

Maybe it's beginning of 'the end

July 23 1986

In the dream, I woke up to a house-full of relatives.

"Hurry up, Karen," they told me. "The 'End Times' are here. THEY are coming to get us."

No one had to explain who THEY were — I knew. THEY were the enemies of all "God's people." THEY were the ones who bore the mark of the beast (the number 666) on their right hands and foreheads.

I jumped out of bed, grabbed a slice of toast, and took off out the back door with my brother, Robert, and sister, Priscilla.

Mom, Dad, Grandma, Aunt Linda, and Uncle LeRoy dashed to the front door. We had decided we'd all have a better chance if we hid up.

In the dream, Robert, Priscilla, and I ran for three days and three nights through the small forest behind our house. Every so often we'd stop to take three-minute rests on our feet, standing with our heads bowed against the trees. We wouldn't let THEM catch us.

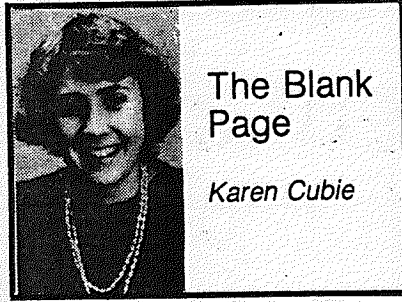
We finally reached the foot of a mountain of sandbags.

"Quick! Run to the top! Get away," I shouted at Robert, pushing him against the bags. Priscilla and I started our way up. It was too late.

THEY caught us, threw bags over our heads, and dragged us back home — separately.

"Just pretend this never happened and you'll be all right," my mother told me.

"No!" I shouted. "Don't you see of course it won't be all right —



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Karen Cubie

this means everything we've always heard about is true. We're doomed if we pretend! We'll all go to hell!"

"If you continue to be difficult about this, THEY will come and kill you," I was told.

But I wouldn't calm down, so they did what they could for me.

A bed was laid out on the floor, I was tucked in, and someone brought me a warm mug of chocolate.

Then THEY came and shot me in the foot. I knew I was dead because I couldn't feel any pain.

You probably think this dream is funny, but it haunted me for years, and occasionally it still pops up.

I was brought up in an evangelical Christian home, and I heard plenty of stories about the Battle of Armageddon, the Second Coming of Christ, and the Mark of the Beast in church as a child.

Although the churches really didn't dwell too often on these obscure passages of Revelations detailing the events leading up to the "End Times," the stories and prophecies lurked in the back of

my mind and fed my imagination.

When I was in my early teens, a series of movies predicting the destruction of the world were produced and circulated through most churches.

I walked away from each one depressed, sad, and certain I wouldn't succumb to any torture that tried to tear me away from what I knew had to be true.

Then I read George Orwell's 1984.

In the movies, all the victims died by guillotine. They were quick deaths — almost merciful.

But in 1984, Winston Smith is forced to choose between betraying the woman he loves, or having his face devoured by huge, starving rats.

"Do it to Julia!" he finally cries out when he can't stand it anymore.

"You shouldn't be afraid if everything is right between you and God," Grandma used to tell me.

But I worried about the people I loved who said they weren't Christians — like my father.

My cousin Mary remembers what one friend of hers went through as a little girl.

"She was terrified Christ would come, and her mother still wouldn't be a Christian," Mary said. "She was so afraid her mother would be left behind she couldn't sleep at night."

The little girl had read a passage which said Christ will come as a thief in the night. He

will not come at a predicted hour or time.

"She made a tape of herself repeating over and over again 'Christ is coming now!'" Mary said. "Christ is coming now! Then every night before she went to sleep, she'd rewind the tape and play it until she fell asleep. Then she felt her mother was safe."

I was also familiar with that passage, and I used it to fend away my terror of the second coming.

A few of the most secure moments I knew were when several religious groups sold all their possessions, climbed to the top of a mountain, and declared Christ was returning at a particular hour they had appointed.

"They're wrong," I thought as I watched the clock anxiously. "It won't come just because they predicted it."

I guess I was right. My grandmother was convinced the "End Times" would begin during her lifetime.

"My parents said they would never see it," she told us. "But they told me my children would live through it."

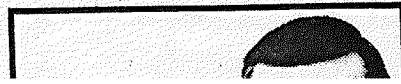
We should be excited about it, she told us. If our hearts were right with God, we'd go to heaven where we could sing with the angels.

But my voice was never very pretty, and I could think of hundreds of things I would rather than sing in a glorified church choir.

Assessing reality in foreign policy

ST. TROPEZ, France — Richard Nixon's private conversations in Moscow last week

bachev as "a man of his times" — as French President Francois Mitterrand called him, after his



against the United States. When Hitler eventually grasped that he could not get agree-