



today:tomorrow

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THE CATAclysm WE BRACED FOR 20 YEARS AGO HAS ARRIVED

A little over two decades ago, the world was gripped by [Y2K panic](#). With computer programs designed using two-digit codes to represent the year (e.g., 89 for 1989), there was widespread fear that when the clock struck midnight on Jan. 1, 2000, our electronics would recognize it as the year 1900 and go haywire. Critical systems would fail, experts warned, potentially causing financial markets to collapse, airplanes to drop out of the sky, and hospital equipment to go dead. The U.S. government was sufficiently alarmed to appoint a [Y2K czar](#).

After all the worry—and [preparation](#)—the “millennium bug” arrived with barely a [whimper](#). My year 2000 trends forecasts centered not on technological Armageddon but on sightings such as “[millennium blue](#),” mass customization, and the rise of the anti-status consumer (think: Old Navy, private label, Southwest Airlines).

2000–2019: A SLOW SLIDE

Having spent much of 1999 waiting for the world to implode, we entered the new millennium feeling both relieved and a little foolish. We had prepared ([some more than others](#)) for something big (and bad) to happen. Instead, we entered into two decades of what many would characterize as a steady decline.

For 20 years, we bobbed and weaved as life threw us one challenge after another. When the Columbine High School



Grocery stores are experiencing hoarding and shortages of some supplies due to the pandemic.
Orlando, Florida 2020

massacre occurred in the U.S. in the spring of 1999, we had no idea it would be the start of a horrible, relentless trend. Terrorist attacks—most notably, 9/11—and mass shootings became an all-too-common occurrence.

Economically, it was boom and bust—heavy on bust—from the burst dot.com bubble in 2000 through to the global recession of 2007–2009 and various national economic crises. Centers

of power shifted: China surpassed Japan to become the world's second largest economy, and by 2018, 71 of the world's top 100 revenue collectors were [corporations](#), not countries. As of 2019, the richest 1 percent owned 44 percent of the [world's wealth](#).

Politically and militarily, we saw the rise of right-wing [nationalism](#) and extremism. Wars raged. By 2016, some 65.6 million people had been forcibly [displaced](#).

Environmentally, those 20 years were a nightmare, with a string of devastating natural disasters and [warnings](#) from scientists that we can expect a continued uptick in extreme weather events.

Health-wise, we saw massive increases in [obesity](#), [diabetes](#), and [mental health issues](#) and a [global crisis in healthcare](#).

Socially, we saw a welcome shift toward LGBTQ+ acceptance. The #MeToo movement grabbed head space and headlines. And sociopolitical divisions intensified, marked by conspiracy theories, #fakenews, and the rabble-rousing of social media "[bots](#)."

Even more impactful was our wholesale embrace of digital living. From e-shopping to social media, smartphones to smart speakers, we gradually shifted our everyday activities into the digital realm.

Without question, much happened over the first 20 years of the new millennium, but at no point did the world face an existential crisis as one. At no point did people across the globe simultaneously wonder whether life would ever return to "normal."

2020: KABOOM! (OUR NEW ANYTHING-BUT-NORMAL)

Well, folks, that cataclysmic crisis has arrived. As I write this in late April 2020, the world has exceeded 3 million confirmed cases of

COVID-19, and more than 225,000 people have died. Most of us are sheltering in place, fearful of just how high those numbers will rise—and how deep the incursion will be into our lives.

This pandemic has wreaked havoc on a level that exceeds what we expected from Y2K all those years ago. Financial markets have been rocked, and unemployment is at Great Depression highs. Airplanes aren't falling from the sky; they've simply been grounded, as social distancing orders keep people at home. Hospitals haven't succumbed to equipment failures but to the failure to amass sufficient supplies and to the overload that comes from having too many contagious, critically ill people at once.

We surfed the choppy waters of the first two decades of the 21st century, never realizing the tsunami that lay ahead.

This virus will touch each of us—some in debilitatingly painful ways; others more tangentially, but still with an enduring impact.



Grounded Swiss aircraft due to COVID-19



Volunteers deliver prepared meals to seniors.

Commentators already are talking about life “before- and post-COVID-19.” I’m thinking of the latter as the PC-19 era.

No one—not even our newest hero, [Dr. Anthony Fauci](#)—knows how long this pandemic will last or its eventual toll. What we do know is that life PC-19 will be radically different.

There will be plenty of time for revised trends forecasts. For now, I can tell you this: It will be a lost opportunity if we don’t take advantage of our present circumstances to design a reset. Rather than fantasize about a quick return to “normal,” why not use this enforced separation from our usual interactions and patterns of behavior to consider what a better world might look like?

On balance, the last 20 years were a bit of a bust. The next 20 could set us on a course we would actually be happy to follow.

Imagine that.

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FEATURED ARTICLES

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Times of crisis bring out the best—and worst—in humanity, and we are certainly seeing that in our leaders. Those most empathetic and personal are receiving high marks.

[The New Gap Year? Why the Class of 2020 Needs a Marketing Makeover](#)

Instead of getting lost in the loss, there are steps new college grads can take to boost their employability and make the best of their lockdowns.

[What Two Brain Tumors Have Taught Me About the Future of Care](#)

We need science, innovation, and technology to lead us into the future, but we can't risk leaving human connection behind.

Forbes

[The COVID Pivot: Small Business Shifts with the Times](#)

Many small businesses have been forced to shutter—but there are others that are pivoting, and in ways larger organizations can only dream about.

[A Glimmer of Hope for the Return of the Cs](#)

Dare we hope that this pandemic will serve as a sort of reset—shepherding in a new era of compassion, camaraderie, civility, and community?

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