

MAY YOU LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES

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Photo by Jodie Andruskevich

There is a reputed ancient Chinese curse that says, "May you live in interesting times." As with some of the ancient sayings, the origins of this one is dubious at best; but this one is intriguing as it is presented as having been an ancient curse. This, of course, should cause us to ask the question: what about living in interesting times could be considered a bad thing?

It is quite likely that if we were to randomly ask people why this saying would be considered a curse, none of them would give us the same answer. However, I submit for your consideration that there is one answer that we can all agree upon: if you are living in interesting times, you are quite likely also living in changing times. But, then, why is change scary?

This, of course, is another question that can have many answers, and with good reason. After all, change can come in many forms, some good and some bad. But, this is likely not what the saying is referring to.

It seems to me that "May you live in interesting times" refers to the more sweeping change that occurs as an entire society is forced to change. This is also the same type of change that is the subject of entire books by historians and that school children grumble about having to memorize dates for. So we know that at least one group of people finds interesting times to be, well, interesting.

However, what about the rest of us, those of us who must live the history instead of just studying it from afar? Those of us who must adapt to situations that are new and for which there are no preexisting answers. After all, interesting times would imply that the world is changing, society is changing, and that people are being forced either to change or to resist the change. Am I starting to make you nervous yet?

Well, consider for a moment the fact that one hundred years ago computers did not exist; about forty years ago personal computers as we know them now really didn't exist; twenty years ago, most homes still didn't have computers in them; and the Internet really didn't start to take off until the nineties. It seems like the development of the computer and the widespread adoption of computers, as well as the Internet, could almost be a case for—interesting times, perhaps? But, then again, as a computer science major, I am biased.

However, this does demonstrate a point: the times are changing through the increase in technology, and, like it or not, we are living in interesting times. Those graduates in the audience who have taken Computer Ethics here at Rivier have firm proof of this, and in the fact that one of the topics in the class is whether or not computer ethics is a new field or just the representation of old problems with new technology. Likewise, the Bioethics course here at Rivier also drives home the point that we are being faced with questions that as little as one hundred years ago were a virtual non-issue. At that time, of course, modern medicine didn't exist in its current state and we didn't have the ability to keep someone alive through the use of machines.

So what does this mean to us as we collectively look toward the future and prepare to embark in our own major life changes?

Well, it goes without saying that we will need to be prepared for change in our lives, both from our own actions and from the society around us as it adapts to the advances in technology and its consequences. However, it also means that we must not lose sight of who we are and what we believe in. Part of the purpose of those pesky ethics and religion courses that students tend to grumble about taking is to consider those situations that you haven't been exposed to yet; to think about how you will react to them if and when you

encounter them; and, most importantly, to reflect on how your actions can directly affect the lives others. In fact, the nurses and teachers in the audience are likely already acutely aware of the impact that they have on other people's lives.

If we can understand and appreciate this fact, then it would seem to me that we are already prepared to face the change and challenges that lie before us, and to make the right decisions when we are faced with them. Likewise, we also have at least some appreciation of the fact that we must do what we can to help others with the challenges that they face.

Of course, if we have been prepared to deal with change and challenges as a result of our experiences here at Rivier College, then what do we have to be worried about? The present may indeed be interesting times, and the future will likely bring many more, but we have been presented with the tools that are needed to construct pathways for negotiating these challenges. Thus, we should not be scared of any changes that may lie before us, but instead embrace the challenges that change brings, confident that we are already ready to face it.

Good luck and God bless you all. ■

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