Editorial

What Has Been Taken, What Has Been Given

Charles E. Ray, Jr., MD, PhD, FSIR¹¹ Department of Radiology, University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System, Chicago, Illinois

Semin Intervent Radiol 2020;37:337–338

In trying to come up with a topic for this editorial, I find myself at nearly a complete loss. My mind is empty, my emotions drained, my existence numbed. It's almost unfathomable, these changes we as a world have seen over the past 4 months (I am writing this editorial on July 2, 2020). What used to be seems to be lost to memory, completely and absolutely. I don't even really know what I was thinking about half a year ago. Hockey season, and why the Blackhawks just can't seem to put it all together this year? How my ties are looking dated and where would I go to replace them? Why the damn traffic to O'Hare is so absurd on a Thursday freaking afternoon? Or will my retirement savings grow as much as I hope it will? At the time, seemingly serious issues; in retrospect, all First World problems. And, also in retrospect, embarrassing to have spent so much mental energy and anguish on issues such as those.

I still feel numb, and continue to think that at some point in time we will all wake up and say, "Well, THAT was a weird dream!" But that clearly won't happen, and in some odd way I am starting to understand that for the good of our world, of our existence, of our humanity, it would be best if this weren't a dream. Because if it were, we would lose what we have been gifted during these times. And, at some point in time, I believe I will look back on these 4 months, or year, or years—whenever we get on the "other side of this"—and realize that this time might very well be some of the most influential and formative years in my own existence. Who would have thought that, at the age of 57, I would feel that I am learning so much about the world in which we live with the opportunity to completely change the lens through which I see the world. That is, if I'm not too blind, too ignorant, too fearful to allow that to occur.

The sad part is that—and I don't think I'm alone in this—it took such horrific events to allow me to have somewhat of an epiphany. At this point in time, we have lost nearly 130,000 American lives to this pandemic, and well over half a million worldwide. These numbers do not take into account the second surge that we have all anticipated, and that we seem to be entering as I write this. In many ways, this crisis has brought out the best and the worst in us. The politiciza-

tion of this, the opportunism taken by some, the divisiveness, and finger-pointing can all feel so overwhelming that it can overshadow all of the good that has shone through. The volunteering of billions of people worldwide to fight this thing, in ways big and small; the coming together of the scientific community to find a vaccine; the appreciation of the general public, true thankfulness, for those on the front lines; and so many more ways in which we as a people have bonded together in this most crucial of times.

And then came the social injustices and unrest.

At a time when we as a nation, and indeed the entire world, were trying to battle the greatest global health crisis in a century, came the senseless murders. Why it took the deaths of so many individuals to force us to focus on the social ills of racism and abuse of power, I will never understand. And how some have chosen to use these deaths as a springboard for their own gain, political and otherwise, is beyond me—it is nothing short of disgusting and despicable. Those individuals should be ashamed, and I can only hope that at some point in time they see the wrongs of their ways and have a chance to redeem themselves to the world at large.

I don't know where we will end up after all of this ends, if it ever will end. I can only hope—and pray—that we as a global society will learn the lessons we are supposed to learn. How will the world look to my grandchildren—will they look back 50 years from now with fond recollections or will they have nightmares about people in spacesuits caring for those who were dying before piling them into refrigerated trucks. Or of sickening videos played innumerable times while hoping against hope that it would end differently this time? Will we as a society learn from these mistakes that we have made all along the way to make ourselves a better place in which our families—everyone's families—can live a fear-free and happy existence? Will we slide back into our old ways, and be happy with a two-step forward, one-step back approach? Will we be better? Will I?

It is becoming so increasingly difficult to do what I want to do, which is to focus on this silver lining, wherever it may be and in whatever form it may take. But my faith in humanity continues to be tested, and sometimes I just don't have the

Address for correspondence
Charles E. Ray, Jr., MD, PhD, FSIR,
Department of Radiology,
University of Illinois Hospital and
Health Sciences System, 1740 W.
Taylor Street, Chicago, IL 60612
(e-mail: chrayer@uic.edu).

Issue Theme Aortic
Interventions; Guest Editors,
Benjamin M. Jackson, MD, FACS
and S. William Stavropolous, MD,
FSIR

Copyright © 2020 by Thieme Medical
Publishers, Inc., 333 Seventh Avenue,
New York, NY 10001, USA.
Tel: +1(212) 760-0888.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0040-1715871>.
ISSN 0739-9529.

emotional energy to continue to put up much of a fight. I am so very fortunate that I have a strong support network—my wife, friends, family, workmates, dog. And I have the resources to get help if I feel that I need to. And even in that setting, I still struggle, and sometimes greatly.

I will close by asking you to tread lightly, emotionally, during these times. We do need to keep our eye on the target, make sure that we as physicians are doing our best for our patients. We need to be responsible members of society and to continue to strive for what is right and just. But we also need to

be careful, so careful, in times like this. Now is not a time to believe the ridiculous myth that we as physicians are bullet-proof. If you need to take a break—take a break. If you need to talk—talk. If you need a friend, find somebody you can trust and lay it all on the table. We are not superhuman, and we all need to lean on one another at this point in time. As colleagues, as workmates, as friends, as a specialty. And please, if you see someone suffering, reach out to them now more than ever.

I do believe—know—that we will get through this. But while we do, please take care of yourself.