



Rider on the Storm

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Hurricane Matthew hit us here on the coast of Palm Beach County, Florida, last week. You may not remember him now, given the black hole of this recent election cycle, but he had a lot of people running scared in the land of oranges and nuts.

For days, the media and our local politicians played up the impending disaster like a summer blockbuster movie: death, destruction, and cries of future agony were the staple of every 6 o'clock news program. "Immense human suffering!" and "Do not assume you can survive if you choose to stay!" warned the usually staid National Weather Service. "This storm will kill you!" stated Governor Rick Scott to any camera that would listen. Even the Martin County Sheriff queried his deputies as to whether they had enough body bags in stock for the inevitable carnage.

Thousands fled the coastline, boats were pulled out of marina slips, and Home Depot and Lowes were emptied of water, plywood, and generators within hours. I live a block from the ocean, so I boarded up the windows and doors and evacuated my Labrador retriever. But I stayed put despite the "mandatory" evacuation order, determined to protect my home and property from certain destruction. And then I waited in the shadows of the cocooned house, candles ready. The minutes ticked by, night fell, and the rain began to patter the metal roof as I lay in bed awaiting my certain doom. And I waited. Eventually I fell asleep, only to awaken in the morning and glance at the electric clock.

The power hadn't even gone out.

Now don't get me wrong. Matthew caused devastation and death in Haiti, Cuba, Georgia, and South Carolina. But he just sort of gave south Florida a hip bump as he passed in the dark. Yes, we were fortunate, but we were also taken for a media ride by politicians and reporters who were more interested in inflating their own public image with wild-eyed warnings than in ensuring a calm, informed populace that everything was going to be OK.

Because, as we all know, the best way to get the public's attention and focus it on one's personal agenda is through instilling fear. By the time this editorial is in print, we will have (finally!) survived the 2016 presidential election, ending a period during which many of us were hoping for that giant meteor from the movie *Armageddon*

to actually hit the damn planet and end it already. But as I sit here and type, not knowing who will be America's final choice, I can still turn on any media source and experience a deep foreboding that the end of times will visit us on November 8.

The funny thing is, I've been in and around the integrative medicine field for about 30 years now, and frankly I have seen the same tactics used to get attention by both sides of the conventional/unconventional debate. From the "quackwatch" people we hear: "It's all witchcraft! Cancer patients will reject life-saving chemotherapy! Homeopathy doesn't make any sense! Chiropractic will paralyze you!" While the unconventional proponents bleat: "MDs know chemo doesn't work and just want to line their pockets! Fluoride and mercury cause all the autoimmune diseases! These upstart 'integrative' MDs are the long rifles and smallpox blankets of our CAM movement!" (Yes, I do remember that one, and you know who you are.)

Man, it takes a lot of energy to be afraid all of the time. Ceaseless vigilance, constantly tuning in to all of the media sources to check the latest threats, responding to Facebook posts and arguing like a third grader—it doesn't do much for one's sense of peace and tranquility. But lately I've discovered something that actually gives me a little hope—perhaps even an inkling that this chaos may all benefit us somewhere down the line.

You see, I've come to realize that we have not been creating divisiveness, and bigotry, and rejection of other religions and cultures. We are simply unveiling such prejudices that have existed in our society all along, whether theological, or political, or integrative. The one redeeming grace of social media is that, under the layers of narcissism and cat videos, it is steadily uncovering the smoldering coals of intolerance and exposing our darker underbelly, which is an essential step toward the possibility of resolution. Presidential candidate (insert name here) is not an evil entity that just popped up in our conscious world. He/she has been here all along, both in the flesh and deep in our own psyche. Maybe this idiotic process we have endured will propel us to a higher state of humanity.

Then again, there's always the meteor ...