are still here, you are in a better place.
I know that whenever I need you, you will always be in my heart to make me feel safe.
I know that any time I need a reminder of your love all I will have to do is look at our little girl. Even though you are no longer here, I thank God every night for all the things you left behind to help me be okay. I love you sweetheart. I miss you so much, but I know one day I will be able to see you again in Heaven.



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