

“Making a difference, not just a living”

“Bad times close minds. Poverty and want can shut the door on truth and decency, leaving justice dying in the cold. Indifference can never resuscitate it. Only an uncompromising commitment to the rule of law can receive that nobleness of human spirit that separates man from all of God’s other creatures. Often it is not popular. Now and then, dedication to justice extracts a heavy toll. Sometimes it is hard. It always takes courage.” -Jim M. Perdue

It was a hot summer day when I found myself standing in front of Mr. Jones’ office. I break into a sweat. My heart is pounding, and my hand begins to shake as I open the door. This was my first interaction with an attorney. I knew I was not in trouble, I only needed help. As I open the door, I am greeted by a secretary who takes me to the conference room where I would meet with the attorney. I look around and it is a pretty simple office, the walls needed to be repainted, nothing like you see in the TV shows.

I waited a couple of minutes before Mr. Jones walked through the door and introduced himself. After a short conversation, he tells me it’s a simple process and that the whole process would not take more than three months.

About a month later, I receive a copy of the petition that had been filed with the court. Page 1 my name is misspelled. Page 3 that’s not my address. The mistakes continued as I finished reading the stack of papers. I call Mr. Jones’ office and let the secretary know about the mistakes that I found and ask if they could fix it. She says they would, and it would be no problem. Two months go by, the process does not move forward. Eight months and Mr. Jones’ office simply won’t return my phone calls. Fed up with not knowing the status of my case, I reach out to my friend google. Google teaches me how to view a court docket to see the status of my case. Apparently, it is set for a DWOP that same week. I have no clue what it is, so I drive to Mr. Jones’s

office, knowing this would be the only way I would get a quick response, and I am assured by the secretary that this was not the case. Mr. Jones calls me that evening and also assures me that I must be misinformed. I print out the docket information and send it to his email address. Now do you believe me. Or do I have to show up to court tomorrow because it seems you don't have any interest in my case, I tell him.

After this experience, I hoped I would never interact with another attorney again. But I was soon to find out that it would be an attorney who would help me through the hardest time of my life.

One evening as I was working on my college applications, I received a phone call from an unknown number. It was a Border Patrol Agent who told me that my mom had just been detained. She was driving on two rims and was disoriented. The Agent asked me if she was on drugs?

“NO, of course not.”

Worried, I arranged for someone to pick her up and take her to the hospital. I packed a suitcase and was on the next flight to McAllen, TX.

I arrived at the hospital and the doctor informs me that things had taken a turn for the worst. My mom was unresponsive, and her heart rate was steadily falling.

60 ...50...40. . .

The medical staff started to panic. It was chaotic. There was a neurologist, an infectious disease doctor, a general medicine doctor, a brain surgeon and several nurses taking care of her. However, neither of them could tell me what was wrong. As one doctor tried to bring up her heart rate, the others discussed the possibility of brain surgery and removing part of her skull in order to relieve her brain inflammation.

36 ... 34... 32...

I prepared for the worst, she was intubated and after several doses of medication her heart rate stopped decreasing.

I am standing in a corner of the ICU when her heart rate stops decreasing. As the medical staff leaves the room, pretending to be strong, I clear my throat and before the last doctor left, I ask, "Is she going to make it overnight?" with as much hesitation in his voice he says, "I don't know." I could not hold back my pain anymore as tears start falling down my cheeks.

I am angry, remorseful and full of doubt. I don't know if I will ever be able to tell her that I love her one more time. I stand at the side of her bed and not knowing if she can hear me, I tell her that I would give everything I have just to laugh with her one more time.

About two weeks later, the doctors were finally able to give us a diagnosis. Her brain had been attacked by a virus, a virus that most of us have dormant in our bodies if we have ever had Chickenpox. But how? Why her? Why now? She was a healthy woman, she worked out and ate healthy for the most part. The worst that had happened to her was a car crash three weeks ago. The doctor proceeded to tell me that the shock and stress of the vehicle accident created the perfect opportunity for the virus to attack.

After a couple of weeks, she started to regain consciousness. However, even before this date, the doctors had prepared us and told us they did not know what to expect or if there would be any long-term side effects due to the brain swelling. When they removed the tube from her throat, it became apparent that she had memory problems, her vision had greatly deteriorated and as we would soon discover, she was not able to walk. I knew she would not be able to work for a long time if ever again, but the bills kept on piling up and her treatment was far from over.

Prior to the hospitalization, my mom had contacted an attorney to help her with her car accident. After not hearing from my mom, the attorney's office contacted me trying to get a hold

of her. I explain the situation and I tell him that I will get any documents he needed. The interaction during that phone call was completely different than my previous interactions with an attorney. I felt genuine care and concern for my family.

Knowing my situation, the attorney called me back and offered me a part-time job and told me that I would be allowed all the time I needed to take my mother to appointments and to take care of her. I accepted. His generosity and willingness to help did not end with me but continued with each client he had while I worked with him. Working for him had allowed me to see the impact that one person can have on many people's lives. I remember a young woman who came into the office, she had no money and had just been kicked out of nursing assistant school two weeks before graduation because she had been late several times. But this woman was not late because she was lazy or irresponsible, she was a single mother of seven and who lived in a three-bedroom house with 17 other people. Her car would break down on a regular basis and many times she would end up walking over 5 miles to school in over 100-degree weather. The attorney knew it was a hard case and decided to help her at no cost. He won the case, and this has allowed her to graduate as a Nurse Assistant at a different school.

However, working for him has opened my eyes to how big the problems are in the legal field. Feeling unimportant and feeling like you are just a paycheck to someone is not only felt by me but by countless other people. I encountered a man who lost his home due to inadequate representation and hundreds of injured clients whose attorney had stolen money from their settlements, just to name a few.

I saw this lack of care and abuse as an epidemic in our society. Growing up, I always held attorneys in a special category of people. I believed they were some of the smartest people in the world who would fight for people's justice. Many have forgotten the responsibilities that one has

by being called an attorney. Becoming an attorney means much more than driving a fancy car or getting respect simply by the title you hold. Being an attorney is fighting for justice and the fair representation of all.