It has been 19 years this week since the first World Trade Center bombing (hello, world, they hate us) and almost 17 years since Oklahoma City exploded at the whim of an American terrorist. I remember that time that had us all fearful, but without the tools to understand what terrorism on our own shores meant, we were not acquainted with how a stateside attack would affect our collective DNA, not yet aware of how our enemies would change the game some eight years later. And even as a museum and memorial to 9/11 and WTC victims open, I wonder what people think about personal security.

I was in New York City during both Trade Center attacks (and still am), and it's hard to forget the way either of them felt. Even though I have the wrinkles to prove the passage of time, the world is evolving, revolving, mutating so fast that it's hard to remember the little events of the past decade, even though each movement contributes to the life we lead today. But on yet another anniversary, it's hard not to remember pivotal and tragic events, with almost photographic accuracy.

In 1999, I co-authored a book called Next: Trends for the Near Future, which became a best-selling book about trends for business and beyond. Though I have never professed to gazing into a crystal ball, we wrote a lot about the end of American superiority, the increasing risk of terrorism and a grave sense of "them versus us." The world has spun out of control since that year, and though we could not have predicted an attack on the scale of 9/11, we did write of planes falling out of the sky, the vulnerability of Americana icons (think Disney World), the sense that something was brewing when it came to our enemies, and how many world citizens were tiring of what they perceived as our American ego gone wild. In 1999, the United States was Miss Universe about to unwittingly cede her title and spiral into a place where a midlife crisis was inevitable.

Cut to now, a post-Madoff time filled with many blows to our economy, including foreclosures (another example of "them versus us" as evidenced by the Occupy movement) to student debt to the disruption of our middle class. We've had to recalibrate our scales and think of America as vulnerable and not at all impervious to our foes or the pitfalls of greed. And who could have imagined a world of "Yes, we can," in which a young-ish African American president gets elected, only to be challenged by those claiming to want to restore some notion of the American dream, complete with a blurring of church and state? (There is a bad irony that the artist whose image I most associate with "Hope" last week admitted it was based on a photo he had used without permission from the Associated Press.).

This, by the way, is also part of the "them versus us" paradigm, a sense of turmoil based on which side of the pendulum you choose. And the gap is only widening between left and right as we inch closer to the election. What happened to shades of purple? What I wouldn't give for a plum smoothie...

We also talked a lot in that heady year of 1999 about the rise of parallel universes, and how virtuality and reality would meet and form something else—what we now know as life in the cloud, mobility and social networking. Had we known in 1999 that Facebook would change how we communicate, socialize, pontificate and ideate, we would be not only insanely rich but also beyond prophetic. The pace of change has become so warped, so Mach 11, that it's insane to think that before 2004, there was no Facebook (just paper Ivy League "pigbooks") and social networking meant in-person socialization. Before 2006, a tweet was a sound made by a bird. And before reality TV and YouTube killed the radio star, we had a different notion of what it meant to have your 15 minutes of fame.

In 1999, we had an inkling that the notion of the nuclear family unit would get a big overhaul, but we didn't know that gay marriage would redefine it or that "gray divorce" would change the game in terms of how we view happily ever after. Who knew that marriage would be more revered by the gay population and slightly more reviled by the hetero set? (A Time/Pew Research poll in 2010 found that a whopping 40 percent of Americans believe marriage is becoming obsolete.)

This brings me to another huge change in our society: the power of women, in the boardroom and at home. With so many women choosing to adopt or have babies on their own, never before in history has the fate of men felt quite so precarious. In 1999 we talked of the rise of the single woman ("singleton"), but she was still a bit sketchy; what would Carrie or Bridget do at 45? And though I try to head for the hills every time somebody mentions the word "metrosexual," which I helped usher into the public consciousness, it's going to be interesting to see how men fare in a post-metro world of gender ambiguity. I believe there's a huge career out there for a would-be trend forecaster who could explore the state of men, now and next (I've given my time on that beat).
As I glanced back at *Next*, I found we were talking a great deal about hyperlocalism, and how newscrafting would become a local love affair—proved out these many years later with Patch and every local website, and with many of us turning to our extended social networks to find out about the weather before turning on the TV news. It's amazing how true this one rang; we even mentioned that advertisers would have the chance to get hyperlocal, too (hello, search engine optimization and custom messaging).

I hate to keep beating an old horse and talking of years well past, but we also discussed sustainability, the rise of cities and the rise of freelancers, among many other topics. We could not have foreseen what the Internet would give birth to or how warm a winter we could (eerily) have in 2012. And in 1999, Columbine, another event that exposed our nation's shortcomings—a culture gone violent and perhaps too cavalier about it—hadn't yet happened.

I've often said that there's great joy in studying change. Though I've been known to predict a few trends that have rung true, the bell tolls much faster than it ever has before. The pace of change is such that in our culture, everything we do is instantaneous, everything is different within seconds—and we're watching it in real time. The choice we all make in terms of personal and business success is to not fight this bounty of tremendous and fast-moving change but to move with the chaos and navigate it as best and smartly as we can. It's hard to believe that it's been a dozen years since we released *Next* in the U.S., after bold runs in Holland, the U.K. and Australia, and one can only imagine what's coming for 2020 and beyond.

Needless to say, look for the next eight years to be filled with the one thing we know to be a constant: change. (So there's something that hasn't changed.) Then again, a silent film just won the Oscar for Best Picture. Perhaps there's room for a bit of the old with all this new after all.