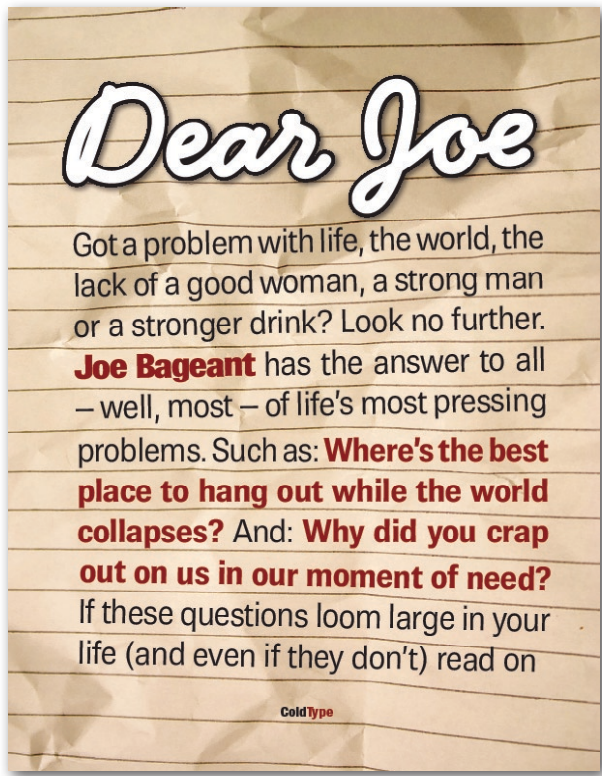


# Dear Joe

Got a problem with life, the world, the lack of a good woman, a strong man or a stronger drink? Look no further.

**Joe Bageant** has the answers to all – well, most – of life's most pressing problems. Such as: **Where's the best place to hang out while the world collapses?** And: **Why did you crap out on us in our moment of need?**

If these questions loom large in your life (and even if they don't) read on



## THE AUTHOR

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# Dear Joe

## Where's the best place to hang out while the world collapses?

*Dear Joe – In response to a letter from a reader you wrote: “Places like Ecuador, northern California – all sorts of places – creating little spots of sustainability as best as possible.”*

*Since the US is the nexus of all the fraud, empire, control, and will thus be the center of the pain in the upcoming financial collapse (AND contains a huge percentage of “useless eaters”, i.e. superfluous workers) have you given any thought as to where the best places/countries in the world will be to “hang out” while the Collective Madness and Economic Collapse take over? – Kevin*

**W**ell, I don't think it's possible to “hang out” until the collapse is over. For starters, it could take 50 years. Or it could take five years. If we knew, more people would probably get off their asses, even in America. But I don't think it will be all at once, or even recognizable at any given moment to techno-hybridized Americans on the ground. For example, most Americans STILL do not recognize the irreversible ecological collapse so well underway. More aware thinkers are calling this “denial,” but it is not. They are simply experiencing the world they see before them, as honestly as their senses and experience permit. And that ain't much.

Thanks to technology and layers upon layers of

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mediation by TV, movies, the Internet, etc., gadgets and manufactured imagery, we all live many steps removed from reality. Collapse is symbolized to each of us in different ways. To some it would be the sustained malfunction and lack of access of the Internet, which is surely coming.

Incidentally, this will be capitalized upon by privatizing the net and selling access at a much higher price, just as with oil. Of course they will experience it as “the consumers” they have been reduced to. So they will see it as bad guys charging money for things that used to be free. Given that their consciousness is a product of technology and its false promise of solutions and endless plentitude, they can never understand that everything is a finite resource and that technology itself can reach such a point of complexity as to be unsustainable. Even your laptop and router is made of petroleum and both eat oil or coal.

### Capitalist hallucination

Others might perceive collapse as banking failure, given their absolute belief that money is the blood of society – a capitalist hallucination if ever there was one. My point is that many will not even understand that collapse is going on because capitalism will provide excuses and more fake solutions at ever higher prices – mainly at the expense of the world's poor and defenseless

of course – until it can no longer extract from them through banking, military force, or other means. This slows down the inevitable and helps the western world maintain its disastrous belief systems. None of which answers your question, but I just had to say it.

There is really no “safe place” to run. For instance, the banking system may utterly fail; actually, it already has, yet no one is calling for an entirely new system. This shows you both the thoroughness of indoctrination of the American people, and the astuteness of the overlords who profit from the masses. Gasoline for cars can become nearly unavailable, and energy prices can become exorbitant, as they are becoming in the UK. And again, people will slowly learn to suck it up, and the system will roll on for a while longer. The more perceptive among them will dream, and are now dreaming, of escape.

Escape as they conceive it does not exist. The ongoing collapse manifests itself in the least developed world too, and even harsher terms: hunger, lack of water, warfare, government corruption, infrastructure collapse, crime. It’s a planetary problem and no one escapes that. They just experience it in different ways.

## How to do it?

The question is not so much where to do it as how to do it. The question is not “Where can I run to to escape?” It is “What sorts of problems can I best deal with?” To my mind, you cannot deal with them alone, despite the romantic imagery of being “off the grid” on some homestead growing your own food. Yes, there are people doing that successfully. But it has been my experience that they are people who’ve wanted to do that for a long time, and that they are the kind of people suited to deal with the problems that come with that life. I’ve done it and believe me, it’s not for the average American, who

is, quite frankly speaking, incompetent in the ways of the earth. It’s a very long learning curve, even if you grew up on a farm. You don’t just stick seeds in the ground and wait for your food. Every spot on the earth is unique and you have to come to understand the place you are, which takes time, error and dedication.

Not to be a smart ass or snide, but let me ask: How much do you love your fellow man? Or do you merely want to save your own ass? By now you must know the answer. From what I’ve seen, a person can be honest with himself on this matter, then pursue either route more effectively.

If you have the temperament and character to readily love other people around you, and the willingness to labor solely for sustenance, community and friendship, then there are countless options. Because that’s what most of the rest of world’s people do every day, if allowed to. So you could do that in any number of places on the planet, especially here in the New World south of the US. You can do it in literally thousands of places, some of which are in the US. I get emails from all over. But I don’t give out contacts anymore because I learned the hard way in Belize that human chemistry is a complex thing. And most Americans do not come into approximately sustainable situations with either the social skills or the willingness to sacrifice for the group. Hell, some Americans starting up such communities don’t have those qualities.

Yet, believe me, just being in a place where life is more fundamental and simple, if hard, goes a long way toward peace of mind and discovering human normalcy. It’s the learning ground. And usually one learns that people who escape at least some of the ravages of our slow collapse, always seem to do it in cooperation with a community of some sort. Either an already existing one, or an intentional one they create between themselves.

There’s nothing new in this, of course. Latin America and the world have countless communities



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hundreds of years old. Governments come and go, rivers dry up, but the people always have tortillas, one way or another. Americans and Europeans usually see these people as poor, thanks to our heavy social conditioning, industrialization and commoditized consciousness – not to mention the denial of the effects of colonialism by Euro-American culture. We see no connection between our iPods, high speed wireless, and, say, the present condition of the Haitian or Dominican people.

Anyway, to me, this is the bottom line:

There is no escape in the sense Americans and European culture thinks of escape. Which is mainly running away to a place where you will get something for nothing in a new and different way – in this case, security and safety from the storm – and also keep some or most of the stuff and gadgetry and ease that has come to represent “quality of life.”

Unless you are rich, this is impossible. And rich these days, including here in Mexico, means so fucking well heeled that even a 90% devaluation cannot hurt you. Oh, there are retirees still living down here on the last shreds of the glory days of the empire. They will tell you there is nothing wrong up there, because they are still getting their checks. But I’m not seeing many newcomers join their ranks. Not at that level. Beyond that, the empire never goes away. It always claims you as its “citizen,” which is to say its property. And lately the empire has been extending its tentacles toward expats, in order to extract new money for its failed system.

### Different life

The rest of us, the non-rich who would prefer to take a shot at some different life – and just about anything will do in the dark of the night when it is gnawing at your guts – must choose another way to cross the border (the “gringo wetbacks”). But always we run up against the same barrier, the same closed gateway to what we suspect is greater satisfaction

and peace of mind, but increasingly cannot afford the price of admission, if we play the same old brain-washed money game.

I have come to think the price of admission anywhere in the world, (except in America and Europe, where enough dough will get your ass kissed in any circles) is service to others. We have been indoctrinated by an earth-devouring capitalist system to believe otherwise. Believe that giving only depletes. And that mankind and civilization came about through kings and warriors and “great men.” But the essential glue of man the social animal, and so-

ciety has always been on cooperation and sharing. That an endless stream of elite thieves have always managed to steal the fruits of that cooperation does not matter. And the best that is in man still rests on the same fundamentals – cooperation for the greater good of all.

So I would suggest that in planning for the future, you first spend many days pondering the question: How can I best go about giving up the world as I have known it – which, after all, is the root of our pain and of our catastrophe – and serve others every day and in as many ways large and small as possible? In other words, sacrifice. In truth, the sacrifice will not be sacrifice, but liberation, because Americans are buried under so much material shit and petty notions as to entitlement, that shedding such things is a blessing. A gift.

From that vantage point you can “watch the collapse” while you help put up a pole barn in Oregon or make love in a Patagonian mountain shack after a hard day of well digging, or smoke a joint in utter relaxation after rescuing orphans from the streets of Guadalajara. And chances are that the collapse of the empire will not much cross your mind.

There is no escape, but there is freedom. And if our fellow Americans long ago forgot that, well, one can still get there alone.

But it’s not for the faint of heart.

Joe



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# Dear Joe

## Why did you crap out on us in our moment of need?

*Dear Joe – Did everything get so hopeless you just gave up? I liked your fighting spirit here, in 2004, and feel when you've got a voice, as you have, we'd appreciate hearing it as a call to arms instead of an old man's complaints. I can say this without being ageist, I'm probably older than you.*

*So get out of my way and Katy bar the door! I for one am taking to the streets, joining every damned faggot commie tree hugging protest march that comes rattling the pike. I don't care if these are the last days of the empire of the locusts. I don't care if the entire jackal nation is at our very throats. Let whatever history remains record that some of us went down with a fight, and that perhaps a few of us indeed became "sages with transfigured faces".*

*The economy stinks, but there's a lot of work that needs to be done – that in itself is an indictment of our economic policy.*

*The environment is trashed. Even more work to be done here. In the meantime the jackals are winning. – Diane, Hawaii*

**W**ell, I've certainly changed my view of things since 2004. In the subsequent six years of reading, listening, trying to learn what's going on, I find the conclusion inescapable that that it will take a collapse to initiate the sort of ground-up change necessary. That doesn't mean good people should not carry on the struggle if they can find it in themselves.

But I really don't think there are enough souls with time or stamina to pull it off in the face of the overwhelming corporate/government machinery opposing them (us). At the same time I believe we can become finer within ourselves, even during collapse, which will take god only knows how long. Or not. So I have become interested in the in the spiritual side of things, as well as the political – because as near as I can tell, spiritual courage, insight and judgment, are what is missing from the progressive struggle (or whatever you want to call it).

### Selling access

It is seeing everything in material terms, just like our avaricious capitalist overlords, that holds us back. Of course it's about money and the material, and its fair distribution. But that ain't the whole picture. Engorged as we have been for so long on goods, services, commodities and spectacle, I think we have lost sight of the power (and frailties) within us as human beings, as souls on this planet.

I am not saying saying that we should run away to some transcendental space and never come back. I'm just saying we can never have a clue unless we look inward and learn that spiritual territory, then look outward and discover that it's common ground for all of mankind.

And besides, doing that helps one get up every morning and do the right things – such as stop mindless consumption (which in itself is subversive



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in a nation of zombie gluttons), stop following sham leadership (we don't need elite "leaders," and indeed they are all elites by virtue of making choices for the rest of us). We need to own our own lives, inside and out. And you can never own the outer, other than in appearances, until you possess the inner.

Meanwhile, the world devouring system that western man created, and in turn recreated him, is reaching the apex of its terrible energy. It will soon be spent. As historical, much less as ecological, planetary and evolutionary time goes, it was a brief folly. So at this point I am content to let up, to quit raging so much (though there's no accounting for the occasional effects of ethyl spirits). Rage fatigue eats up one's stamina and inner resources, without one bit affecting the auto-nomic predatory system in motion.

Beyond that, I am seeing others do the same, directing their energies to places out of the path of the machine Places like Ecuador, northern California – all sorts of places – creating little spots of sustainability as best as possible. They're not going to stop the collapse either, and in all likelihood go down with everyone else, just not as fast. (After all, we are in the sixth great species die-off here).

But when I am around these people, I feel healthy human beings flourishing both physically and spiritually – something you don't see much in America these days, and something I've not seen since my boyhood on a West Virginia mountain farm. And I want to bounce their babies on my knee, and savor a little rightness in the world for a change.

### Raging and cussing

And when I'm done, I don't much feel like going back to raging and cussing and screaming at an empire so vast it can never feel anything I'd do to it anyway. It takes actual destruction and killing to get its attention, because all it understands and responds to is brutal force, despite the pretense of democracy and all – that is, manufactured consent. So if it could feel

any effect from me as an individual, then I'd simply be branded a terrorist and disposed of, wouldn't I?

I'm too old to be shitting in a can in Gitmo. I used to go to sleep at night contemplating just what sort of violence I could perform that would do any good. Believe me, like so many others with whom I've talked who felt the same, I seriously contemplated some horrific stuff. But when I looked at the sorts of company I'd be keeping in America by doing so, I did not like it at all. Perhaps if Trotsky's ghost came one night to call me out, I'd get dressed and go. But as I see it, there is no "will of the people" mandate. Hell, the people want more cable channels, fried chicken buckets and someone to tell them there really is a free lunch. And that they can return to the same shameful waste and stupidity as before, through "a recovery."

I'm rambling, I know it. But readers have asked me this before. So in the end all I can say is that I do what I do. I make my own choices each day, without any self-conscious concern for reader opinion. Or even the opinions of my own family much of the time, most of them being as they are, attached to the fictions of the empire – one of which is the power of the people. Another being that they can have security, and that if they just keep their heads down, be nice around people and work hard, America will not fuck them over.

Common sense eventually told me there ain't gonna be no revolution, just things the empire will label revolutions as a distraction from the utterly remote possibility of one are – such as the "Tea Party Revolution."

In the end, maybe all we ever have in this world is each day we awaken to. In which case, I might as well do what I can until the collapse, which I probably won't quite live to see: Live lightly, find joy in age, and tickle younger people's babies when I'm lucky enough to get the opportunity.

Would that I could give you a more elegant answer, my dear. But that's about all there is to it.

Joe



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