



*...[G]ravity did
the rest and
70 slides hit the
ground like an
avalanche.*

Slides in memoriam

Stuart E. Mirvis, MD, FACR

As I was sitting at my office desk the other day, my eyes wandered to a bunch of slide carousels sitting high up on a shelf. Out of curiosity I got up and pulled them down and was immediately covered in many years' worth of dust. I actually had accumulated about 40 or 50 of these things in my basement back home; for years I had left the last used slides sitting in them, planning to digitize all those old images for future generations. When I arrived home that day I started looking at some of those antique slides. There was some amazing pathology on them. If I were writing a radiology textbook for 1990 it would be a slam-dunk best-seller. If I ever wanted to crush my residents, I would show them plain films of bone tumors—there would be a bloodbath.

In any event, my newfound interest in these slides and carousels put me into flashback mode—taking me back to a time before computers, PowerPoint and other digital software sent film slides to a quick and ignoble death. I can't imagine how many of them lie buried in landfills or sit encrypted on high, dusty shelves like mine today.

I gave my first-ever foreign lecture in Cancun. At the time a taxi ride anywhere in the city was one U.S. dollar and there was one good restaurant in town, Carlos y Charlie's. The meeting sponsors brought two projectors for my fancy double-projection

lecture. I had spent months preparing these talks. Alas, a projector bulb blew during my first lecture, for which there was apparently no replacement anywhere in Mexico. In a matter of a few not-too-pleasant minutes, I took all the slides out and reset them for a single projection lecture. I was fortunate no radiologists were in the audience; I sweated out the following three days and five lectures praying the other bulb would survive. It did.

One of my favorite mentors always used bright orange text slides in his lectures. This was an odd choice—and I never could understand why he used bright orange text—but I never mentioned my opinion to him. What was particularly unusual, though, is that the slides also had the unfortunate habit of melting under the intense, hot lamp, and they always melted in the same manner, starting at one corner and progressing faithfully around the edges to the center. I found this process rather psychedelic—a popular adjective at the time. I loved watching those slides melt, and I never actually saw slides melt in any other presentation—just his. But what was truly miraculous is that the slides always looked fresh and perfectly symmetric at the next lecture.

Another time, I was carrying four full carousels up the escalator at RSNA to give a 90-minute lecture on cervical spine trauma. Just before I reached the top, I tripped and all four flew from my arms, landing hard

Continued on page 6

Dr. Mirvis is the Editor-in-Chief of this journal and a Professor of Radiology, Diagnostic Imaging Department, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD.

Continued from page 5

onto the floor. My life passed before me. Fortunately, none of the locking rings came off. This was a near miracle. An elderly gentleman behind me chuckled and said, “You sure are lucky, kid.” By the way, that was the day—the only one I know of—when the electricity failed at McCormick Place for several hours. I never gave that lecture. Instead, I held an impromptu chat on the lecture topic with about 90 audience members in the front of the room. I just know that if I had needed to give that lecture, all the slides would have broken loose.

I also recall once speaking at a ski conference, which was fundamentally a bad idea, as I do not ski, although I roll downhill very well. During an afternoon talk, the slides became jammed. This jam occurred about every tenth slide using the typical plastic-and-metal slide carousel. A well-intentioned audience member picked up the foul thing, took off the ring and turned it upside down to check it out. Well, gravity did the rest and 70 slides hit the ground like an avalanche. I was given 10 whole minutes to reload and start up again to stay on schedule.

Finally, some residents from my training program had invited me to lecture at their hospital and their local radiology society. I accepted for old times’ sake, even though I was anything but friendly with one of them and the location was awful for the time of year. Everything was dandy until the evening society talk, when my slides stopped falling

from both projectors at the same place. The carousels and projectors were fully inspected, but nothing was found to be amiss. Eventually, we figured this must be a supernatural occurrence that we should not tamper with further.

After dinner I returned to remove the slides. As I removed the last group of slides, I discovered a thin piece of paper cut to fit under the same point in both carousels to prevent the slides from dropping. What a trick! I never did confront whom I believed to be the responsible party (the odds-on favorite, at least). But I do believe there’s a lesson to be learned from slide carousels: What goes around, comes around.

Clearly, my nostalgia for film slides was misplaced. As I revisited these and many other memories, my whole attitude about these nasty, little 2 cm × 2 cm pieces of white paper and cellulose base returned to an appropriate level of disdain. Indeed, I assure you, and my wife, that 10,000 more slides and associated paraphernalia are now bound for the landfill. She has been begging for the shelf space they’ve occupied for years to store our ever-expanding files of *Applied Radiology*.

By the way, have you ever noticed how your laptop freezes just as you’re about to start a talk or the color scheme on your PowerPoint presentation looks nothing like you anticipated?

Maybe it’s time to consider new technology.