

# Take a Breath

BY JENNIFER PLATZKERE SNYDER

**H**ard to believe it, but my year as editor-in-chief of The Philadelphia Lawyer magazine has come to a close, with this being my final column. What a year it has been.

Regardless of your age, experience or political affiliation, I am sure every reader would agree that this past year has been quite a whirlwind. Little that is taking place today could have even been predicted last July (except, perhaps, by the screenwriters of TV shows who have somehow managed to be way too prescient in their presumptively fantastical view of a fictitious political landscape.)

I agreed to take on the role of editor-in-chief because I wanted to give myself a challenge, jolting myself out of my comfort zone by writing about my own personal views rather than those of my clients. Mind you, I've always liked the notion of taking time to commit my thoughts to writing, if only for my own personal edification. But I have bought a zillion beautiful journals over the years and few of them ever got filled. Given a deadline, however, and the fairly modest expectation that I only have to do this four times in a single year, I felt that the challenge was manageable enough that it was actually achievable.

In my first column, I recounted how I came to be a member of the board – a young lawyer-outsider seemingly invading the private territory of an insular group that had been selectively passing muster on submitted articles for years and did not appear to be engaging in any efforts to expand the roster of contributors. Perhaps it is because of the way I came to be part of the board, but I have long believed that this magazine should be a forum for everyone in our legal community to be able to share their thoughts, knowledge and experiences. To make sure that this magazine reflects that sentiment, over the past year I have actively engaged in personal outreach to various constituencies of the Philadelphia Bar Association to remind them that our pages are open to all – with the hope of garnering greater diversity in authors and, by extension, subject matter,

viewpoints and insights. I am proud to report that every one of the four issues published under my leadership has featured at least one, if not more, first-time authors for this magazine!

As I close out my year, I am pleased to announce that our board recently agreed to undertake an initiative to encourage more young lawyers to become published authors in these very pages. We are committed to working one-on-one with any young lawyer who submits an article, providing them with meaningful editorial feedback. Indeed, our board has a goal of publishing an entire issue of this magazine next year filled exclusively with articles written by young lawyers. If any young lawyer wants to brainstorm ideas, please feel free to contact me or any other member of the board. We are here to help.



For me, the past year has been filled with fantastical highs and unfathomable lows. Legal victories aside, the highs that have stayed with me have exclusively related to the way I spend my time away from work. Taking my twins on their first airplane flights. Watching my oldest son beam as he walked the red carpet at the Tribeca Film Festival. Celebrating my father's 75th birthday with friends and family from near and far. Dressing up for Halloween. Pool time. Mini-golf. Yoga. Petting stingrays and swimming with dolphins. Dancing. Blowing bubbles. Watching my boys peacefully sleep.

Sadly, however, a dear friend recently committed suicide. He was my "adopted" older brother who worked at my family's restaurant for eight years, from when I was

10 to 18 years old. It seems like yesterday that he took me out to dinner to celebrate my "Sweet 16." He often joked that he had more in common with my mom and grandmom than his own family, loving their glamorous presence and reveling in their nourishing emotional support. Although he moved away from this area many years ago, we stayed in touch – largely through texts and Facebook posts – and spent quality time together whenever he was in town. His favorite holiday to celebrate with my family was Passover. He loved seeing the cherry blossom tree in our front yard that was usually newly in bloom, enjoying



the decadent feast and our boisterous company. But I think what he loved best was that the celebration was in the springtime, when the weather made you feel like there was an opportunity to put the past away and start anew, as the snow and ice melted and the soul-warming summer was mere weeks ahead.

I came to find out that he had deliberately planned to take his life and, in the weeks leading up to his final actions, intentionally withdrew from communicating with anyone (including me) who might dissuade him from following through on his plans. I know he struggled with various demons, but this act came entirely out of the blue for me. I can't conceive of how much pain he must have been in to feel so powerless, as though these emotions were impossible to address – especially considering the other hurdles he had faced down and overcome. I have wondered many times over the past weeks whether there was anything I might have been able to do or sway to dissuade him or change his course. Unfortunately, I will never know.

I am sharing this very personal tragedy in the hope that it prompts you to stop what you are doing and take a breath. Notice the world around you. Notice the people in your life and the roles they play. Notice who and what brings you

joy. Take stock of those experiences that make you smile. Be present. Stop with the personal judgment and set a goal for one positive action you are going to undertake each day.

It's easy to say yet hard to do. As lawyers, we all face the pressure for immediately responding to clients, courts, opposing counsel and even colleagues. We face the daunting pressure that comes with our value being measured in billable hours and client-development successes. I know that, at times, I get so consumed with my work that my health and well-being gets shunted to second place (or third, or fourth...or tenth). This career, however, is not a sprint but a marathon, and those tendencies will not serve me well in the long run. This is why I'm thrilled that our Association recently launched a Mindfulness Initiative, providing resources to members to assist them in their roles as advocates and exposing them to the benefits that the practice of mindfulness can bring to their professional careers and personal lives. I hope that, in reading this issue, you can take a break from the stresses of your work and find a moment of calm. ■

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