This I Believe by Tina Buck

I am an English teacher whose interest in literature probably started with *Catcher in the Rye* in 9th grade. The author, J.D. Salinger said, "I am a kind of paranoiac in reverse. I suspect people of plotting to make me happy." Like Salinger, I am not a paranoid, I am a pronoid. I believe the world is not out to get me, instead I believe the world is out to help me. When I look back on my 438,000 hours on this earth (give or take a few), I would be hard pressed to come up with even 1000 hours of downright meanness that I have experienced and hopefully many fewer that I have inflicted.

Granted, I am one of the millions of lucky ones. I had parents who loved me (enough) and was warm, fed and spoiled. My big sister made me eat a bar of soap one time… that counts as several hours of downright meanness, I suppose. I made my best friend pick her scabs so we could see fresh blood under the microscope (chalk up a few hours of meanness in my column). When my mother sent me to the back yard for a tree branch off the pear tree for “a good switching”, she wasn’t being mean; she was trying to teach me something (here is what I learned: always get a green one; they hurt less.) In fact, when I asked my husband many years later if we should switch our children, he found the idea delightful and asked “Who could we switch with?” All of these experiences confirm my pronoid view.

My pronoaic vision is that more good things happen than bad – a thousand fold. People open doors for me all the time. I have spent at least one hundred hours of driving time “merging” peacefully ahead of someone who let me into their lane. Strangers have paid a few cents here and there if I was short. A woman rescued my dog from a busy intersection and held him there until I could come with a leash. I have seen teenagers pick up clothes off the floor without complaint (well, okay, the first one, anyway). At the grocery store, an elderly veteran bought my son a D-Day Commemorative issue of Time Magazine just because my son had excitedly pointed it out to me. Babies smile at me.

I know “bad things happen to good people.” My pronoiac belief, however, is that more good than bad things happen to everyone. And, in fact, if part of our meanness to others comes from “re-attributing” the bad things that have happened to us, I assert that if more people appreciated the kindness they receive, the world would be a better place. My father died in a plane crash as a young man; I had thyroid cancer at 15 and breast cancer at 40. My husband and I divorced after 25 years of marriage. My new dog chews shoes (and books, remote controls and furniture). But when you look at the ying-yang symbol of my life, trying to find a balance between the good (white) and bad (black) hemispheres, the white one is still disproportionately larger than the black one.

This year I will be 50. I want an additional 438,000 hours (or more) of time to pursue this research into pronoia. However, if I am granted only a fraction of my manufacturer’s warranty of 100 years, I, at least, plan to let someone in ahead of me in line, to smile at babies and to pick up clothes off the floor without complaint (well at least the first one, anyway) just to prove my point.

"Evil is boring. Cynicism is idiotic. Fear is a bad habit. Despair is lazy. Joy is fascinating. Love is an act of heroic genius. Pleasure is our birthright."
http://www.thesunmagazine.org/359_Brezny.pdf