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So you're already privy to this topic a little bit. Without having to go into too much and prejudice your thoughts, just take us back to that day, that night, New Year's Eve 1999. Let's just start on a personal note, and tell me what you remember about that day.

I was in approximately Tulum, Mexico, with two other couples. So it was myself and my then-husband, who is now my ex-husband; my best friend from graduate school and her ex-partner [laughs]; and her best friend from high school and her ex-husband [laughs].

Wow, a lot has changed since then.

Yeah, a lot has changed since then. And we...I don't think we were *really* afraid of the world coming to an end, but I think we thought it would be a really fun thing to do, to be, to take a vacation at a really landmark date, in a place that had clean water. [laughs]

Interesting.

Yeah. So we chose Mexico. I mean, it was actually kind of a deliberate thought process on my friend Karen's part, who works in environmental science. And so what I remember is actually watching TV and we'd prepared this elaborate meal, and had this amazing dinner, with fresh tortillas and produce from the local market. And we watched TV and we watched the world, you know, welcome the New Year. And then we danced for like, two hours, in the living room.

That's fantastic.

Yeah.

Had you ever been to that part of Mexico before?

I hadn't. I hadn't been to the Yucatan Peninsula before.

And you said the clean water was a part of the decision making process?

Yes. Yeah, because our thought was if the world was gonna go to hell in a hand basket, at least we'd be someplace that access to fresh water and fresh food. Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah. No seriously, it was part of Karen's calculation.

What were your immediate surroundings like that night?

Um, we were in a subdivision of, I would say, fairly wealthy-to-middle class Mexican people, and tourists. So our unit was owned by an ex-pat who was now living in Mexico. But it actually wasn't that...I don't know if this is true of all of the Yucatan Peninsula or just this area, but we were about an hour outside of Cancun, so it wasn't exactly a tourist mecca or destination, where we were at. But we were very close to the Tulum ruins, so across the way there was a village, so it was a little bit more working class, I guess you would say. Or clearly not middle class, clearly not catering to tourists. So it seemed like a mixed community, maybe is the way to put it.

And you said you were in the midst of your doctoral program for English and comparative literature?

Yeah. I was in the PhD program, my friend Karen was in a PhD program, and Anne Marie was a high school teacher in California.

And this is something that's been interesting about the topic: for a lot of people, given that it was a momentous occasion, they seem to have put some forethought into who they spent that time with. Was that the case with you?

Oh, yeah. Karen was -- still is -- one of my closest friends, and at the time, I felt like she was my sister.

How long had you known her?

Um, I'd known her since college, but we reconnected in graduate school. Yeah.

Wow. So you're in Mexico, you're with you said your *then*-husband...

Then husband.

Best friend, and her then-husband, right? No?

Um, partner. They weren't married, but live-in partner, yeah.

Do you remember how you felt as midnight approached?

Um...really happy. I mean, I didn't actually think the world was going to end, right? I didn't think...

You can be honest.

No, I didn't think the world was going to end [laughs].

You'd be surprised. I mean, I've interviewed people from all walks of life, like I said, and I've actually talked to people who were candid enough to say, yes, they did really think –

Oh yeah, no, my ex-husband did. And my best friend, you know, really did wonder about what the ramifications of Y2K were going to be on global systems, right? Global computer systems. And I don't know whether it's my own naiveté about such things...like I don't really...it's still a mystery to me how landline phones work, right? It's more [laughs]...it's easier for me to imagine how cell phones work than a landline phone. [laughs]

Well, it's a mystery that will go extinct and may never be solved. Do you still have a landline phone?

I do not. [laughs]

Do you remember if you had a cell phone back then?

I did not have a cell phone. I'm a late adapter. I'm a very late...I'm like one of those people that doesn't get a cell phone until it's already into generation, like, four.

That's been another salient aspect of this topic, when people have reminisced about it, is a lot of people have said that that was sort of the fulcrum point. That it seemed like that was when technology just really exponentially started to take off. Do you feel that way? And do you remember what your daily life back then and comparing it to now, as far as technology, and just how –

Yeah, you know, I think because I was so immersed in my graduate program and because I'm a lit person who really only needs access to paper, no. I wasn't...like I said, I'm really a late adapter, and I'm also one of those people that really scoffs at technology. So for example, when Facebook first came on the scene, I was like, "Ugh, Facebook. What the hell is this thing?"

I'm still that way.

Right. This is totally ridiculous. When twitter came on the scene, I was like, "Twitter. How can anybody write something that's 140 characters?" I mean have a twitter and a Facebook account now, but –

That's spoken like an English professor right there.

Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, I mean it took me a couple of years. Yeah.

I know you said paper is primarily your, your primary resource, but you have to admit even today, that's probably changed, as far as like how you do your research, right?

Oh, no, absolutely. It makes me sad, but honestly, for space purposes, I've converted to electronic media for anything that's narrative. So still for critical works, I really prefer to have a book. But if it's a novel, I can read a novel on a Kindle.

Do you think it's changed how research is conducted, or perhaps the integrity of research? And people, you know, just sort of cherry picking things because its so quick and easy now?

[sighs] Yeah. You know, I wonder. I think about that, but in terms of teaching, like in the classroom, and I think...I guess I think about it as I do with any technology, including the book, right?

Yeah.

Because I think of the book as a technology –

Since 1455 and growing.

Exactly [laughs]. It's still going strong. That there are really revolutionary positive things about it, and then there are other tings that you lose sight of. So you could argue that when the book came around, the oral tradition of storytelling and memory and having human conversation, kind of maybe, people maybe lamented that, I don't know. That's a possible reaction. And then similarly, you could say that on Facebook you're not really connected to people, you know. But I think there are positive things, and so I think research wise, there are also positive things about being able to...like, to be able to search into a database at the British Library, for example, and find exactly what you need, versus spending hours scouring through boxes to find a single document.

Oh, yeah.

Or to be able to have a scanned document available to you that you can click on and you don't have to go to London, right? That's amazing. Yeah.

Well, it's always nice to have a reason to go to London, but...

Well, yeah [laughs].

Okay, so if you -- being an English literature person -- if you were going to write a book about 1999, what would be the title, and what would be overarching theme?

[sighs] You know, this is going to sound really cheesy, but the first thing that comes to mind is the REM song, "It's the End of the World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)."

Not cheesy, but a long title. But it worked for REM, didn't it?

[laughs] It did work for REM, yeah.

And would that, like I said, would that be the overarching theme? Would it be that sense of possible apocalypse looming?

Uh, yeah, yeah. I think that I would say what I feel as a person born in 1970, who's kind of seen this arc of technology and discourse in popular media, there's always been apocalyptic narratives, but I sort of feel like there's a different tenor to the apocalyptic narratives, there's a kind of ferocity to the way that we're envisioning the end of the world, that I think is different from --

Do you remember that tenor changing, or increasing in intensity, at that time?

I feel like it started in...when did the first kind of vampire stuff happen? Mid-to-late 90s?

Ooh, that's an interesting angle on it.

I think mid-to-late 90s.

You know, I've never thought about it, but yeah, that's been --

It's the vampire stuff, is when I first started noticing it.

Wasn't Tom Cruise in a movie that I think was like first vampire movie --

Yeah, yeah, yeah! No, Anne Rice, it's really, right..

Anne Rice. And that was a couple of years before the millennium...

Exactly. So I feel like it was Anne Rice, it was the remake of Bram Stoker's "Dracula," with Winona Ryder...

That was also the same time, I think.

Exactly, right? So...

I've never thought about that.

Yeah. I feel like it's...but it's also AIDS, right? I think there's a kind of unique connection to the AIDS crisis of the 80s, leading to the rise of the vampire narrative. Now I'm really speaking like a lit professor [laughs].

No, I'm with you. No, it's right in my wheelhouse.

And then...yeah, I mean and now, we have the "Walking Dead", right? We have zombies. There's a really --

Oh, that's definitely become prevalent.

Yeah.

I've never thought about that, but yeah, there may some sort of a tacit connection between that narrative and the bigger narrative about how things are going and may continue to go.

Yeah.

Wow. Is the world going to end with a bang or a whimper?

Both. [laughs]

Okay, I don't know what T.S. Eliot would say about that, but...

I'm not into binaries.

[laughs] **"Not into binaries." See, I do a lot of coding, so binaries are kind of a thing, but in a different way.**

I wrote a book on racial ambiguity, so I'm all about the gray.

That will be a great ending point. Do you feel like...compare then and now, briefly, if you don't mind. As far as -- and this is getting into a big topic, that you don't have to necessarily get into -- but culture and racial interactions then, to now, and that experience.

[exasperated sigh] Ooof. Like the now of August 6, 2016, on the eve of a fall election – presidential election – that we’ve never kind of seen before? Like the rise of this kind of rhetoric of hatred, for lack of a better word? Is that –

So do you feel like it’s changed for the worse in the 16 years since 1999?

[sighs] If we’re examining the rhetoric, then yes. But I will say this. I’ve actually been in Europe for the last two months. I just got back this week.

Well, that’s an interesting perspective on it.

Yeah, no, it’s been really fascinating being away, right? Being in Europe, especially with their gun laws, right? And then seeing and hearing –

That’s another conversation.

Oh, yeah. Seeing and hearing about what’s happening in the United States. And so when there was the cluster of killings of black men by police, and then the assassination of police by that gunman, my husband – who’s white – said to me, “Do you think there’s a coming race war?” And I said, “It never ended.” Right? So I think there’s this myth that the 1960s happened and we all...all of a sudden our racism was over. But I actually think that was never true. And so I think what feels new is the public voicing, but the sentiment isn’t new, right?

Do you think technology plays into that?

To a certain extent, the anonymity of the comment section, right?

Anonymity, yes.

The anonymity does.

Makes a big difference.

Right.

For better and worse.

Right, but people hold these sentiments and they’ll voice them in private company, right? So there’s a way in which my husband hears things that I’m not going to hear because I’m...I know this is radio, but I’m Asian-American, so I scan as being not white, and yeah, so...

Wow. Well, that’s an interesting take. Anonymity, yeah, I’ve never thought about that, but that’s true. I mean, it allows people to...it gives them a pulpit that they wouldn’t have had before.

Right. And I think in a similar way, Trump's presidency, his election bid, was another form of the anonymity, right? So rather than an anonymity through hiding yourself in a comment section, it is being able to hide yourself in a mob. Right? Being able to hide yourself –

Well said.

-- with others who are shouting the same kind of slogans.

I think someone said that Trump's candidacy is essentially the comment section of an online article come to life.

Yeah. That's a great way of putting it, yeah.

Last question. What will be the overarching topic that people will be talking about in 2100?

So, I'm really a pessimist about the environment. There won't be anyone around to talk about 2100.

Wow. You are a pessimist.

Yeah. There won't be anyone around. The ice caps will have melted. We'll leave it to the roaches. Yeah.

It's what the roaches will be talking about, right? The cyborg roaches –

Yeah. I mean, I think it's possible that the aliens might come down and be able to decipher, right? If anything survived. And maybe it will be a book.

See, I'm of the opinion that by 2100, we'll have moved beyond our corporeal existence and we'll just be code, and we'll be living in the ether.

Oh, I could live with that. That's a happier future than [laughs]...

I agree with you, but whenever I voice that opinion, a lot of people vehemently disagree with that and think that would be horrible. Which is an interesting philosophical take on things, to see how people react to that. Would you want to be immortal thought, as opposed to a corporeal existence?

Right.

I think a lot of people are really attached to the idea of existence being bodily, you know?

I have sort of a Buddhist mindset. My grandparents were Buddhists, and so I just feel like, you know, we're going to go back to the Earth somehow. We'll end up in the ether somehow.

Do you remember how people in the Buddhist tradition celebrated that event, the turn of the millennium?

No, I don't, I don't. That's actually an interesting question.

Just curious, yeah.

Yeah, I was actually actively practicing at that point, too. But no, I actually don't...so here's the funny thing: I don't think they would have necessarily marked it any differently, right?

Okay, yeah.

Yeah. Because it's all just time.

Right.

Yeah. And space.

I mention how I've gotten very different perspectives from talking with people of different faiths in this project. I thank Jennifer for her time and end the interview.