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Cheers to Ch-ch-ch-changes – Turn and Face the Strange

Authors: Sara Turner

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David Bowie had it right, change is inevitable for each of us. Sometimes it comes without us even knowing it, like the moment you realize that you have rocked your last baby to sleep for the final time. I can't remember when I last rocked Lily (our youngest, now seven) to sleep, but I do know that it passed without any fanfare or recognition on my part. Other changes come in a single moment, after years of anxious anticipation. In 2019, my husband and I saw our four eldest kids graduate high school and head off to college (Abby to St. Louis University; Grace to Wellesley; Lexi to University of Portland; Kit to University of North Alabama). The days spent raising four kids the same age often felt interminably long. Seemingly overwhelming questions screamed: How to get the laundry done, dinner on the table, everyone to cheer/dance/football, and manage two busy law practices? The ultimate victory in watching our four "big kids" graduate and head off to start embracing change of their own still takes my breath away. I cannot comprehend having enough energy to do it all again.

Anyone who has sent kids to college knows that the resulting calm can be both wonderful and lonely at the same time. Fortunately, we still had two at home (Sophie Kate, 13; Lily, seven) to keep us on our toes, even if it did seem laughably easy and calm in comparison to our early years. I love being able to give focused attention to our two youngest girls in a way that we never could before.

Our victory lap was made even sweeter by my having overcome a nearly fatal health scare late in 2018 when I was hospitalized with a significant bilateral pulmonary embolism (PE). (PSA: Please use this article as an opportunity to search the symptoms of blood clots. I am a runner and my only real symptom was what I thought was a pulled muscle in my shoulder. Blood clots are a common killer, especially for those of us traveling regularly.) Coming back from the PE was made easy, in part, by having incredible clients who continue to place confidence in me to handle their bet-the-company litigation across the country, amazing law partners, and the best supporting team of lawyers and staff I have ever had working with me. Bottom line, in the fall of 2019, life seemed pretty close to perfect. We could not have possibly known that more change was on the horizon.

Labor Day 2019: for our family, on this day, change came calling once again. Less than an hour after arriving at the ER, the doctor was using the word no one wants to hear – cancer. Days later, one of my medical device clients had urgently gotten us a coveted spot to see a surgeon in Rochester, Minnesota at the Mayo Clinic, which was immediately followed by my husband (Kile) having his primary tumor removed. Weeks later, Kile was healing from surgery and was starting chemotherapy. He ultimately underwent 20 days of chemo spread out over 12 weeks. He started 2020 in remission – and thankfully has stayed that way.

Early in 2020, like so many of us, I began seeing strange videos on Twitter coming out of China – people collapsing on the street, homes being welded shut, massive new hospitals being built. Despite these videos, we largely went about our lives. This included my typical heavy travel schedule, which by March 2020 had already included trips to New York, Florida, Texas, Arizona, Illinois, and California. Things started to get serious when friends were having children sent home from study abroad programs and our own children discovered they would be headed home from college.

I have been asked so many times – how do you survive and thrive in the face of such life altering change, especially when it happens all at once? First and foremost, great comfort comes from recognizing that no matter how dire your own situation might seem, everyone is walking through their own darkness, even if it might not be as obvious as the hurdles you know you must pass. Second, faith and preparedness. If raising six kids while running a busy law practice has taught me anything it is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. For me, that translated into planning and preparing in much the same way I would heading into trial. Making sure that the details were handled brought peace and calm. Finally, like in so many other times in life, connections with friends, family, clients, and colleagues have made all the difference.

Our friends and colleagues helped in so many ways: sending food and offering supportive encouragement from afar, but most importantly, providing that warm circle of friendship that is so necessary. While none of us hope to face challenges, I can honestly say that it has been one of the most enjoyable times in life. The slowing down has been hard for me – I have thrived on the busy for as long as I can remember. But there is something different and wonderful about how my life has changed. I have loved having our older children home again (most of the time). While homeschooling our younger children has been a challenge, watching their success had been so rewarding. I have not been back to the office since February 2020, but I have been busier than ever and have found my ability to serve my clients to be greatly enhanced by not having to travel all over the country. My relationships with friends and clients located all over the country have deepened through regular virtual happy hours, because I typically might have only seen them occasionally.

The mental health issues within our profession are real. Lawyers are more likely to suffer from depression and drug and alcohol abuse. These increased risks come not only from the stress of what we do, but also from the isolation lawyers can experience. We work from home, in airports, and on weekends, often cutting us off from the rest of the world. Our work is high stakes, competitive, and sometimes seems never-ending.

Connection and building a lifetime of real relationships – that is how you survive change, even when it comes quick and fast. Kile and I have learned from these past few years that we cannot do it alone.

The difficulties in life are inevitable; but know that you do not face them on your own. As only those who share my love of all things Disney will understand, *Frozen 2* said it best, "Some things never change. Turn around in the time that's flown. Some things stay the same. Though the future remains unknown. May our good luck rest, may our past be past." Peace out, 2020 – may we all toast to the change coming next!

Sara Turner is a shareholder in the Firm's Birmingham, Alabama, office where she serves as chair of Baker Donelson's Hospitality Industry Service Team. Sara was recently elected to serve as a National Director for the DRI Board of Directors. As an active member of DRI, the leading organization of defense attorneys and in-house counsel, Sara recently served as chair and co-chair of the Retail and Hospitality Committee and has held numerous other leadership roles in several DRI committees.