

The sound of agony

**Taking away medical care for millions of Americans is not the right thing. Paying millions to politicians to ensure that healthcare will end for Americans is morally deplorable.**

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I have learned what my voice sounds like in agony—when something animal overtakes my composure. When I no longer have control over the quality or shape of that noise, because its release has become a valve of some sort, relieving the pressure of pain. It invites others to witness my suffering which, depending on my context, is either to my embarrassment or my comfort. That particular noise that

escapes me is not the helpless scream from a horror movie damsel. It is not the guttural growl from a testosterone-fueled action movie hero. It is not even the controlled whimper I typically employ with small pain. It is a holler that bellows like a bear caught in the metal teeth of a trap.

That feral cry has been ensnared in my chest for decades, but it learned an easy escape route during the last few months. You see, about five years ago, my husband started a justice and peace center, and at the turn of 2017, he was able to hand it off to the co-director. These were all wonderful developments, but in the transition period, he was working without a salary or benefits. I made enough money to keep the household going, but I didn't have health insurance.

In the meantime, my shoulder was dislocating. Usually, it slips out, causing that instant cry before I can quickly pop it back in. But lately, it has been coming out fully. Completely. I do not know what is happening until the pain overtakes me. I look down and that knob that typically sits beside me betrays me and is suddenly in front of me. The muscles--I'm not sure what my muscles are doing, because it feels like my heart is beating there, *inside* my shoulder. My blood pressure spikes. Then I have intense muscle contractions, like I had while giving birth. I try to breathe deeply, to tell myself that the shoulder will go back into place, as I try to move my hand out and then behind my head.

I move an inch and desperation floods me because I know that I have to move my arm in order for it to go back into place, but I can't move it without increasing the pain, which is already at a ten. I feel like one of those intrepid hikers, who has a boulder that falls on her, and she has the choice between dying there or using a pocket knife to saw off her arm.

This summer the shoulder dislocated while I was sleeping. Since then, my ordinarily serene dreamscape gets regularly interrupted with the panic that I'll wake up with my arm barely hanging on to the rest of my body.

My family has also been concerned with the dislocations. They're the ones who have to stand by helplessly, with moral support as I writhe in agony. In order to soothe my daughter's anxiety, I recently told her, "Don't worry. No one has ever died from a shoulder dislocation." But she is a fact-checker, so she googled my attempt to comfort her. And, evidently, I might have been technically correct, but people do die from the heart attacks caused from the pain of the shoulder dislocation. That ended

my sleep altogether.

Obviously, I need surgery, but as I stated, we didn't have health insurance. At one moment this summer, when I was that wild, trapped animal, I pleaded with my husband in that fearful voice that I barely recognized, "I can't do it. It's too much. We have to call 9-1-1. Please call them." Then I looked at my husband's eyes and knew the truth. It was an impossibility. The bills would ruin us. I had to figure it out.

This intense and personal pain has been happening among the larger backdrop of healthcare in our country. I didn't understand why politicians seemed intent on repealing Obamacare, even though the outcry from the American people has been loud and persistent that we don't want insurance taken away from millions of Americans. Why does this keep coming up? Then [I read](#) that certain donors are closing their checkbooks to midterm elections unless the GOP can conjure up a legislative victory by repealing the Affordable Care Act. Until the GOP can start delivering, they are withholding funds.

I try to ingest that news. A handful of wealthy people would happily write a check for millions of dollars to be certain that I will writhe in pain, with no relief.

I simply don't understand it. I grew up surrounded by Republicans. My family is mostly conservative. I know that there are kind-hearted, generous people who want to do the right thing, the *Christian* thing, so they vote Republican.

But taking away medical care for millions of Americans is not the right thing. Paying millions to politicians to ensure that healthcare will end for so many Americans is morally deplorable.

This week, my husband will be starting a job in Albuquerque, so our insurance will be recovered and I can begin to talk with doctors about the options available for me. The stress, pain, and anxiety of this summer will dissipate. But I hope I never forget it entirely, because I never want anyone else to go through that sort of torture. Health care for all is not some sort of crazy liberal dream. It's a reality for most developed countries. And someday, I know that it will be a reality for us.