



GROUNDED

15 WAYS TO STAY ON YOUR FEET WHEN THE REST OF THE WORLD IS SHAKING

Walking along a trail through an ancient redwood forest deeply rooted into the rocks and cliffs of the Pacific Coast, I stop for a moment and inhale a deep, refreshing breath of earth, ocean and pine.

The quiet that surrounds me is timeless. Sunlight pierces the forest canopy and moves down deeply grooved bark until it reaches the forest floor nearly 300 feet below. By the time it touches the moss and pine needles beneath my feet and sparkles across the brook that nourishes giant roots that seem to have grown since the beginning of time, the constant state of hypervigilance that seems part of my daily life has dropped away, the tension that keeps me ready to run at a moment's notice has gone and the sense that—in an hour, a minute,

a moment—the sky will surely fall has simply disappeared.

Gently, I reach out to touch the bark of a tree nearly 1,400 years old, close my eyes and take a deep breath of the richly scented air that surrounds me. Here among the trees, I feel grounded. And I know that I can handle anything.

THE NEW REALITY

Today the sense of feeling deeply rooted, deeply centered and able to handle anything is a gift.

Recent economic, social and political events may trigger changes that can come at us so quickly that we run in circles trying to figure out how our lives will be affected six months or a year down the line. Negative noise surrounds us as we become dependent on instant news, social media and plugging in. And that's in addition to the tumult of

everyday life—coping with moody teenagers, watching over aging parents and navigating workplace politics.

In a 2017 national survey, the American Psychological Association (APA) reported that 57 percent of us view the current political state as a source of significant stress. "This is a crazy time," says Catherine Mogil, Psy.D., director of training and intervention development for UCLA Nathanson Family Resilience Center and a consultant for the National Military Family Association Operation Purple Family Retreats. "Parents are stressed, kids are stressed," she says.

And, says Katherine C. Nordal, Ph.D., the APA's executive director for professional practice, "We're surrounded by conversations, news and social media that constantly remind us of the issues that are stressing us the most."

BY ELLEN MICHAUD ILLUSTRATIONS BY KIM JOHNSON



SEARCHING FOR SOLID GROUND

So what are we to do? How—when this fast-changing world seems bent on keeping us anxious and unsettled—do we work, feed the family, get Dad to his doctor's appointment on time and still keep our own feet planted firmly on the ground?

1. CARVE OUT YOUR TURF.

Begin by showing yourself that you can make a difference in the world, suggests Catherine. Pick one single thing in your neighborhood, local school or community that needs fixing and figure out how you can carve out

the time, talent and resources from your life to get it done.

When Galit Reuben realized several years ago that people in Los Angeles were abandoning dogs on the streets in unprecedented numbers, for example, she began picking up the starving and often battered pups, and asking friends to keep them until she could find the dogs a home.

Eleven years later, the Ojai, California, mom has built an organization with a network of foster homes and street corner adoption fairs that has led to the placement of more than 3,000 mutts in forever homes. Her passion to help these abused creatures—to make sure they are

loved and cared for—has not only rescued dogs, but has also brought together an entire community of caring people to support one another.

2. DITCH THE ONLINE POLITICS.

A 2016 survey of more than 14,000 social media users from the Pew Research Center reveals that more than one-third of us are "worn out" by all the political comments we run into on Facebook, Twitter and the rest of the social media universe. What's more—59 percent of us who engage in a political discussion with a social media friend with whom we disagree end up feeling stressed and frustrated.



PHOTOGRAPHS: THIS PAGE: CWHITNEY HARTMAN/PHOTOGRAPHY; OPPOSITE: © PAVEL KUBARKOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

3. MANAGE YOUR PHONE.

Assign a special ring tone to your children and others who depend on you for care and emergency help. Outside of work, ignore other calls that come in, but then set aside 30 minutes or so each day to return to them.

And turn off notifications! Any device that pings, beeps, burps and plays the national anthem can drive you crazy. According to a 2016 study by researchers at the University of British Columbia, students who kept their notifications on for one week reported significantly higher levels of inattention and hyperactivity than students who kept their phones off. The researchers reported that the higher levels of inattention predicted lower levels of productivity and well-being.

4. SINK INTO THE MUD.

When Los Angeles marriage and family therapist Carly Arenaz needs her own personal renewal after helping clients explore the unique challenges they experience every week, she'll pack up her miniature Pomeranian—Philippe, aka "the mayor of Hollywood"—and head north to the mud baths of Napa Valley. "They're unbelievable," says Carly, as she closes her eyes in remembrance. "You sink into a tub full of warm mud," and the mud—a combination of volcanic ash, peat and mineral water from a hot spring—gently pulls you down until you're suspended in its warmth, totally weightless. "The world just floats away," Carly says.

5. RATION YOUR NEWS. Pick two mainstream news outlets, each from a different political perspective, and subscribe to their newsfeeds online. Check them no more than twice a day, Catherine suggests, and for no more than 10 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes at night.



6. TRACE YOUR ROOTS.

Few things ground us like family. Use online databases like ancestry.com to follow the wild and sometimes twisting adventures of your own. Interview distant relatives and get to know cousins 10 times removed. Aside from discovering where that cute little nose of yours came from—and your penchant for chocolate—you'll hear story after story of a people who survived and thrived through war, famine, migration, ocean voyages, possibly even a plague of locusts. With that kind of a heritage, you know there's nothing that can keep you from taking control of your own destiny.

7. CONNECT WITH OLDER WOMEN. The older women in my community have been there, done that, bought the T-shirt and survived. I love to hang out with them. They've tended their children, nurtured their families and supported friends through good and bad times. Plus, no matter what their political proclivities, they marched, boycotted, advocated, visited their representatives in Congress, even wrote editorials for the local newspaper. They survived and they changed our world.

Sipping tea under the trees with my 80-something-year-old friends Barbara and Elspeth is a joy. Stories flow,

challenges are discussed, advice is given, laughter is rich, and I go home uplifted and ready to solve every one of my—and the world's—problems.

8. LOOK FOR A FEW GOOD WARRIORS. Any service member who has served in a combat role abroad and survived has a lot to tell us about staying grounded during unpredictable events. Attending a community barbecue at the local Veterans of Foreign Wars in your town and sitting down to talk with veterans can be an eye-opening experience. It's amazing what you can learn when you open your heart, open your mind and sit down to gnaw on some corn on the cob straight from the grill.

9. GROUND YOURSELF WITH MEDITATION. Whenever you feel as though the world's spinning out of control, sit down, plant your feet solidly on the earth and close your eyes, suggests Carly. Focus your attention on one part of your body after another for 15 minutes. Then open your eyes, stand up and stretch. You'll feel calm, centered and ready to restart your day.



13. HOLD OUT A CRAYON.

10. REACH OUT. "Connecting to other human beings can be so restorative," says Catherine. So nurture those relationships. When your best friend—overwhelmed by job loss, soaring rent, or just the demands and decisions of daily life—curls up into a ball and cries, throw your arms around her, feed her chocolate, tell her husband to take her camping for the weekend and haul her kids over to your place for a sleepover with uplifting kid movies and taffy-making. The fact that you would do this for her will ground her. The fact that you *did* will ground you.

11. LOOK DEEP. Pick out a group of people on the nightly news who are yelling and screaming about one issue or another, then try to figure out who those people are, what makes them tick and why they're so steamed.

Patti Callahan, a retired psychiatric nurse who was housesitting in Hawaii for friends last year, was puzzled by some of the presidential campaign talk about how there were still no jobs for huge numbers of people whose industries had been decimated in the last recession.

"I wasn't interested in all the lamenting, protesting and putting people down that was going on during the election," Patti says bluntly, "but it seemed obvious that [I] had missed something. And I wanted to know what it was."

ABOVE AND LEFT: REFUGEE CHILDREN ARRIVING ON THE ISLAND OF LESBOS, GREECE, TELL THEIR STORIES THROUGH ART WITH HELP FROM ROBERT AND ROBIN JONES, WHO LIVE PART-TIME IN THE VILLAGE OF MOLYVOS.

So, Patti stopped by the local library, ordered a bunch of books for her Kindle and started reading. First up was *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* by Arlie Russell Hochschild, Ph.D., professor emerita of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. Arlie had experienced the same curiosity as Patti about why some American workers were angry, so she had gone on the road to Louisiana's bayou country, a repository of American conservatism, hung out with people and listened to what they had to say. It wasn't long before she learned of whole communities in which jobs had disappeared, homes had been lost and kids had been robbed of their futures.

"I got a vivid and sickening picture of what's happened to the land where they live and what they're surrounded with," Patti says. "It gave me a better understanding."

12. PRACTICE GRATITUDE. We get so absorbed in bouncing from one crisis to another all day that we never focus on all the amazing things



LISTEN TO OUR PODCAST ON LIVEHAPPYNOW.COM

in our lives, says Catherine. So, make focusing on gratitude a daily practice. If you can take the time to say "I have my health, I have a loving relationship" for just two minutes every day, it will change your brain chemistry and allow you to move forward on solid ground.

13. HOLD OUT A CRAYON. Reach out to children around the globe who have been forced to flee the horror of war and make a difference in their lives. You can donate time, money and talents to organizations like Save the Children. Or, like one couple from Santa Barbara, California, you can get even more directly involved.

Robin and Robert Jones, who live part-time on the Greek island of Lesbos, were there when the rubber boats of Syrian refugees started hitting the

shore. The entire island's population turned out to help, but Robin, an art teacher, was concerned about the pain she saw in the children's eyes. She went home, grabbed blankets and art supplies and took them to a transfer point at the beach. Within an hour of their arrival, she had children drawing and sketching their experiences, which gave them a voice to express their fear, confusion and pain—and a way to take the first step into a new life.

14. WEAVE A SENSE OF PRESENCE INTO YOUR LIFE. Pull together a book discussion group that encourages you to explore your inner spiritual life. Friends Mary Karp, Paul Harris, Polly Post and Maureen Glancy are four members of a local Quaker community in Santa Rosa,



California, who meet every other week at Mary's house to discuss *A Testament of Devotion*, the classic 1941 book of essays on the internal spiritual journey from Haverford College professor Thomas Kelly. The brief pause in their busy lives is an opportunity to rest in the inner stillness brought through a quiet attentiveness to that which is holy.

15. RETREAT. Whether it's a wicker chair on your front porch, a boulder in Yosemite National Park or the third pew on the left inside an empty cathedral anywhere in the world, regularly retreat to that one single place of quiet in which the world's voices are hushed and your own can emerge strong and free. A long weekend, a day, even just a few hours is all it takes.

A few yards from where I sit on my tiny porch surrounded by sunshine and jasmine, the narrow Santa Rosa Creek runs beneath a canopy of gnarled oaks and fresh California laurel. It begins as a great stream in the mountains to the north, but by the time it tumbles down the hills, over rocks and through lush vineyards into the valley where I live, it has gentled to a soft murmuring rhythm that soothes away all my edges.

Here, the chatter of Twitter is absent, the minutia of life disappears, and the incessant voices that demand my attention don't exist.

My retreat only lasts an hour. But here I am grounded. I know who I am. I know where I'm going. And no matter how fast and furiously the world erupts in 10 directions at once, the ground under my feet is firm. 🍃



PHOTOGRAPHS THIS PAGE: (BY ROBIN JONES) AND ARE ATTRIBUTED TO: THE REFUGEE CRISIS THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN