Stop and Smell the Plumeria

Spencer B. King III, MD, MACC, Editor-in-Chief, JACC: Cardiovascular Interventions

This is my last opportunity to write a column from “our little grass shack in Hawaii.” I had hoped to escape from reality (or fake reality) of our chaotic transfer of government. It is not easy but I will try. As I sit in front of our little place on the beach, I am thinking about the advice we all give each other—“stop and smell the roses.” However being in “paradise” the challenge more likely is to stop smelling the roses and to get back to reviewing or assigning papers. Modern technology has enabled us to work from afar and so we do. This is a great blessing but also a curse. There cannot be a more relaxing place for me than where I am right now. However, it is no longer possible to escape the world. I found myself wishing for a Russian hack on the television transmission during the last quarter of the Super Bowl. To escape that wave of depression I started to read Tom Friedman’s book, Thank You for Being Late. His review of the accelerating speed of computational technology characterized by Moore’s law as a doubling of capacity every year or 2 is inspiring to some and depressing to some of us with no hope of catching up. When Gail and I first came to Hawaii as guests of the U.S. Army 53 years ago, the island possession had barely gained statehood. Few buildings were taller than a palm tree, and many of my colleagues arrived by boat. Our affordable entertainment was a walk along Waikiki Beach at sunset or a sneak into the Don Ho Show at Duke Kahanamoku’s without paying the cover charge thanks to his drummer who was our neighbor. Gail attended the University of Hawaii at the same time as Barack Obama’s mother (how is that for dating one’s self?). There were no television sets in the newly opened Mauna Kea Beach Hotel and telephone calls to the mainland was a major investment. The 5- to 6-hour time difference from the east coast meant that most things had already happened by the time we woke up in the morning but we were in another world and were little interested. What we did learn was mostly from newspapers. Remember newspapers? Those things that showed up once a day and enabled some uninterrupted reflection?

Today is different. I talk, mostly by e-mail or text, to my assistant in Atlanta and to the staff at Heart House any time I pick up my iPhone or open my laptop. If I do not look at them I know there are messages lurking there waiting for me to respond. Is there no escape?

Today is perfection. The Kona winds have abated and the vog (haze created by the eruption of the volcano) has blown away. At 70° with bright sunshine and a gentle surf, I think it might be a good day to go out with my snorkel to see the reef fish or a giant sea turtle or two. On the other hand it is pretty nice right here on my lanai and the forecast for tomorrow is the same, so what is the hurry? Although it is winter and the plumeria trees are bare, I can imagine the sweet smell of the blossoms to come in the spring. Yes smelling the roses, or plumeria, is still possible but now mostly when multitasking. As Tom Friedman wrote, the world is flat and becomes smaller every year (1). That is mostly a good thing. This interconnected world is a better world and, in any case, it is the world we have built. The nostalgia for isolation and the regressive thinking we have been subjected to by some of our politicians is not what I wish for. It is a different world but we humans have not yet adjusted to this exponential explosion of interconnectivity. Though I do pine for the rounder and bigger world we experienced in the early 1960s,
I realize that the plumeria smell just as sweet today as they did back then. The challenge now is to learn how to smell them while rejecting a perfectly fine paper that just does not make priority.

Aloha.

REFERENCE