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Gratitude makes for a life well lived

IT IS SAID THAT WE HAVE TWO LIVES, AND THE SECOND BEGINS WHEN WE REALIZE WE ONLY HAVE ONE

I have always tried to live a life of gratitude, although not always successfully. I have so many things to be grateful for – a loving family, outstanding law partners, wonderful friends, the list goes on – but sometimes I get lost in the stress of the moment or the heavy weight of responsibility on my shoulders. Still, I have made a conscious decision to be grateful, and that's an important first step. I firmly believe gratitude makes me a better person. It also makes me a better lawyer, more civil and in greater service to the Los Angeles legal community. Scientific studies of late have even found that living a life of gratitude actually makes us happier.

I've always intellectually understood gratitude as something incredibly worthwhile. But this summer I came to know gratitude from experience. Shortly after returning from speaking at a legal seminar, what I thought was a stomach bug turned out to be a burst appendix. I had a severe abdominal infection and had to go on some very strong antibiotics, but antibiotics alone were not enough. A drain was inserted in my abdomen with a drainage bag.

I responded well to the antibiotics and my white blood cell count came down to the point where after five days I was released from the hospital. Of course, the drain came home with me. I couldn't wait to get out of the hospital with all the prodding and poking every few hours; hospitals are a terrible place to sleep. I had some uncomfortable neuropathy from an IV in my hand, but the surgeon scheduled a follow-up CT scan and the surgery to remove my appendix.

I arrived early in the morning for the surgery. I was prepped and the anesthesiologist administered the sedative Versed (Midazolam). I remember a few minutes after that, then started to doze off. As part of the surgery protocol, I was administered the antibiotic Ancef (Cephalosporin) to protect against skin bacteria. Within minutes of receiving the Ancef, I became very agitated. My blood

pressure dropped and my heart started racing. Then my heart stopped. I coded. I was in full anaphylaxis. A couple of residents were in the operating room during my surgery and took turns giving me CPR to keep blood flowing through my heart and to my brain. I was already intubated with oxygen for the surgery. The anesthesiologist worked feverishly to try and stabilize me. Five minutes turned to 10 to 15 to 20 to 25 minutes, my heart was still not beating on its own. The medical team continued the CPR and hit me with the defibrillator paddles *nine* times. After 30 minutes, my heart began beating on its own. Once stabilized, I was brought to the ICU in a medically induced coma.

My surgeon made the call to my family, who thought they were going to hear the usual everything went well, you can pick him up later today. The news they received was far from that. My parents immediately traveled to be with me and my children were there. They didn't know if I was going to wake up and, if I did, what condition I would be in. The doctors and nurses told my family they would have to make medical decisions on my behalf.

The following day – 30 hours after my heart stopped – I woke up on a ventilator. I had no idea what had happened and thought it was just a few hours later. My arms and legs were restrained, my head was bandaged with electrodes all over it, and I had more wires and tubes coming out of me than I could count. I knew something serious had happened when I saw my parents and children there. I was beat up, but I was alive. My family told me what happened. As I was talking to them, I could see the look of relief on my children's faces that they still had their dad. I always knew my children loved me, I was an important part of their life, etc., but in that moment, I truly felt it.

My preliminary tests came back positive. My brain, heart, kidneys, etc. were all functioning normally. Broken sternums and ribs are quite common from CPR; my chest was sore, but not even bruised – although you could clearly see the outline of

the defibrillator paddle on my chest. I did develop deep vein thrombosis (blood clots) from my blood being stagnant in my extremities when my heart stopped. All things being considered, I was feeling pretty darn lucky. Within a few days I was stepped down to a regular hospital room from ICU and then released. *Walking* out of the hospital never felt so good.

As I began to process what had happened, I felt an incredible sense of gratitude to be alive. Even the reaction of the trained medical professionals in the ICU was telling. That an otherwise healthy mid-50-year-old coded for 30 minutes during a routine surgery, and within a couple of days was walking around the ICU with no apparent serious damage, was news. Other patients in the ICU were not as fortunate.

I never did have the appendectomy – the reason I went to the hospital in the first place – and still need to have it. But first I have to go to an allergist to figure out what my kryptonite is and make sure I am never exposed to it again. I have never been allergic to anything in my life and have had a number of antibiotics over the years, including several to treat the infection from the burst appendix. I have a follow-up CT scan and a full set of panels to make sure there's no residual damage that can surface later from my heart stopping. Once all that is completed, I can, hopefully *and safely*, have the surgery.

In the meantime, my life is forever changed. It is said that we have two lives, and the second begins when we realize we only have one. I am living my second life – laughing and crying more, happy just doing little things, not letting the usual nonsense bother me, and mostly feeling, well, grateful.

I am honored (and grateful) to advance our causes on your behalf and to be your 2022 president. As always, I invite you to contact me at any time (dsilverstein@californialaborlawattorney.com) with questions or ideas on how CAALA can better serve you.

