

# SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

**I PROMISED MYSELF I'D WRITE MORE THIS YEAR**, exercise more regularly, deepen my meditation practice. But the year is almost over, and how little progress I've made. How unhappy I am with the current administration. Yes, Mr. President, I know there are only so many hours in a day. But promises were made, sir: to govern yourself more wisely; to keep imperial misadventures to a minimum; to ask not what the Mystery can do for you, but what you can do for the Mystery.

**I DON'T WANT TO SHIRK MY RESPONSIBILITIES** — only, what are my responsibilities? Where does my life end and the life I share with everyone else on the planet begin? This morning I heard a flock of geese overhead but didn't look up. Nearly a billion people will go to bed hungry tonight.

**GEORGE W. BUSH CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY TERRORISTS** hate Americans so much, as if hatred were somehow a mystery in this country, where so many straight Americans hate gay Americans and so many white Americans hate black Americans. Bush keeps promising to make America safe again. But when did we ever feel safe? Before September 11, we felt unsafe because of crime. Because of AIDS. Because the hole in the ozone layer was getting bigger and because the rainforest was being turned into particle board.

**AN OPTIMIST AND A PESSIMIST MET ON ELECTION** day. The pessimist said, "Everything is terrible. It can't get any worse." The optimist said, "Yes, it can."

**NO ONE HAS CONVINCINGLY EXPLAINED THE** difference between the exit polls and the actual returns on November 2. Were electronic voting machines hacked? Did the Republicans steal another election? Stealing elections is nothing new in this country — for Democrats or Republicans. John Kennedy was elected president in 1960 thanks to the support of dead voters in Chicago; Lyndon Baines Johnson won a Senate race in 1948 because of ballot-box stuffing. We may never know the extent of electronic ballot stuffing this year. There's no question, however, about the efforts to disenfranchise numerous citizens: phone calls directing Democratic voters to incorrect polling places; fliers distributed in poor neighborhoods telling Democrats to vote on Wednesday; voting-machine shortages in predominantly Democratic wards; hundreds of thousands of first-time voters (most of them Kerry supporters) being forced to use provisional ballots. When the administration warned months ago that the election might be disrupted by terrorist attacks, I guess they weren't just crying wolf. But instead of al-Qaeda operatives, it was homegrown terrorists who tried to derail the voting; homegrown terrorists who masqueraded as law-abiding citizens; homegrown terrorists who hate us because we're free.

**IT'S HARD FOR ME TO SEPARATE THE SADNESS I** feel about Bush's victory from the melancholy I always experience this time of year. The days grow shorter for Republicans as well as Democrats. Dead leaves pile up in both red states and blue states. Autumn is still autumn, and the heart turns in its seasons no matter who rules the land.

**DEMOCRACY DIDN'T LEAVE BEHIND A FORWARD-**ing address. Who can blame her? Maybe she just got tired of being ignored, and lied to, and slapped around. Sure, it started out as a great love affair, one for the history books: men died for her; women wept; no sacrifice was too great — in the beginning. But here it is, 2004, and the bed is empty, and her suitcase gone.

**ISN'T VILIFYING GEORGE W. BUSH MORE COSTLY** to me than it is to him? I don't need to hate the president in order to oppose his actions (just as I didn't need to love John Kerry in order to vote for him). Nor is there any reason to inflate Bush's all-too-human shortcomings to mythic dimensions. The president, too, wakes up every morning in a body that isn't getting any younger. Nor is a full night's sleep the refuge it used to be. His dreams are more vivid now, more painful. He speaks of them to no one.

**I'D LIKE EVERYONE ON THE LEFT TO STICK TO-**gether. I don't want to see us bleeding from self-inflicted wounds. Let's face it: progressives have evolved a martial-arts form all their own, more deadly than karate or kung fu. The rules: Do as much damage as possible not just to your enemies but to your allies, and not just to your allies but to your closest, dearest friends. And after they lie broken and bleeding, split yourself down the middle, and start flailing away again.

**THERE'S A NATIVE AMERICAN SAYING: "WHEN WE** take one step toward the gods, the gods take ten steps toward us." The writer Rob Breznsny comments, "Here's another way to think about it. There are huge, cosmic intelligences whose work is imperceptible to our five senses. They aren't figments of the imagination or sentimental fictions, but actual beings. When we acknowledge their existence and ask for their help, they enjoy responding. More than that: they love to collaborate with our strong intention."

**LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE LUMINOUS ONES WHO** don't stop shining when the lights go out.

**I DREAMT THAT I WALKED FROM COAST TO COAST** and wrote long letters to myself from every town I passed through, so that when I got home, my mailbox was filled with the truth about America.