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PREPARING TO ACCEPT JOY

April showers bring May flowers; however, the torrential and seemingly-nonstop February rains left me thinking I might mildew if they did not let up. But then, remember those few days in the middle of the month with sunshine and temperatures in the seventies? And those two stunningly- beautiful days during the first week of March, even though temperatures plummeted back into the teens? They felt like a renewal. They brought me unabashed joy.

The day after Ash Wednesday, Tasha Blakney's weekly Facebook Thursday Query asked what we had given up for Lent. Mine: Alcohol through the work-week and swearing. This amidst all the kinder, generous offerings. Oh yes, I did! And worse, I admitted we would have to see how the latter "giving-up" works out. I know myself. I did not make it through the first day. My brother always said my language would embarrass a truck driver. No offense to my dear husband.

I knew what she was asking because having grown up Episcopalian, my family always observed this solemn time of repentance, contemplation, and preparation for the coming joy of Easter. Like many others, we shared in the practice of "giving up" something that interferes in our lives. During our childhood, my older siblings and I always gave up sweets. In our household, this meant going without them for the entire 40 days. This also meant the Girl Scout Cookies got tucked into the freezer. Wasn't I surprised to learn with children of my own that Sundays are Feast Days permitting treats? Clever Mama and Daddy! Mama made pots of soup for Wednesday dinners and Friday's usually meant fish sticks – the frozen, perfectly rectangular ones that at the time tasted delicious. A dime of our \$25 cent weekly allowance went into our cardboard alms boxes to be given on Easter morning, along with hand-picked flower from our yard, to people in need. These simple rituals brought peace and a pace to the season.

Lent is a season of reflection and preparation. But what are we preparing for? A recent afternoon outing and life-events for my children resonated for me and brought this answer for myself: I am preparing to accept joy. In February, my daughter Maegan went abroad (again!) for an anticipated three-month employment contract that included lodging. The very morning that she was to begin, the would-be boss canceled the position entirely. Imagine yourself in Barcelona, having left one job for another, paying to travel, and finding yourself with no roof over your head, no source of income and your return flight home three months away. (Or having been in momma's shoes! If only I could have sprouted wings . . .) All's well that ends well. She can take care of herself. She found another position before ever letting me know what happened, and initiated a complaint. Suddenly, she dropped the matter, telling me she was feeling happy and positive, wanted to move on and let go. Like mother, like daughter. She had been prompted by a breath-taking, beautiful day. She accepted joy.

Meanwhile, my son Richmond has been nose-to-the-grindstone wrapping up his senior year and making his next moves through job interviews and law school application. With law schools furiously competing for students, getting accepted appears to me much more difficult these days. He did not give up on his efforts, but he chose to give up on not being able to control the results. What relief I heard in my son's voice when he received an acceptance, and again when he called a few hours later with good news from more schools! He dropped by my office to visit today. His joy is visible.

My husband Wayne and I spent a Saturday afternoon with dear friends. Watching the Volunteers trounce the Wildcats was joyful in itself. The best part though was the four of us sharing time together,

talking about how as husbands and wives we are happy together, and recognizing that honoring these relationships requires giving up and taking time out.

Like a lot of lawyers, I am a list maker and avid reader. I read a book at least every day and a half – books of all kinds. Last night, I stumbled across a book on making one small change weekly for a year, promising to result in a "healthier and happier you." The first chapters were devoted to drinking more water and getting more sleep. All 52 chapters were filled with checklists, charts, time-logs, measuring tools, incentives, tips-and-tricks, and the such. Once upon a time, I would have jumped at that kind of list-making challenge, but without finishing the book, the whole prospect seemed exhausting. One chapter was about keeping your house cleaner by leaving shoes at the door – an entire chapter. And no joke, as I was reading, a television ad appeared for a phone "app" to help you break bad habits and create better habits. How about putting down the phone! I turned off the TV, put the book down and played with our critters instead. True joy for the five of us.

As I think on it, as attorneys, we are particularly situated to improve the lives of others and help ease their burdens so they can be open to and experience joy. Aren't we fortunate? No matter who we are or where we come from, maybe a practice of self-contemplation and preparation is a good thing for us individuals and as attorneys. My social media post drew several private comments with smiley-faces and thumbs-ups. I was and continue to be serious about working on these things. But further reflection leads me to add these to the list, and not just for a season – give up the distractions, at times just be still, be present for one another – be prepared to accept joy and then choose joy. By giving up, often we are gaining.



Faces of joy from Sevilla to UT and in between.