

Ms. Geek Without Oil (Complete)

I

Better late than never.

(May 13, 2007)

Here in Panorama City, CA it's pretty bad.

The price of gas here is inching dangerously close to \$4.50 My friend happycube says it's worse up his way in Goleta, and it's hit \$4.50 already.

There is talk at Woodbury University of ending Weekend College starting Fall 2007. I'm glad I'm almost finished there, and that I didn't have a "must take" class that was scheduled for Weekend College. They think that if they completely shut down most of the campus on weekends, they'll be able to pull through without cutting deep into "muscle and bone" in the curriculum. Bummer for the students in the dorms.

Power hasn't gotten flaky in DWP areas...yet. Same with those served by little municipal power companies like those run by Burbank and Glendale. However, out in areas served by SoCal Edison, things are a lot sketchier. People who opted to be "interruptable" customers of SCE are going several hours a day without power. Yeesh. We aren't going to be immune forever, though. The City Council has been making noises about the need for rolling blackouts at DWP if things continue like this.

Sketchier still is my husband's situation. He has to go for outpatient chemotherapy on Mondays and Thursdays, and it's gotten to the point to where we can't afford to keep the tank full in the van. So far the good people at the City of Hope have been arranging rides for him and the other patients within a reasonable radius of the facilities. However, if this continues, they are going to start putting patients up in temporary housing on the hospital campus, and in local hotels and motels. I'm going to have to make the choice between living in a trailer at the City of Hope with Richie or living here and holding down the fort.

My aunt got laid off from her travel agent job. She's now living out here in the Valley with her boyfriend because living on the Westside is so damn expensive. She hates it here. We're all going to hate it once the weather starts getting hot. We got a preview a couple of weeks ago with the hot spell but damn it's going to get bad when the heat waves begin.

My cousin is likely to be the one member of the family who's going to be raking it in. He's working for a company doing alternative energy projects, and the world is beating a path to his door. My uncle's going to be OK: no matter what, everyone's going to need someone to handle their books. Death, taxes and all that.

Anyway, I have been hearing more gunshots at night. Someone tried to pry open one of the locked garages at a neighboring apartment building, and people who have to park out in the open are having to deal with people ripping off their gas tank covers and siphoning gas. We've had a couple of carjackings in the neighborhood. Then again, there was a carjacking on Rodeo Drive a day ago. Nobody's immune from this.

II

Celebration IV feels like it was the last hurrah.

(May 30, 2007)

I just got done with the big geek event...Celebration IV. A huge convention of Star Wars fans in Downtown LA, at the Convention Center. A lot of people couldn't make it because of the emergency surcharges on plane travel. Tom Reed called me via cell phone and told me not to expect him for San Diego Comic-Con. I'll probably not go either, considering the emergency.

We are going to live one more month here in Panorama City and take it day to day. Richie's doctor is talking about bringing a pump down here and having a nurse teach me how to give him his chemo. They are trying to figure out ways of keeping the outpatients outpatients. The bus rides have been swell but they're going to stop soon. And the manufactured housing is being trucked onto areas of City of Hope where once only statuary and grass stood. Those who can't fend for themselves without help are being "cottaged" on campus. We don't want to unless it's totally necessary.

Metro just announced the second emergency bus fare increase. Just as I got used to \$5/day for a daily pass, they're talking about \$7 as of June 1st.

Then again, oil is \$5 a gallon now, for unleaded. And it keeps on going up.

May the Force be with us all.

III

The heat is on. And the air conditioner is off.

(June 12th, 2007)

OMFG it's so hot...

105 degrees at 1pm today. We had a rolling blackout that kept us without power for 4 hours today.

There was a hate crime at the Food 4 Less today. I wasn't there but it was all over KCAL's news. Some big fat loudmouthed white guy walked into Food 4 Less with a baseball bat, screaming about "Wetbacks!" and then he proceeded to bash out the brains of a Latina checkout lady in front of everyone in the store. The security guard got a good

shot in with his baton and he collapsed. They have him in the jail ward at Olive View now. The checkout lady wasn't so lucky. She's dead.

There would be a car wash to support her family and help pay for the funeral, but nobody washes their cars anymore. People don't really drive anymore. The streets used to be crowded, now only the curbs are. And driveways. And front lawns.

Yesterday was Richie's last ride to and from City of Hope. The whole idea of me giving him his chemo was scotched when they considered the blackouts. Yes, an IV pump has a reserve battery, but the medicine has to be kept in a very climate-controlled environment. They're insisting he make the move to the temporary housing at City of Hope. My family is going to chip in on storage for our stuff, but I don't trust anything local. I don't know if I trust anything in their neighborhood either, considering the riot that happened in Palms that spread to Westwood a few days ago.

We now have to figure out what we will take with us, what we will leave behind for the neighbors, and what goes into storage. I have to take my laptop. Richie has to take his little guitar amp and a guitar and a bass. No way to take the drums...too much. At least he can plug a pair of headphones into the amp and practice. The practice pad will have to do.

The price of gas has kept fairly steady, but it is clear anything can set it soaring again. And weeks of gas above \$5 a gallon has been murder on the economy.

If this keeps going until August I don't know what will happen with the semester.

Meanwhile, it's a little cooler now. Maybe I'll take a walk. Or maybe I'll just go out into the atrium of our apartment building. I don't feel safe about a walk after dark today. Damn.

IV Reprieve

(June 28, 2007)

I can't bloody believe it.

Mrs. Valenzuela, the lady who manages the landlord's properties, told me that we shouldn't move out, that she'd work something out with us.

Apparently there are five families that have just picked up and left the building this month. And other buildings the landlord owns have been worse for attrition. Lots of people moving in with family, whether that family is in Alaska, Alabama, Mexico City, or Managua. I was completely unaware of this. Shows you what being distracted with other things can do. So yeah, the landlord wants to keep as many of us here as possible. Also, the price of storage spaces has skyrocketed for some reason. Evidently we aren't the only people who needed to stow stuff before moving.

So yeah, this is the deal. Our rent will go down. We can lock our stuff up in a security building. We keep our apartment for now. Basically all we're going to do is unplug all the electrical stuff, secure the computers on floor level, clean out the fridge, turn off the gas, lock up (very important!) and leave the place almost as-is. Oh yeah, foodstuffs get cleaned out too. Don't want this to turn into a cockroach banquet.

We are going to be moving into a tent city at City of Hope. The cottages and the trailers are being given to the people who are in worse shape. Helford Research Hospital is completely full, and some of the old wings in the 1951-era building are being pressed back into service to house patients...again, patients who are in worse shape than Richie is.

I guess when oil prices leap one whole dollar in one whole week, things change. \$6.25 at the 76 station at Roscoe and Woodman today. Last week it was only (only!) \$5.50.

I bought a USB modem at the Apple Store today. I have converted my DSL account to a dialup account so I can preserve my online identity. Shouts out to DSL Extreme. Great ISP. Good people. My mobile phone is now our home phone. All the bills and my school stuff are going to be sent to my uncle, and he's going to put them in a big manila envelope and mail them to City of Hope, to our new mailbox there. One thing won't go there, and that's voting stuff. One of the perks of this arrangement is that I don't lose my address. If this crazy stuff continues, I'll just figure out some way of getting to my polling place. Or go permanent absentee voter. I don't trust those damn touch-screen DRE machines so I'm not going to vote that way.

This is making me very melancholy. I like my neighborhood. I'm going to miss it.

This is what being a refugee feels like.

V **Independence Day, 2007**

(July 5, 2007)

The local American Legion post held a fireworks display for everyone who's stuck in Duarte getting treatment at City of Hope. They set everything up in Irwindale and the guys who did the display basically figured out that if you target everything to blow up high above the intersection of the 605 and the 210, that the folks here would see it if they got to a place where you could see the sky.

The display was basically theme park quality. Like something you'd see at Disneyland or Magic Mountain or Knotts Berry Farm or something like that. No choreographed music, just a whole lot of beautiful fireworks going off. I started crying and didn't stop until just now, 5 hours later.

Why was I so melancholy? Why all the waterworks?

Because I was in America, celebrating the 4th of July, and I knew that this was not really America anymore. Arguably it hadn't been since the day the Senate confirmed George W. Bush's (s)election as President. But ever since the big oil crisis the wheels had come completely off the cart.

In a way, being in Duarte, deep in Suburbia, almost in freaking Mayberry RFD for all intents and purposes, we are sort of buffered from a lot of the things that have been going on now. The doctors, nurses and everyone else here have a sense of mission. I keep reading on the blogs about the need to find community. At least in our situation we have a ready-made community. They say that the day after you are diagnosed with cancer you're a survivor. This is a community of cancer survivors and cancer caregivers. We had our own shock before the current "oil shock." In a way, we all had a jump on things.

Weird: the Shul (Jewish synagogue) on the campus here is busy almost 24/7. It's not just used by Jews now, but is parceled out as a place of worship for all the Abrahamic faiths. A Priest comes by daily to hear confessions and say Mass. There are something like 20 Protestant congregations who have prayer services there now. And there are 3 Jewish services: a Conservative Jewish service, a Chabad service, and a Reform service. There's also a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Brother Thanh, who teaches Mindfulness meditation in the Japanese garden. And even the Pagans get their equal time: a robed circle is being organized for full moons in the Rose Garden. It seems like the tendency for people to get more religious in times of health crisis is only amplified by the energy crisis.

Me? It's very strange. I have to cling to my non-belief. It's the old problem: is Whoever's In Charge Up There almighty or all-good? Or is there no-one in charge, or is the One Who Set Things In Motion off to other, more important things now? I like the "nobody's in charge" option because in the other options God is either impotent to help Creation, or S/He is just a big monumental asshole who doesn't want to help.

Will this be the last Independence Day? I can't see America, or for that matter any other country, surviving a year under these circumstances.

Whatever happens, we'll ride it out together. Richie and I. That's a comfort, at least.

VI

Woodbury: Plan A and Plan B are announced

(July 9, 2007)

I just got email from Woodbury University...interesting.

All Woodbury students of Senior status will have their transcripts re-evaluated to determine which students will have their degrees conferred under emergency circumstances and which will not. The cut-off point as far as units completed has not --

and I repeat, NOT -- been determined. Please do not bother Admissions because they will be operating under strict guidelines that the Board and the Academic Senate will determine. There will be no exceptions made for hardship. We are all suffering hardships due to the Current Situation.

There also has been no decision made about the Fall 2007 semester. Summer 2007 semester will be wrapped up and "Credit" grades given on coursework if the current heat wave continues much longer. The costs of keeping the electricity on at Woodbury are mounting, and there is not enough of a student population to warrant keeping things running even with Summer schedules.

Workstudy programs, except for the most crucial student workers, will be cancelled. Workstudy students must be laid off first before hired workers. Please understand this decision: we are not playing favorites.

You will be notified more than one way about these vital decisions. Thanks to those students who have given their mobile phone numbers so far: we need everyone to submit the mobile phone form right away because Short Message Service (Text messaging) will be our first-line means of contacting you. Next line will be email, then landline phone number, then parents. We will maintain student confidentiality when dealing with parents, but hopefully we can contact you one way or another before falling back to that option.

Thank you in advance for your patience and understanding.
Student Affairs Staff, Woodbury

Since I was able to get a waiver to "walk" with the Class of 2007, I will probably be likely to be one of the students that have their degrees confirmed under emergency circumstances. But one never knows. They might get picky.

This is certainly interesting news, and gets me off the hook for my workstudy. As if I could keep it going now that I'm in Duarte with no way of commuting to Burbank.

VII

The ugly side of Duarte

(July 16, 2007)

We had a very strange event happen at CoH last night. Actual KKK guys in hoods, driving up in their pickup trucks. Apparently they mistook our encampment for one of the immigrant camps that have popped up in the suburbs and in rural California. They showed up here and were disappointed to find out that we weren't all Mexican or Centro-Americano. It was like a scene out of Blazing Saddles. One thing: they won't be free to look for people to beat up. A couple of deputies hauled them away to Goddess only knows where. I don't know if they're taking arrestees to Twin Towers or some other place.

The crisis is starting to bring out the worst in people. I don't like that.

VIII

We get letters...

(August 6, 2007)

The world is going to hell in a handbasket, but thank Goddess the email still works.

Some clarifications requested by my audience:

1. These are being copied to my blog from a file on my MacBook, hence the lumpy nature of the posts. And hence the fact that we haven't gotten to present day, present time (cue ominous laughter) yet.

2. No, there are no organized "refugee camps" in SoCal that I know of. The City of Hope is putting patients and family of patients up on the facilities so that patients can get their chemo without interruption. The undocumented immigrant encampments I spoke of are very ad-hoc, and are usually in parks and vacant lots. I have seen these kind of encampments before: when the Northridge Earthquake hit our neighborhood a lot of the locals did not trust their apartment buildings. Apparently during the big Mexico City quake, people were told to get back into their dwellings, and people were buried alive by buildings collapsing due to aftershocks. It hasn't become The Grapes Of Wrath. At least, not yet.

3. Richie's OK. They have said that he's officially in remission. In spite of all this stress, we're fine for now. However, who knows what will happen when the meds run out.

Will get back to cutting and pasting momentarily. There seems to be a disturbance near the front gate.

IX

A close call with an insane guy

(also August 6th 2007)

I promise I will get back to my back journal entries but this is really screwed up, man. A breast cancer patient's ex-husband found out about what is going on here at the City of Hope thanks to me and to KTLA TV 5. One of the back journal entries was about the time the Morning News came here to broadcast. The SOB saw the broadcast back home in Barstow thanks to his satellite dish. He got the accurate picture of what the tents were like from me, though. OMG.

He brought a gun on campus and came looking for his ex. If it wasn't for the fact the thing was a souvenir from the Gulf War and kept poorly someone could have gotten killed. This time the Sheriff's Department did not come immediately. It seems like LASD has closed its substation here because of the need to guard the prisoners being held in

various detention centers around LA County. The Sheriff's Department is commandeering recently built high schools because they are designed for security and keeping low value, low risk prisoners there. The violent ones are still going places like Pitchess and Twin Towers.

People are packing heat here. Loved ones and patients alike. People kept the fact to themselves but now that this incident happened and a few people drew their guns and helped out the security guards -- who aren't armed, btw...that's gotta change -- the cat's out of the bag. Wait. That's not a good metaphor post-Felix, is that? Sigh...

Now disarmament is going to be a concern of the staffers. I have mixed feelings about it. They'd rather have the professionals have the guns than the people but I'm not sure that a security guard is going to be better than someone who has some investment in protecting the community. Then again, I can understand why they'd be uneasy about amateurs with weapons walking around as an unofficial posse.

There's going to be fencing going up...something that hasn't happened in a history of City of Hope that goes back to 1913. They can't wait for pretty fencing...it's going to be ugly chain link fencing stretching the entire front perimeter of the compound, with gates for employees and a main gate for patients. They're going to check ID. Things are going to tighten up here. And the tents are going to be replaced with trailers that can be secured. However, I don't think FEMA is going to be able to keep up with our needs, the needs of the people hit by Hurricane Felix, and the needs of everyone else in the country.

There are rumors on the Net of detention centers hastily being built out in the Desert by the Department of Homeland Security. I can't get out there and check but that would make sense. The warnings are that if you are asked to relocate to a FEMA relocation center, tell them, "thank you, no." It's not mandatory, even according to the rumors. At least, not yet.

I'm going to have to go now. I have updates going all the way back from July 16th to the day Hurricane Felix hit Texas. I'll post them when I can.

X

Trying to tie up loose ends and move things into real time

(August 19, 2007)

OK, what happened between July 16th to August 6th?

I'll run it by as bullet points, because things are moving so quickly now I can't just cut and paste anymore.

- July 20, morning: KTLA Channel 5 did a remote for its Morning News here. They got to hang around with and talk with doctors, nurses, and even a few patients.

- July 22: visit to Target. We were able to get a real air bed, (which came with a battery powered pump) a foot pump (get real, batteries will probably be all gone soon) and some sheets and a comforter. The cots are horrible on the back. This is mushy but sleepable. Things are getting somewhat thin but there are still decent stocks of most stuff. Except for camping gear and bottled water.
- July 23: Richie is now officially in remission. Joy!
- July 27-ish: Felix makes landfall. Unclear how FEMA response is working out, but you would expect that it's TEXAS for crissake and there are too many Bush family friends there to not pour on the aid goodness. Can you say Bush Rangers? I knew you could.
- August 1st: a foraging run to Wal*Mart (yeah I know, ugh) found it very tapped. Weird...the place is one of those huge ones that seem to go on for miles and miles.
- August 2nd: Woodbury "regretfully" cancels Fall 2007 classes. I am one of the people who are going to get their diploma for existing work. I have enough credits to where it's not going to weaken my transcript too much. However, when, where or if I will finish my education, Goddess only knows.

And now to the news. A "Town Hall Meeting" for patients and caregivers at City of Hope happened yesterday, ending up with a disarmament plan, revelation of a plan to build somewhat more permanent family housing on campus to replace the tents, and plans to set up a hydroponic gardening facility to augment the food supply the facility brings in daily. There are a few very wealthy individuals who have been digging in deep to make sure the place continues. There is no, repeat, no triage plan in place...yet.

The stocks of Richie's chemo drugs are still fairly good, and there are plans afoot to manufacture just enough of some of them on-campus. However, this assumes a lot of things. The power grid not completely collapsing, or somehow CoH becoming self-sufficient. The availability of the chemicals and biologicals needed. And so on.

Summing things up: we are in a holding pattern.

Oh yeah, surprise surprise. Jim Smith, a friend of ours with roots in East TX, was able to finally reach his dad. FEMA came in like gangbusters. Would Bush disappoint his buddies in the region? I don't think so. Jim's dad is safe. Good.

However, things are not so great for my buddy in Goleta, happycube. The little beachside hamlet of La Conchita is now a burnt-out cinder. Someone got cute and hoarded gas. Now the train tracks are out for the Surfliner and the 101 is out of commission. The Central Coast is now officially cut off from SoCal. Groovy.

The fences are up. They have a topping of razor wire. That's a bit disconcerting. But I suppose we're safer. Unless someone comes by with boltcutters.

XI

Support is appreciated...no thanks to the Gov't.

(August 26, 2007)

Wow.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, all the folks who have been sending messages of support. It does matter, to all of us.

The fence seems to have made a difference...people are relaxing more. There were tent, trailer and cottage inspections, and the staff has succeeded in disarming the patients and caregivers, except for those with Law Enforcement backgrounds. Those folks who are healthy enough to do so are now pulling sentry duty. It is comforting to know we aren't entirely disarmed, that the folks who are qualified to have guns have them in case of evil bastards paying us visits, like the KKKlowns and the stalker ex-husband.

Velcade situation: everyone who has that for chemo has been told that there is a 4 month supply for everyone. Dr. Forman is cautiously saying that Richie will not need more, that full molecular remission (no myeloma-generating stem cells found in bone marrow biopsy) is more than possible in that time.

David Geffen and George Soros made an amazing donation to the City of Hope: a huge cache of photovoltaics, storage battery arrays, and co-generation systems for the generators. We are not going to be 100% electricity independent, but our needs will be quite modest compared to the hospital's needs beforehand. Cher has also donated richly...she has created a trust fund for finding housing for patients in Duarte. She sent us an open letter:

Nobody who is facing Cancer, AIDS, Auto-Immune disorders or any of the other grave diseases City of Hope treats should have to live in tents. I am establishing funds to keep the patients who are well enough to live off-site the ability to do so. Housing should be the least of your worries.

Wow. In all this insanity, with gasoline at \$7.11, we are still cared for and cared about. Maybe the world won't entirely cave in.

Things are not all sunshine and roses other places: there was a so-called "accident" where a US Navy fighter-bomber dropped its load of conventional bombs on Southern LA. Ground Zero was Watts, where there has been sporadic rioting over the last couple of weeks. The fighter took off at Miramar and supposedly was on its way to Point Mugu when it "lost its cargo." Bullpuckey. This was intentional. If it really was following that path, it would have dropped the bombs over the ocean. Or on Palos Verdes, Santa Monica, LAX, or Pedro. This is too far inland. This was NOT an accident. This was a deliberate attack by the Bush Administration on Americans.

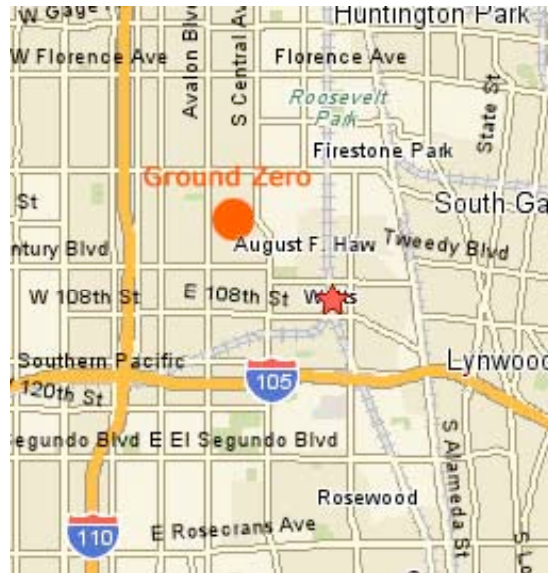
Fearless prediction: this is going to touch off a firestorm. Particularly in areas of high concentrations of African-Americans and/or Latinos.

I'm mad. Really mad.

XII

Breaking: Watts Bombing

(August 26, 2007)



This is my poor attempt at a graphic showing roughly where the bombs hit. They both hit in the same place, man...this is NO ACCIDENT.

The news is trickling out of the area. The 110 and the 105 freeways have been damaged, if not destroyed in the area, and so has the Alameda Freight Corridor. Heckuva job, guys. Heck of a freaking job. The Alameda Freight Corridor is crucial for moving freight out of the ports of San Pedro and Long Beach. The 105 also has the Metro Green Line running on a median, and the Metro Blue Line also runs through this area and is no doubt knocked out of commission.

Federal troops have been sent down to the Southern LA area. They haven't been moving to help anyone save for the folks in Texas, and now they are moving to cordon off the area where the bombs hit. They are also apparently there to keep the press out.

Los Angeles' misery index is going to go through the roof, folks. We are somewhat isolated from this but eventually it's going to affect us big time. The whole region is going to be in deep doo-doo. Heck of a job. Heck of a job.

UPDATE: Watts Towers is a twisted heap of concrete, metal and tile. One of the treasures of Los Angeles is now history.



Here's what it looked like in Better Days.

XIII

Lt. Jeremy Logan: patsy or rogue?

(August 27, 2007)

Conveniently, Lt. Jeremy Logan, USN Naval Aviator, has been arrested and thrown into the brig for the release of the two bombs over Watts. There have been hints from official channels that there are other suspects, both junior officers and enlisted Naval personnel, who are being questioned in connection with a possible White Supremacist cell at Miramar Naval Air Station.

However, this official explanation is lacking in a few things. Why was Logan cleared to take off? Why was he sent on a mission like this? Why would a fully armed fighter-bomber be sent on a trip from San Diego to Point Mugu, near Ventura? Over land? Why would this be done in a situation where jet fuel is so expensive?

The death toll and count of the injured has been slow in coming, thanks to the current crisis and the absence of a central trauma center in Southern LA. King-Drew Medical Center was not a great place, but it provided a place for the treatment of trauma close to where the bombs were dropped. The facility has been re-opened temporarily to handle the victims, and is staffed by US Military medics. Tentative estimates are between 1,500 and 2,000 dead, with 5,000 injured. This will rank as the worst case of mass murder by one

person in the history of the United States, and the second most serious case of terrorism on US soil.

Lt. Logan, for his part, says he was following orders from superior officers, right down to dropping the bombs on American soil. He also disavows membership in any White Supremacist organizations or any hatred of African Americans or Latinos. I don't know what or who to believe.

And yes, there have been riots as word gets out about this event. And yes, the damage to local infrastructure is severe, and will impair regional availability of a wide variety of goods. Metro has announced that the Green and Blue light rail lines are closed until further notice, and that the 105 and 110 freeways have been badly damaged. Burlington Northern Santa Fe and Union Pacific have also confirmed the destruction of "a significant amount" of railroad track in the area, including two miles of the Alameda Freight Corridor.

This is serious stuff.

XIV

Alameda Corridor: why it's important

(August 28, 2007)

Whoever is ultimately at fault in the bombing of Watts, the most damage done by the event is the disruption of the Alameda Corridor.

There had recently been talk of converting the currently diesel locomotives along the rail corridor to electric. Hopefully when the Corridor is rebuilt this will be part of the rebuilding process. Although I have been hearing talk of the rebuilding process for the Alameda Corridor being accelerated, because people are realizing how important it is. Wonder if China is putting the screws on the US to fix the Corridor to keep the skids on trade nice and greasy? Hmmm...

XV

Media in the Greater LA area...

(also August 28, 2007)

I just remembered something I wanted to post, but didn't want to just blindly tag to the back of my last post. It was jogged to mind when I was sitting here reading people's email posts, and also happycube's most recent post about some of his friends in Isla Vista.

Los Angeles is the media capital of the Known World. Life is so mediated here it's not funny. That living by media thing we do so well spills over to places like the Central Coast and San Diego and so forth. I thought it would be interesting to do a bit of a media census.

A few of my tent-city neighbors have either XM or Sirius. Both of them are going to be one big satellite radio presence, or perhaps not, depending on whether we come out of this crisis or not. We've noticed that the channel selection is shrinking for both services. It is as if they were strapped for personnel, power, or both.

Much was made of the fact that Fox and CBS technically have two owned-and-operated TV stations in this market. No more, folks. Fox has closed down Channel 13, KCOP, and terminated the failing "My Network" experiment in *Telenovelas* for *gabachos*. CBS has moved the programming that was on KCAL Channel 9 to a sideband channel of KCBS' digital programming, and also taken Channel 9 off the air. The argument in both cases is the need for power: the cost of running TV transmitters is astronomical in normal situations but crippling now. Running a sideband channel on a digital signal does not affect the need for transmission power. It's all bits, whether pumped out at 480p or 1080p. However, 480p allows for multiple sideband channels.

The cable and Direct Broadcast Satellite companies still run KCAL programming as a separate channel, because now they are getting a wee bit starved for programming. Cable and DBS TV is showing the same sort of diminution of choice as satellite radio is, as marginal channels die off and are not replaced. I have been seeing more DBS than anything because many of the RV-ers who are encamped here have either Dish or DirecTV. Cable at CoH is a subset of what comes in locally from the local cable service provider, so there is no way of gauging the shakeup on cable. I only know from second hand sources that the same process is going on with the coaxial side of things.

Which will be the first of the big broadcast networks to fall? Everyone is hurting. The stock market is well-forked. However, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox and the CW are still soldiering on. Prime Time is going to suffer by the inability of Big Media to generate Prime Time-quality content. April 30th came just as the studios were ramping up production on the 2007-2008 TV season. Sorry, people, many of the shows you love will be history. Those cliffhangers you were teased with in May will not be resolved "for the duration." Cheapness is King now. Lots of news magazines and reality shows. It's what was expected when the WGA strike was looming, but now it's because the networks can't afford production values anymore.

Movies: what movies? Basically movie theatres bit the big one almost from the beginning of the crisis. There is no more distribution of prints, whether they are on film reels or on hard drives. Digital or film, projectors take huge amounts of power to run. If you blow a bulb, the replacements are very hard to come by regardless of which medium you are running. In the off chance movie theatres are operating, they are running movies from late May at the latest. If you like *Pirates of the Caribbean: At Worlds End*, then you can watch it 'til the cows come home if your Cineplex is still up and running. However, I will lay you odds it's not.

Remeber I was belly-aching about missing Comic-Con? Well, it was a bust. Because of the basic collapse of Big Media and the sudden mobility crisis, guests weren't there,

panels were cancelled, exhibitors didn't show, etc. etc. etc. Jim gave me the lowdown about it all. "Like a barbecue where someone forgot to buy the meat" was the Texas-flavored turn of phrase he used to describe it.

The collapse of Big Media and the surprising robustness of the Internet has basically changed the game with regard to the cat-and-mouse Big Media vs. Copyright Infringement fracas. The RIAA and the MPAA have basically had their enforcement shut down completely by their lack of funds to continue. There has been an explosion of traffic in filesharing. Bit Torrent is the weapon of choice, and countermeasures against remaining filtration means the Internet is the Wild West once again.

With the end of credit cards except for debit and prepaid cards, however, eCommerce is dying a death of a thousand cuts. iTunes shuttered about two weeks ago. If you go to the iTunes site, you find a QuickTime message from Steve Jobs, personally thanking the customers and hoping you will patronize a re-launched iTunes "when conditions change."

Basically the rise in free filesharing is being fueled by a lot of people wanting their iTunes fix but unable to use it. Oh yeah: Apple is in the weird position of having to distribute DVD Jon's program to strip protected AAC files of their protection. People want to be able to access the music they've paid for, and with the shutdown of the iTunes infrastructure the music (and movies, let us not forget) will be inaccessible forever. However, the copy-protection defeating program doesn't work on movies. Apple is now pleading with the Open Source community for help in defeating its own copy protection. "What a burn," as we used to say on the playground.

Oh yeah: broadcast radio. The big companies like ClearChannel and Infinity/CBS are gleefully shedding stations. ClearChannel ended all pretense of keeping Progressive Talk 1150 on the air, but KFI is still beaming its 50,000 watt monster signal and its right-wing "hot talkers" all over Creation. Small radio stations are dying because keeping the transmitters running is just too costly. However, pirate radio is rising. Little radio stations are popping up, and the FCC can't shut them down. Again, the industry is a hamstrung giant, or to use Robert Fripp's longtime metaphor, they are dinosaurs dying while small, mobile and intelligent mammals thrive.

Maybe there's some good coming of all this. A couple of my Psych professors would be thrilled to see me take such a stance.

XVI

The heat is on

(August 30, 2007)

We are having some of the worst heat of the year, and there have been some nasty brush fires nearby. Certain areas of the foothills are in a "let burn condition" so the fires aren't even fought. Non-populated areas of the Angelus National Forest are burning without being checked.

The combo of the heat and the smoke and one of our patented inversion layers have created a smog siege like the kind we used to get in the '70s. The CoH folks are now trying to figure out how to put more people up indoors, particularly people who have had cardio/pulmonary problems.

We have had a Black Bear incursion. I'm trying to find pictures and have been unsuccessful so far but a mother bear and her cub got pretty close to us. The new fence was a successful barrier, and a retired cop caregiver shooting over their heads with a shotgun effectively scared them from our compound. They were beautiful, though...ruddy cinnamon fur and soulful amber eyes.

Some important things you need to know about the Watts Bombing:

- 1.) Lt. Logan is disavowing, through his Navy-provided defender, any ties between White Supremacy or any other hate group, and is loudly claiming that the bombing was ordered by higher-ups. He does affirm his membership in a "Traditionalist LDS" church in Arizona, but is not revealing which of the secretive groups it is.
- 2.) There is a huge infusion of human-power and materiel going to fixing the Alameda Corridor. Again, the suggestion I've been hearing is that the Chinese are directly leaning on the G. W. Bush administration to fix the rail link yesterday. The freeways will have to wait, as will the light rail.
- 3.) Scuttlebutt has it that some of the workers on the Alameda Corridor are dressed in orange jumpsuits. They aren't wearing the rest of the X-Wing Pilot costume so I would have to assume this is prison labor. Some say that the jumpsuits are either marked "FEMA" or "DHS" on the back. This would suggest they are denizens of the rumored relocation camps.
- 4.) I have gotten a weird email in my box. It's written with text message abbreviations so it's going to require some very thoughtful reading to parse. It comes from a guy who calls himself "especialisto X (equis)" and it comes from a Cingular account. He says this is his first and last communique. I may post it as is.

A note related to my last post: KNBC 4 Los Angeles, and I'm assuming KMEX 34 as well, are now off the air. This is a biggie because they are (were?) an owned-and-

operated NBC outlet. So much for new Heroes episodes. Anyone know if NBC/Universal has gone bankrupt?

XVII

The Especialisto X communique.

(August 30, 2007, second post)

This is what I got in my email box. I will not reveal the email address but it came from the Cingular domain. This is intense stuff.

Hey. Especialisto X here.

1st & last comm 2 u. Risky 2 do more. Army. Pvt. UCMJ susp. in Watts restrict. zone. Summ. exec. 4 media leaks.

Cas figs way off. 5K-7K dead, 10K to 15K wounded. Pulped bodies in craters. We may never know how many ded.

Much labor on AC FEMA. Pressure 2 finish quick. Camp res. "Earning their keep." 90% Blk/Ltno men. Occas Wht. Some chn gng, some not.

+ly devst'd.

Lt. L. telling truth. Orders hi up. C in C signoff proolly.

Hasta.

Here's my sense of what Especialisto Equis is trying to say.

This is my first and last communique to you. It's risky to write again. I'm in the Army, I'm a private. Unified Code of Military Justice has been suspended in the Watts Restricted Zone. Summary executions are the punishment for media leaks.

The casualty figures reported to the press are way off. 5,000 to 7,000 casualties. 10,000 to 15,000 wounded. Severely mutilated bodies in the craters left by the bomb. We may never know how many died.

Much of the labor on the Alameda Corridor is from FEMA. People who have been relocated to FEMA camps are being forced to work to "earn their keep." 90% of the laborers are either Black or Latino. Occasionally there are a few non-Hispanic Whites. Some are chain gang labor, some are not.

I am positively devastated by what I see here.

Lt. Logan is telling the truth. Orders are coming from high up. The Commander in Chief probably signed off on this.

So there you go. Someone trusted me enough to entrust me with their information. I'm sure this is a big risk to post this, but it's now my responsibility to get it to you.

I do not know who this person is. All I know is the communication came from a Cingular cellular phone. That's it.

I hope that Especialisto Equis does not get in trouble for this. He's a brave guy. Braver than me.

XVIII

Picture in Southwestern Los Angeles ugly, getting uglier.

(Sept. 1, 2007)

Let's sum up the new, ugly picture out of Southwestern Los Angeles, which seems to be the most afflicted part of Los Angeles County.

- 1.) The body count from the Watts Bombing is dramatically understated in what remains of the media. We are looking at the worst case of terrorism on US soil, period.
- 2.) The Alameda Corridor is being furiously worked on to to fix. Not only is China concerned, but we mustn't forget the 49th State of the Union, Hawaii, which is exquisitely dependent on goods from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Freeway and light rail damage will be dealt with later.
- 3.) Some of the labor is apparently being performed by individuals in neon orange jumpsuits, which are marked, in bold letters, FEMA. Some of these individuals appear to witnesses to be shackled together, chain-gang style. Some are not shackled. However, all of them seem not to be volunteers, but to have been "volunteered" in some way for their duties. Rumors of a sinister aspect to the FEMA relocation camps seem to be proving to be more than rumor.
- 4.) The assertions made by Lt. Logan through his Naval defender seem to be backed up by others. He may very well been acting on orders from superiors. The suspicion is that the clearances went all the way up the Chain of Command...make of that what you will. This suggests that Logan is being set up to take the fall for a decision made way above his station.
- 5.) The cordon around Watts is very tight, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice is being ignored in the case of those servicepersons who might leak information about ops in Watts. Meaning: drumhead courts-martial and summary execution as punishment for leakers.

6.) This all raises the question: *Cui bono?* Who is benefiting from this? Who is benefitting from the destruction of vital infrastructure in Los Angeles? Who is benefitting from the use of FEMA relocatees for labor? That's the \$64,000,000,000 question here. I will leave that for you to ponder.

XIX

OMG...OMG....OMG...

(Sept. 4, 2007)

My bank has bitten the big one. Washington Mutual is dead as a Dodo.

I read something out of Seattle, where riots are currently going on and WaMu branches are being trashed, so Richie and I hauled buns to the nearest WaMu branch. It's Tuesday, right? They should be open, right????

GAH!!! NO FREAKING WAY!!! Branch is shut tight. The ATM is dark. There is a sign on the door saying "Closed Labor Day Sept. 3" but this is the freaking FOURTH. We go to the next closest one, same diff. We finally get on the horn to my CPA uncle. "Yes, Washington Mutual is insolvent. You are going to have to file a claim for your money through the FDIC. In the meantime don't worry. You have enough to worry about with your husband being sick."

We get back to the encampment, and there are more people walking around with dazed expressions on their faces. Sure enough, those people are WaMu customers. We take a quick count of those who are present. About 50% of us are affected by this. OMG. Talk about a single point of failure.

I will be monitoring the tattered remnants of the media to see whether there is "official information" about this. Aside from the cash in our wallets, we are penniless until the FDIC reimburses us.

And we were just told today that they found an apartment for us to move into in Duarte, and that the "Cher fund" would cover move-in costs and so forth. But if our bank is dead, we can't pay the diminished rent on the apt in Panorama City. And that means they will probably hold our stuff until they get paid. OMG. OMG.

Then again, chances are we aren't the only remaining tenants with our money in WaMu.

Still...Eep.

XX

In which I find out how hard the social workers are working for all of us.

(Sept. 6, 2007)

The WWO site calls me a "hero." Fsck that, I'm no hero. You want some heroes? Meet the LCSWs who work at City of Hope.

I am now a volunteer aide to one of them, a sweet lady from South Africa named Sizwe. Sizwe comes by her heroism genetically: her parents were ANC activists, and the healthy children of the family all have gone either into organizing or helping professions in South Africa. I say "healthy children" because two of her siblings are dead of AIDS, and her mother is HIV+. Her father died of AIDS-related complications a few years ago.

Sizwe, or Suzy as she tells those who are challenged by the non-English combination of phonemes in her Xhosa name to call her, was sent to the US on a full-ride scholarship to study at USC School of Social Work. She, like me, held a bachelors in Psychology before she received her MSW. "When this all ends I will see what I can do about getting you in at USC if you want it. I know a lot of people there." My uncle would have kittens...he's a UCLA grad and almost stopped speaking to one of my cousins when she followed Spielberg, Lucas, Landis and Coppola to USC School of Film. But he got over Wendie at USC and so would he me at USC. Particularly if I was there on a full-ride scholarship. I have another powerful advocate for my going there: Dr. LaVergne Rosow, who was my mentor at LA Valley College between 2003 and 2005.

Anyway, Sizwe means Spear. She's as tough and pugnacious, when she needs to be, as her name implies. She has been fighting the good fight to get those who qualify for State Disability on State Disability. Now that Arnold Schwarzenegger has been forced by the Legislature to open up more funds for MediCal and SDI in the current crisis, she has succeeded in getting Richie in, and about 200 other charity-care patients, in one swell foop. We got a box yesterday with almost 200 envelopes, to be distributed to encamped persons. One of those envelopes had Richie's name on them.

Richie is approved for MediCal and SDI. We can now go back to the hospital where Richie was diagnosed and tell 'em to get paid through them. We have money coming at just the right time to keep us tided over while the FDIC sorts out the WaMess, which is what the LA Daily News website called the bank failure. Our next checking account will be at a Credit Union. Not sure which one, but LA County Employees Credit Union is all over the place, and anyone who's a "stakeholder" in LA County (Live, work, own property) can bank there.

So now I am a volunteer at the City of Hope, albeit one whose hours are being carefully recorded so that perhaps they can count at some MSW program or another. I still want to go to Cal State Northridge when all this is over.

Oh yeah: KNBC and KMEX might have gone off-air but they are still broadcasting via Cable and Direct Broadcast Satellite. ABC TV's O&O stations will probably be next to turn the transmitters off. KCBS is stuck: they are designated as a "source of news and official information" according to the Emergency Alert System, and they must keep their transmitter running. However, since they are forced to keep the transmitter going they will be in the big line looking for federal subsidies, since the Emergency Alert System is mandated by the Department of Homeland Security. KCET is also similarly forced to keep the transmitter up and running, due to the fact they receive federal funds.

Affiliates of networks can choose whether or not to keep the transmitters going, unless they are designated as the official Emergency Alert TV station. I'm keeping in contact with Tom Reed in Orlando, and so far the ABC affil he works with is keeping the transmitter up.

What would you do for a meal?



Find out on **FOX** This season!

In very ugly media news, there is now a new reality show on Fox that will be premiering in about a week. The show is called What Would YOU Do For A Meal? and is basically "Bumfights" on a bigger scale. They have the exclusive right, granted by the Feds, to find volunteers at FEMA relocation camps to participate in this new gameshow.

Here's an example of a stunt on the show: a pool is filled with raw sewage. Then, money starts being thrown into the pool. The first person to jump in gets to start picking out bills. The winner is the person who accumulates the most money.

Yes, it's THAT bad. There are several public interest groups that are threatening lawsuits if Fox airs the show. And some of the Democratic senators and congresspeople are introducing bills in both houses of Congress to specifically outlaw the show.

Funny thing: Fox hasn't turned off their transmitter. I think they are counting on their over-the-air signal to buy them favor.

XXI

A Fish Story

(Sept. 7, 2007)

Weird thing, a patient from Texas decided he was homesick for fishing. He got all rigged up Huck Finn style, dug out a worm from the ground, and went over to the Japanese Garden. He caught himself a fish. Big muddy brown Koi. At least he didn't catch any of the really gorgeous ones in the pond...caught one that came from the generation that was born there. Regression to the mean tends to do that: the pretty variations are flukes, sports. It's the brown ones, throwbacks to the original river carp that were bred to make Koi, that wear basic survival coloration.

Needless to say, the staff were horrified.

He wanted the staff in the cafeteria to fry it up and make hush puppies and french fries to go with it.

Just before he got out his knife to behead and gut it, I got to him.

"Sir...ever go fishing for Catfish?"

"Yep. Like Bass more, but Catfish will do."

"Umm...when you brought your Catfish home, you didn't clean it and cook it right away if it was still alive, right?"

"Yeah, gotta get the mud out of their system."

"OK. Carp are like that too, and that's what you just caught."

"OK."

"You have to let them swim around in clear water a few days, feed them cornflakes, get them to crap all that mud out of their system. Does that sound like something you can do here?"

"Uh...no."

"The fish looks like he's still alive. Why don't you put him back in the water where he belongs. I'll see what I can do about getting you a fish dinner."

The guy agreed, and we both took the fish back to the Japanese Garden pond. The fish splashed the guy on the way back in. I guess it's anthropomorphising, but it was like a final "screw you, pal" gesture on behalf of the fish to the guy who made him miserable.

XXII

Rumor my eye...

(Sept. 11, 2007)

...or something lower to the ground.

It's been a week since Washington Mutual went T. U., as The Register is wont to say. I received the first offer from what remains of WaMu and from the FDIC. It's laughable if it weren't so damn sad. I think I had something like a grand in there, and they want to give us \$200. No WAY am I settling for that. Jerks. I guess they want a fight, then. Bring it. I'm ready. To paraphrase Obi-Wan, bureaucrats are my Spec-i-AH-li-ty. Take your best shot. I'm ready.

Yep, it's the 6th anniversary of 9/11. I have been scanning what I can of the media to see if there are any copycat events. Luckily I can find none.

My cousin has been onsite frequently, because his company is the broker between sustainable energy equipment producers and the City of Hope. What a neat coincidence.

He says he's going to rent a U-Haul to get our stuff so that we can move into the apartment the "Cher and Cher-alike" fund has found us. It's not getting cold...yet. The brush fire-produced smog isn't screwing with us too badly. Those who have lots of cardio-pulmonary problems have already been relocated into apartments and houses or the three re-opened wings of the Old Building. The dorm building is almost complete (thank Goddess there's still a lot of manufactured housing available in SoCal) so the single patients whose condition doesn't merit hospitalization will have a nice place to live.

With the Solar, bio-digester and co-generation facilities the CoH will have, the folks living in the dorms will actually have the most reliable power and most controlled environment of all of us, except for those in Helford Hospital and in the Old Building. Southern California Edison is dragging its feet on switching power on for those moving

off-campus into Cher fund housing. They say they don't have the capacity. I have pointed out that many of us would be happy to designate as being interruptible, and have given them a priority list of people who absolutely need electricity and those who do not.

We (We being the Social Work staff, of which I am a volunteer assistant) will probably have to reconfigure the list to concentrate electricity-sensitive patients within a particular grid area. CoH is a hospital so they get priority on the grid, but we need to make sure we can locate people in an area that can be an isolated part of the grid and get similar priority to a hospital. This might mean we wind up in a free-standing house or a duplex instead of an apartment. I suppose that's cool.

My cousin says he can take time out from supervising the installation to help us move from Panorama City. However, I fear my old 'hood is a red zone now. We'd better have pepper spray on us or something. I don't feel comfortable with Heat but I'm also thinking both Richie and I should have a nice stout stick or cane on hand. Maybe a heavy Mag-Lite too. Rumor has it that Pacoima was burnt down -- the entire fsckn community -- by LAPD Metro Squad cops as revenge for a gang hit on a couple of cops. That can't be right. How do you burn down an entire community? Gads.

XXIII

Preparing for the move...going to be offline

(September 17, 2007)

We're going back to "Paranoia City" for a while to go through our stuff and figure out what goes with us and what stays. We will be camping out in our own apartment. We have survival rations thanks to my cousin. I don't know where he got the MREs but I'm not going to question our luck. MREs and granola bars, plus juice boxes. Hopefully we will augment our meals with local food.

If I absolutely need to have my fix of News From Outside, I can go by the Panorama City library. The WiFi access point is up, running, and robust, according to a friend of mine.

Richie is actually off of the chemo for a while because he's in Molecular Remission. He's had bone marrow taken and banked, because he might be getting an Autologous bone marrow transplant when we get back. They took the PICC line out of him. No more flushing the lines.

According to official LAPD data Mission Station and Van Nuys Station (they each patrol part of Panorama City) the immediate area is still a Green Zone. You don't want to venture into North Hills, particularly near the 405 and Nordhoff, but Panorama is relatively safe.

Oddly, one of the hottest Red Zones is West LA. My cousin is thinking of moving the family away from the Westside because there are a lot of bandits looking for wealthy Westsiders to roll there. The only safe spot is Santa Monica. True to the old "People's

Republic of Santa Monica" tag for the place, the community has coalesced around the city and the City Council is specifically promoting community building. The Yuppies and the Dogtown have-nots are amazingly pulling together. Santa Monica is a Green Zone. However, it's ringed around with dangerous territory.

The Leimert Park area of Southern LA, not really that far away from the cordoned-off zone, is another Green Zone worth noting. Certain parts of Downtown are also Green Zones. Hollywood is a big fat Red Zone, though.

I tried to do a map but it's real hard because there are these little pockets of red in green, little pockets of green in red, etc.

One of the worst Red Zones, however, is the territory under the purview of Foothill Division, LAPD. This includes some areas near where we'll be. Pacoima is supposed to be a hellhole now. That's way close. Wish us luck.

And if you live here in SoCal, please: SOUND OFF. There was one guy in Valley Village who was blogging but he seems to have dropped off the face of the earth. I can't be the only person in the region holding down the fort.

XXIV

Surprise! Panorama City is in good shape.

(Sept. 21, 2007)

Panorama City seems to be coalescing into a livable place. There is a lot of mutual aid, although it tends to flow to language groups. Spanish-speakers help other Spanish-speakers, Tagalog-speakers help other Tagalog-speakers, although the Pinoy community is mostly bilingual and not adverse to helping Anglophones. There is a Thai community that is centered around the Buddhist Temple.

There are even WiFi nodes popping up here...some identify as being City of Los Angeles nodes, with names beginning with ci.la.ca.us and a dotted quad, like this: ci.la.ca.us_XXX_XXX_XXX_XXX. I'm on one now.

I'm formatting old computers and installing Linux. I can't update the Linux because the bandwidth off the LA grid is too damn slow, but it's faster than dialup or GPRS.

Mobile phone service has even improved. There are new cell towers, oddly enough, and they report as "T-Mobile." The mobile phone network that T-Mobile was using was shared with Cingular, but T-Mobile has taken the initiative to widen their own network.

The Alameda Corridor has been rebuilt, and the whole stretch, from Union Station to the ports, is now being electrified.

I am not knocked off the air, thankfully. I have to find a place to sit and charge my laptop, of course, but that's available to me.

We will be coming back to Duarte in a few weeks. Until then, this is not bad.

XXV

Park your WWO photos here.

(Sept. 21, 2007)

I'm a member of Ning.Com, and I just put up a site for folks to add their WWO Photos and video.

So much nicer than a lot of the other photo or video sites. Check it out.

<http://wwophotos.ning.com/>.

XXVI

Eating good in the neighborhood...

(October 8th, 2007)

...and I don't mean freaking Applebee's either.

Our local indie grocery stores, El Super and Island Pacific, are bringing in some pretty decent produce for reasonable prices. Even Food 4 Less, owned by the Kroger's juggernaut, is in fairly good shape now.

California is lucky in that back in the day we were the breadbasket for the entire US. Now we are the breadbasket for ourselves and for the Pacific Coastal states. It's not cost-effective to do the kind of coast-to-coast transportation California agriculture used to do, so now it all flows along the backbone rail routes linking the Pacific states.

I hung out with the manager of Island Pacific at the nearby Goldilocks Bakery. I plied him with strong Filipino coffee and pastry, and he let me know how the new market conditions work.

"Agricultural trade runs on barter now. Someone in Washington State has apples, and they want onions from Bakersfield. OK, we trade you your apples for our onions. Or table grapes for cheese. Or whatever. It's only when it gets Downtown when actual money changes hands. It might get sticky next year with the current situation continuing, the cost of oil, water, etcetera. Although a big bonus to all this is that more people are farming organically or semi-organically. Connections are essential: a lot of times we have to act on word of mouth."

So this is where things are at: produce is easy to get on this coast. Next year's crops are more organic than ever. I haven't mentioned meat: meat is still hard to find, as is fish and eggs and fowl. We've been living a lot on vegetable protein: beans and brown rice, peanut butter on whole wheat bread, and somehow or another I will have to get used to eating Tofu.

However, turkey time is drawing near, and turkeys are coming into the stores at actually fairly reasonable prices. There are several turkey processors located in Sun Valley, one town over from us, and so they are happy to sell to locals cheap. You see taco trucks and tamale carts on the streets again, and tacos de pavo and tamales de pavo are available everywhere. However, you might be taking your life in your hands if you eat street tamales, so best to get them from one of the restaurants that are still up and running.

Gobble, gobble, gobble. Gooble gobble we accept you, one of us, one of us.

XXVII

OK, this about wraps it up for the immigration problem...

(October 9, 2007)

Finally, I get confirmation of something I've been observing. Someone in San Diego is also observing that Mexican emigres are repatriating themselves. I'm not saying this is an entirely voluntary exodus: I'm sure that there's been sweeps, possibly directed by Homeland Security/FEMA.

However, I think that it has a lot to do with a desire to reconnect to family. Family means a great deal to Latinos in general and *Mexicanos* in particular. And it's hard to keep in touch with people outside the US unless you have Internet connectivity, and only 19.1% of Latinos in the US use the Internet. More Mexican nationals use the Internet than do Latinos in the US. So the way to reconnect, when mail and telephone is spotty, is to physically come home.

I first got the sense of this when our apartment manager was so quick to negotiate our rent down. She and her family are gone now, on their way back to El Salvador. Our ex-manager is back managing the building. She's a native Angelino, the daughter of Mexican immigrants, but all her family ties are here in the States. We now have 2/3rds of the building vacant. The owners sent a personal representative to try to persuade us to stay. We can't. We have to go back to Duarte. Richie's officially in remission, but the doc wants to keep him close by and monitor him regularly. And he can't do it if we stay in Paranoia City.

This 'hood has been good to me. I'm going to miss it. Sitting in the Goldilocks bakery, munching on mocha sponge cake as if the world hadn't changed, talking about the remarkably good mangoes coming in from Mexico seemingly unaffected by the crisis with the manager of the supermarket next door made me think of just how comfortable it was. However, we are only a few blocks away from an area the LAPD has marked as

being a "local Red Zone"...Pacoima. And we have to go through Pacoima to get back to our new home. Duarte, on the other hand, is in one of the safest parts of Los Angeles County, according to the LA Sheriff's Department. No Red Zones for miles.

The die is cast. Duarte or bust.

I may be incommunicado for a while after this. Don't assume the worst. Watch my friend happycube's Live Journal. I will be keeping in close contact with him and if something really gnarly is going down he will let you know.

Think good thoughts. I'm still not a praying person. But think good thoughts, please.

XXVIII

Back in Duarte for good.

(Oct. 12, 2007)

Just a quick note to let you all know that we are back in Duarte, this time for good.

The journey to Duarte from Panorama City was interesting as in "may you live in interesting times."

Let me decompress for a little bit longer and I will give you all the story. I just wanted to resurface before people start wondering if there was something going on. We are living out of boxes in a duplex in Duarte, not in a FEMA relocation camp or something more sinister.

TTYL,
Ms. Geek

XXIX

Maybe not "The Road Warrior"...but...

(November 21, 2007)

OK, I have finally settled down enough to write.

The actual trip from Panorama City to Duarte was a month ago. It's taken me this long to get over it. Basically Pacoima does not exist anymore. No, nobody dropped a bomb on it...it just got burnt down. There are conflicting stories about how the firestorms happened. Most locals believe it was retaliation for an ambush killing of two police officers at Glenoaks and Van Nuys. And the Fire Department were basically prevented from responding because, depending on who you talk to, the firefighters were warned not to go near the homes by cops, or the firefighters didn't want to go in because they heard shooting in the area where the fires were breaking out.

Eventually, according to locals, the fires just burned themselves out. By the time we were on our way home all you could see was burnt out buildings. And stray dogs. It made me think about the Mad Max movies. We had to hustle through, but what I saw will stay with me for a long, long time. How many people died there, in the flames? How many people went unrescued? How many families lost what little they had?

If the LAPD started this, or prevented the LAFD from responding, or both, they will have a lot to answer for.

Richie's remission is holding. He's currently mulling a bone marrow transplant, although the risk of complications that couldn't be easily addressed with the current state of the facilities at City of Hope might prove to be the deal-breaker. The wear is starting to show here, as the generators have been kicking in more and more, particularly during the night when solar energy can't be generated. They installed a huge tank for Bio-Diesel as part of the sustainability project.

The tents are gone now, for the most part. The dorm building is open, and so are the houses and apartment buildings that have been bought up. Like I said last post, this is a duplex. The other people who live here are a family with kids -- two boys. I've been working on padded stunt lightsabers (nothing lights up, and the blade is padded with pool noodle foam) as a gift for the boys. The Tandy out here was closing down so I bought some leather so I can set them up with belts to go with them. Since I haven't been able to track down clips and wheels that would hold them (the cell phone type are often too flimsy) I'm doing these sabres Original Trilogy style. (D-Rings and hooks) They love *Star Wars*, I'm a hopeless *SW* fangirl.

It seems that smaller school districts like those in Duarte, Arcadia, Bradbury, Monrovia, Temple City and Pasadena have it together better than hulking, overburdened LA Unified. Kids are actually going to school and it's not just glorified day care. LA Unified is so overstressed that basically it's warehousing the students. Ever since the crisis started there has been a moratorium on enforcing the ill-named "No Child Left Behind" nationally. While the "drill and kill" approach is really bad, and we are likely to see some really horrible consequences in college readiness when that generation comes of age, I worry that the generation which is just now starting school is going to have it much, much worse. Like widespread pre-literacy.

Education is going to be essential going forward, if we don't want to go back to the late 1800s. We can survive this two ways: with high or low technology. Considering everything, I don't think I want to go back to the Wild West. But that's where we are headed if we don't educate the children. Ever looked at actuarial tables from that period? They aren't pretty.

There's going to be a huge turkey dinner held for the entire community. I'm looking forward to it. Someone told me once about what heaven and hell looked like. In hell, people had these huge spoons that were too long to eat from. They were seated at a table laden with all kinds of luscious food, and everyone was starving. In heaven, the people

figured out what to do with the long spoons. They were just perfect for feeding your neighbor.

XXX

A tale of two courts-martial

(Nov. 30, 2007)

The court-martial of Lt. Jeremy Logan, the Watts Bomber, ended today. He will be spending the rest of his life at hard labor in Leavenworth. Which at this point probably means working on a farm run for benefit of the FEMA system. However, and this is the reason he was spared a firing squad: (they still do that) damning evidence was presented which specifically points fingers at high-level officers, and even as far up as the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The inference is clear. This order was at least signed off on by the Commander in Chief. Will we finally see impeachment hearings? Finally? Is complicity in bombing the country you swore to defend finally enough to bring Bush and Cheney into the dock? If not, we're in REAL sad shape.

China and Russia are now rattling sabres at each other where once they were making googly eyes at each other and courting. China wants Russia's oil. Russia wants a pretty penny for it. Considering how hard it is to extract their oil from the ground, they can demand it. China knows it has the numbers. Russia still has a technological edge, although with the Daibei Accords China now has former Taiwanese scientists on their side. How long did the accords between Mao Zedong and Khrushchev last? Not long. I think that there's been a mutual hate between the two countries that runs a lot deeper and further back in time than the Cold War between the US and the former USSR. There's little we can do but just watch. China does have Iranian oil to fuel its war machine.

Oh yeah, and what about that other court-martial? I finally found out what became of Especialista Equis. Someone told me his name was Rigoberto Ruiz De La Madrid, and he was executed by hanging. A street light served as his gibbet. He apparently had filched a phone off of a dead body in Watts and sent the email from the phone. It took them a while but they found out the whole story. His family was in Mazatlan, working the tourist trade for pennies a day. Rigoberto looked to purchase citizenship for his family with his service. Now his family get nothing but a body that was first hanged, then mutilated by an angry mob, and the need to scrape together the money for his burial. I am in awe of his bravery.

What's next? I haven't a clue. It looks like gas at or about \$5.50/gallon is reality now. It looks like we need to get off the petroleum teat and do so ASAP. We need to rebuild the railroads, using alternatives like hybrid locomotives and Bio-Diesel. We don't necessarily need Shinkansen or TGV but just plain old locomotive power will be fine. The plans to electrify the Alameda Corridor are being put into action, so that's a start.

Farmers are coming back to the Sepulveda Dam Basin, and community gardens are springing up all over the place. Here in the San Gabriel Valley, park land and vacant land

are being considered for conversion to agricultural use. However, the weather pundits are predicting a drier-than-normal Winter. Eventually irrigation will come up at loggerheads against human water needs. And eventually the shaky compacts that keep water flowing from areas outside Los Angeles will fall apart, and Los Angeles will have to deal with the consequences of development of arid land for human habitation and agriculture.

Let me leave you with some lyrics from The Police, from a song that's been running through my head all these past months.

*Fifty million years ago
You walked upon the planet so,
Lord of all that you could see
Just a little bit like me*

Walking in your footsteps

*Hey mr. dinosaur
You really couldnt ask for more
You were gods favourite creature
But you didnt have a future*

Walking in your footsteps

*Hey mighty brontosaurus
Dont you have a lesson for us
You thought your rule would always last
There were no lessons in your past
You were built three stories high
They say you would not hurt a fly
If we explode the atom bomb
Would they say that we were dumb?*

Walking in your footsteps

*Fifty million years ago
They walked upon the planet so
They live in a museum
Its the only place youll see um.*

This is Ms. Geek, signing off, from beautiful downtown Duarte, California. Hope everyone gets through the Winter ok. Peace, out.

Afterword

Breaking Kay-Fabe: an explanation. [OOG]

(May 31, 2007)

Basically all the preceding blog entries are part of a huge online roleplaying game called "World Without Oil." It helped that in real life during the month of game time we were dealing with gasoline prices that are, in real-money, adjusted-for-inflation terms, the most people have ever paid in the United States for gas. There were places in LA County where people paid \$4/gallon if they were fool enough to fill up at those stations.

Yes, my husband has multiple myeloma. Yes, he's being treated at the City of Hope in Duarte. No, we don't live there. We still live in Panorama City. Both Watts and Pacoima are still alive and well. No bombs were dropped on Watts, no fires set by revenge-minded police in Pacoima. We did have a police riot at McArthur Park in the Westlake district of the City of Los Angeles (not to be confused with the Ventura County community of Westlake) on May 1. They're still trying to sort that out. It is likely this won't cost Chief Bratton his job. But at least his mentality seems to be more about finding the truth than circling the wagons. At least I hope that's the case.

If you are interested in multiple myeloma, which is being diagnosed more and more, particularly in people exposed to pesticides and/or diesel fuel, you would do well to drop in on the International Myeloma Foundation's website. They are at <http://www.myeloma.org/> . The facts are all there, as is information on treatment and information about what you can do to help. The City of Hope is doing wonders every day at its facility: they deserve your support as well. Stop by and see them at <http://www.coh.org/> . No they don't have sustainable power sources...at least, not yet. Someone should step up to the plate and hook them up. If this actually happened in real life, the City of Hope would probably not do so great.

Yes, I took a very pointed political tone in my writings. Yes, I am frustrated by the current state of affairs. We did not elect a Democratic majority to Congress and the Senate to roll over on its collective belly and tuck its tail between its legs. The idea of the bombing of Watts came when I thought "What's it going to take to get people to stop being obsequious to Darth Cheney and his Apprentice, Dubya? Are they going to have to be caught bombing US soil?" So that's why the storyline I put together. If the Republic we have was still working, still effective, still representing its constituents, Cheney and Bush would not have been back for a second term. And even if they were voted back legitimately, (and there is convincing evidence the elections were gamed once again) a truly functional Republic would have impeached and removed the bastards long ago.

I'm a bit of a pessimist with regard to Peak Oil, Global Warming, and the fate of the Nation. We could have done something about this 30 years ago, when Carter was seriously talking about weaning us off the petroleum teat. However, the Iran hostage crisis happened, Carter was not re-elected, and Reagan began 30 years of a "Don't Worry, Be Happy" policy with regard to our dependence on foreign petrochemicals. Global

Warming seems to be a runaway train that nobody can stop. We're just going to have to adapt or die: emulate the small mammals that survived the Great Impact, or share the fate the large dinosaurs suffered.

With regard to politics, it might take a full-blown revolution at this point, because our political institutions have either been bought off or co-opted by other means, or in some cases directly sabotaged. I hope not: revolutions are costly, and it is never assured that the Good Guys win. Usually violent revolutions end with the most ruthless and the most savage warlords winning and imposing their will. Look at how France suffered first under Robespierre, then under Napoleon Bonaparte. Who came out the winner in the Russian Revolution? Stalin. I know I've said nice things about Hugo Chavez in other places, and I love the way he makes Dubya mad, but he's turning out to not be so nice. A legitimate leader can survive dissent. It is only the illegitimate ones who have to resort to suppressing freedom of speech and other civil liberties. He lost me at "let's close down all but the state-run media."

Much depends on 2008. I don't like the idea of Hillary Rodham Clinton as the Democratic nominee. I prefer General Wes Clark, Vice President (arguably President) Al Gore, or a ticket with the both of them on it. Either one of them have what it takes to lead us out of the mess we're in and get us back in the good graces of the rest of the world. Hillary is just more of the same old warmed-over DLC slightly-right-of-center pottage that Bill Clinton was feeding us. Don't get me wrong: I miss Bill Clinton. After seven years of George W. Bush, I have nothing but nostalgia for him. Anyway, hopefully the GOP nominee will be weak tea that satisfies neither the base nor the swing voters, because Hillary won't win this on her own merits. The GOP field would have to be so weak the base stays home and the swing voters hold their noses and vote for "anyone but the GOP candidate." So far none of them look like they can satisfy both the base and the swing voters. The ones pandering to the base are frothing lunatics like Huckabee and Brownback. The ones pandering to the swing voters like Giuliani haven't a prayer (heh) of being accepted by the base. And McCain looks more and more lost and unhinged as time goes on. Dubya successfully smeared him as unstable in 2000. McCain nowadays is proving him right.

Anyway, enough of the politics: peak oil, climate change, ecological crises and their economic sequellae are way too big for politics. We will all be affected. At best, we will have to adapt rapidly and successfully. At worst, nothing we can do will stop this, and the rest of the world will wind up joining us Angelinos in our perennial game of "Waiting For The Big One."

No, this will not hit all at once, in the space of 32 weeks of unleashed Hell on Earth. This will hit us gradually and subtly. My friend Pam, aka Beep, runs a Live Journal community called boiling frog. The community is more about climate change issues than about peak oil but the myth the name comes from is a perfect metaphor for our situation. We're in the pot. The heat is coming on slowly, ever so slowly. We don't notice. By the time it's noticeable, it's too late. However, what really happens when a frog is put in a pot

where the water is slowly heated, is eventually the temperature gets uncomfortable and it hops right out. We apparently don't have the same sense that a frog has.

I invite you to read my posts like you would read a novel. Start with the last one first and move up. I might even try to write this in prose eventually. I also invite you to visit <http://www.worldwithoutoil.org/> and explore the other writers on this project's work. There may even be a PBS special on this sometime in the future. I don't know if there will be one yet, but there is a connection there with the sponsors of the master WWO site. I made it to #7 in the rankings of writers on WWO, and managed to score a winning post with my last in-game post.