

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have one of your dreams analyzed? Dreams can illuminate your inner life, recall forgotten memories (happy or traumatic), alert you to thoughts and feelings you keep hidden from yourself. A friend, who has engaged a Jungian therapist, tells me, the therapist encourages her to jot down on waking what she remembers dreaming; in sessions, they discuss what she has recalled. The process, says my friend, has been vital to the insights she's gained.

Once, as a young woman in California, I had a dream that was so vivid, I didn't need a therapist to interpret it for me. I did, however, spend time reflecting on it. I was 28 and married, the mother of young children. Here is what I dreamed:

I'm a twelve-year-old riding my bike down a familiar lane when the air-raid sirens sound, informing us that bombers are on the way with their payload. I drop the bike, run into the nearest house, and scurry into its cellar. The adults who huddle there take no notice of me. No one says a word; everyone seems fearful that the house will be hit by a bomb. We wait for the all-clear signal to let us know it's safe to leave the cellar and go back up, but the sirens never sound. Eventually someone climbs the stairs to take a look around. All is quiet. Slowly, hesitantly, the rest of us follow. Above ground, no bombing raid is in progress. The adults go about their business and disappear.

I get on my bike to be on my way when I glance up. There hangs a warplane so huge, so gray, it obliterates the entire sky. Not a sliver of blue is to be seen. Terror holds me in its grip. The raid is not over; I must hurry back into the cellar! But my legs are rooted in place and won't budge. As I watch, the belly of the plane opens and a flock of smaller airplanes issues forth. They fly north. I can feel the ground shake as they drop their bombs. A thought holds me in thrall: What's the use, trying to hide in a cellar? This thing is so big, it'll get me no matter where I might be.

On waking I said to myself, "Odd that you're twelve years old in your dream-war; you were barely four when the war ended."

Later that day something occurred to me about the "all-clear" that never sounded. Wouldn't it suggest a war continues for me, either a conflict within, a strife in the domestic sphere, or an imagined continuum of the war?

That the people with whom I sought refuge remain indifferent to my presence suggests, in my childhood recollections, no caregiver sought to comfort me in times of terror.

The mother airplane bringing forth smaller ones to terrorize or destroy survivors hardly needs elaborating.

"No wonder you're depressed," I told myself at the end of the day. "This huge thing overshadows your entire life."

What had triggered the dream? The day before, the children and I visited with another mother and children at their community pool. While our kids amused themselves in the play-pool, the other mother began reading a book. I asked what she was reading and she showed me. The book was full of Edgar Casey prophecies.

“He predicts California will break off the mainland and crash into the ocean,” she said, “amid fires and earthquakes and volcanoes erupting. All unbelievers are doomed.”

I’m doomed, then, I wanted to say but kept quiet—I did not know her well.

Her family and mine got together one more time, for a barbeque at the lake where our husbands did the cooking. After that, I never visited with the young mother again.

Which one of the dream conflicts that occurred to me as I reflected was “it”? Perhaps not one or two but all three? Whichever it is, how do you go about resolving the conflict or conflicts in real life? Ah, there’s the rub! Maybe I needed a therapist after all.