Editorial

Heroes—Don't BlinkCharles E. Ray, Jr., MD, PhD, FSIR¹¹ Department of Radiology, University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System, Chicago, Illinois

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I recently came upon a documentary on the climbing culture in Yosemite. Yosemite was, still is, and likely always will be a mecca for rock climbing. Rock climbing used to be performed solely for the purpose of readying oneself for a mountain climb, but in the 1950s it became a sport unto itself, with the same “because it is there” mentality of the mountaineer.

For 10 to 15 years, rock climbing and mountaineering were my primary hobbies. I was never particularly good, but I pursued it with a passion that probably has been equaled by no other personal pursuit before or after. In medical school I, along with my climbing partner, Mark Bettag, climbed every free weekend. Devil's Lake in Wisconsin was our home away from home, the place that we longed to be when we couldn't, where driving 3 to 4 hours to, and the same time from, was a small price to pay for a few hours on the rock. This documentary brought back many fond memories, and though Mark and I were no Yosemite rock jocks (far from it), I was still filled with a longing to be outside looking for the route that I knew was there but couldn't quite fathom in my mind.

Watching the film also reminded me of the climbers whom I most followed in the magazines and occasional newspaper: John Bachar, who offered anybody ten thousand dollars if they could follow him for a day of free soloing; John Long, who combined top end climbing with film production; Lynn Hill, who first free-climbed El Capitan; and Yvon Chouinard, who as a climber survived on cat food before inadvertently founding one of the largest outdoor clothing companies in the world (Patagonia). All of these individuals—my climbing heroes—were brought back to me in slightly grainy 1980s' film snippets and soundbites. It was a good way to spend an hour and a half.

Thinking of my climbing heroes made me reflect on other heroes in my life: Joshua Chamberlain, George C. Marshall, Lou Gehrig, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, my uncle, even my climbing partner Mark ... too many individuals to name. And then, of course, there are my heroes in IR. Those heroes are different, in some cases, from my mentors. To me, mentors guide and teach and always have a presence in one's life. Heroes needn't be present, or even alive; rather, they need to represent something that may or may not be attain-

able, but always something for which to strive to make one a better person in some way. Physical and moral courage, intelligence, creativity, fairness, and selflessness are all traits that I seem to look for (unconsciously) in my heroes.

Those heroic traits that are so important to me are traits that are exhibited by some of the giants in our own field. Hell, I don't even have to tell you their first names—Waltman, Durham, Keller, Baum, Kaufman, and Dotter. Recognize any of those? There are even heroes that I don't particularly like (insert names here), but whom I respect to the degree that I can get past their personalities to their contributions. In many ways, it may be their brash and abrasive personalities that got them to that giant—hero—status in the first place. The bottom line is that heroes abound in IR, and the amazing thing is that they are still around and, in some cases, practicing medicine in the angio suite next door.

Did you, the reader, catch that last comment? THEY ARE STILL PRACTICING MEDICINE as our partners (and in some cases, our competitors). Those luminaries, those heroes, are still around us, a resource begging to be tapped, if not for their current contributions then for those they made in the past. Can you imagine asking Waltman about the origin of the eponymous loop? I can. In fact, I have. My heroes outside of IR are basically all dead, and most are long dead. But those in IR are living and breathing, interested and willing to share their experiences and knowledge. What a horrible thing it would be to let that opportunity pass through our fingertips.

Laura Findeiss, current SIR president, told me a story once regarding one of her IR partners. He called for an SOS catheter (spelled out with each letter, like the ship signal) rather than a Sos catheter. When she asked him if he knows what Sos stood for, he replied that it was a catheter to be used as a bailout when nothing else worked (like the pot scrubber?). She mentioned to him that Tom Sos was indeed still alive and well, to which he replied—nothing. Cause for immediate dismissal in my little world, but evidently in her world they allow for second chances.

Heroes abound, but life moves on. Mark is now an oncologist in Sheboygan, and we see each other only once or twice a year. But that time, and with one exception each

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year since 1986, we still rope up, give each other a nod, and head to the vertical world. Times change—Bachar dies, Long no longer looks like a bodybuilder, Hill—well, for the record, I'd still leave my fiancée for her but that's another story—but heroes don't. And they should be tapped into as much as possible before they, too, are gone. Let's not let that gift pass us by. Go up to Mike Dake at the next SIR meeting, shake his

hand, and tell him how important he is to the field. Tell Riad Salem that you understand the sacrifices he made while changing the landscape of IR. Find your own hero, muster the courage, and approach them to simply thank them for what they have done, and for what they have meant to you. You won't be disappointed—and you won't have the chance for long.