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Dear Friends,

Over the last week, I have been particularly preoccupied with the notion of loss. Though I am fortunate that my own circle of friends and family are well, the ever-widening circle of family and friends of friends felled by the virus grows every day. And the global images and indicators of loss in the news are incalculable – almost impossible for the human mind and heart to absorb.

On a much smaller scale, and much closer to home, I find myself mourning the loss of the quotidian and the local. The spontaneous gatherings with friends at favorite restaurants downtown. The impulsive pass by the bookstore for that new book I can't live another moment without. The abundance and variety of great live music spilling out onto streets all over the City. I can live with the temporary suspension of activity. There is certainly much solace and insight and beauty to be had in solitude. But when my imagination jumps over the wall to survey the landscape post-isolation, the panorama of potential loss brings me to my knees.

This year, 2020, was meant to be remembered as the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birthday. In 1802, Beethoven, a passionate lover of nature, retired to the countryside, to the village of Heiligenstadt, to seek solace. Over the course of the preceding 6 years, one of the greatest composers of all time had been losing his hearing. A letter to his brothers, written from Heiligenstadt, leads us to believe that Beethoven was contemplating suicide as the only answer to the despair of loss. As it turns out, Beethoven returned home and began writing The Eroica Symphony – one of the greatest and most galvanizing pieces of music ever written.

Our Summer season still contemplates an August 15 performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, The Ode To Joy. But today, I contemplate the following: a February 1, 1924 live broadcast of Beethoven's 9th performed by the New York Symphony Orchestra - and the reaction to the performance of the "immortal symphony" by Helen Keller, listening to vibrations of the music with hands placed on an uncovered radio speaker:

"...out of his pain, he wrought such joy for others – and there I sat, feeling with my hand the magnificent symphony which broke like a sea upon the silent shores of his soul & mine."

On the other side of the wall, may we all create joy out of suffering.

Elizabeth Sobol  
President & CEO



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