

When Will We Ever Learn?



This morning was one of the most beautiful of the year thus far. I took the opportunity to suit up in last year's Lymphoma Research Ride jersey and head out for what was to be a 41-mile day in preparation for the 10th anniversary event on September 25th. I also had another agenda on my mind, however. Riding provides me the opportunity to think and create, and—because the deadline was fast approaching for my monthly Letter From the Editor—a chance to come up with a writing topic. Well into my 14th year, it is becoming more difficult each month to be witty and original. My usual muses were not sufficiently inspiring (and I admittedly provided them with very short notice).

Nevertheless, a couple of ideas came to mind as I peddled along. One safe topic was the celebration on June 9th in honor of the graduates from our fellowship program. We gathered with our fellows in a private room at an upscale restaurant, where the waitstaff passed hors d'oeuvres, rioja, and chardonnay. Gone were the khakis and the ballet slipper–like shoes; the young men showed up in neatly pressed suits and ties and the young women in dresses and heels. Most of the faculty were in attendance, and two of the fellows had even brought their mothers to this meaningful occasion. I had signed their diplomas in my traditional brown ink (which is currently *Antietam* from Noodler's Ink). During dinner (steak, chicken, or risotto), each attending gave a short spiel that applauded the compassion and intelligence of his or her charges, and each of the fellows deluged the attendings with appreciation. Several fellows noted how they had finally gotten over their initial fear of me, and explained that they were better off for having both experienced the fear and conquered it. Now off they go from coast to coast, to the positions they have earned. We are proud of them, and they are grateful. When we run into them at meetings, they will continue with their expressions of gratitude and tell their colleagues that they trained with (pick a name) at our center.

Another possible topic for my letter was Vice President Joe Biden's impassioned speech at the American Society of Clinical Oncology annual meeting, which described the “cancer moonshot” initiative. The goal is to improve clinical outcomes by fostering international collaborations, using the power of supercomputers to enable sharing of genomic data, and optimizing the use of precision medicine.

Alternatively, I could have written about the oral sessions in lymphoma, which included far too many studies that were negative, derivative, or both.

But none of these topics seemed nearly as important to me as the one that has repeatedly occupied our minds, our hearts, and the airwaves for far too long: the bullets used by the darkest of souls. So many lives have been senselessly lost to gun violence, including those at Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, and thousands more each year. Just a few days before I wrote this, the politician Jo Cox was gunned down in Great Britain.

I've been thinking about the antiwar song that Pete Seeger wrote in the 1950s and that became popular in the 1960s, “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” As I ride my bike, more current words have been spinning in my head:

*Where have all the children gone, long time passing?
Where have all our loved ones gone, long time ago?
Where have all the innocents gone?
Gone to graveyards, every one.
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?*

With hopes for a violence-free month . . .

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Bruce D. Cheson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce D. Cheson, MD