

WELCOME TO THE EIGHTIES

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Looking back and rereading twenty years of editorials that welcomed in a New Year, we are haunted by the feeling of *déjà vu*. The themes are distressingly similar. The recurrent warning that “American medicine faces a crossroads” or that “the fate of medicine hangs in the balance” is a favorite wolf cry. The threat of compulsory care and socialized medicine has been with us now for at least forty years. In the interval, a lot of roads have been crossed, our balancing act continues, and, apart from a moderate erosion around the edges, the practice of medicine here continues along its blundering way. At least in the immediate future, the push for complete socialization has lost much of its steam as other national problems become more urgent.

In January 1970, we looked back on the tumultuous preceding years that began in 1960 with the trumpets of Camelot and the overblown rhetoric of Kennedy and his men of the New Frontier. We had suffered through disaster after disaster culminating in the Vietnam debacle, Charles Reich’s “Greening of America,” college campuses in turmoil, a widespread youthful drug culture, urban rioting, and anarchism bent on destroying all social order. We wrote then, “But the Sixties are over and, however apprehensively, we should extend a welcome to the years ahead. It would be a great comfort to be alive and writing on this day ten years from now, to look back once again and be able to paste a label of Sensible on the Seventies.”

So now another decade has passed. We are alive and writing. Whether or not we have completed ten Sensible years is debatable. There have been some positive accomplishments: Vietnam did end, however unsatisfactorily; relations with mainland China were reestablished; college campuses returned to normal; Charles Reich is forgotten; the young are not so restless; and the wave of anarchism has all but subsided. In place of the old problems, we now have new ones: recession, soaring inflation, an energy crisis, and Iran and the whole Middle East threatening to explode at any minute.

The Seventies—now labeled by some as the “Me Decade”—are over, and, again apprehensively, we extend a welcome to the Eighties. Maybe the best we can hope for is just to make it through another ten years.

[Editor’s note: The author died in January 1984.]