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CHICKEN WIRE AND CEMENT

Sharing stories can take circular journeys that also, in oxymoronic fashion, move us forward. Every month, I share DICTA with my siblings. Lochlin and Christina who live in Nashville. Margaret, the eldest, lives in Santa Fe. Our "South African brother" Errol is a citizen of four countries living in Melbourne. KBA's raconteurs struck a chord. Reading the personal stories of people willing to "put themselves out there" inspired Errol to lead by story-telling, sharing his deeply personal story with the leadership team of his international professional association. The context was embracing our vulnerabilities in times of turmoil, with the courage and integrity to reach despite our differences in pursuit of worthy purposes greater than self. He described for them a telephone call seeking counsel from my sister:

"She told me three things that will live with me always. One of them is cement and chicken wire. But first, she said, 'Errol, in all the years I have known you, you remind me of the person in the poem *The Man in the Arena*. This formed part of a speech in Paris in April 1910 by President 'Colonel' Teddy Roosevelt known as *The Citizen Speech*. I do not see myself as this person, but then again, I never do know how others see me, nor is that my business, but would love in any event to share this poem with you and respectfully reframe it as *The Person in the Arena*:"

It is not the critic who counts; not the person who points out how the strong person stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is not effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends themselves in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if they fail, at least fails while daring greatly . . .

Then my sister told me two things about our father that I did not know, notwithstanding all those many long, fascinating and memorable evenings of the two of us speaking quietly together at the dinner table to many chimes of the grandfather clock in the adjoining lounge after the family had gone to sleep."

"She said, 'Did you know that Dad was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal by the President?' She then explained and forwarded me the citation accompanying the medal of what he accomplished in a period of just five years from August 1970 to June 1975. My mind boggled and still does not comprehend the immensity of what one person, one engineer, could achieve in undertaking causes that were so much greater than self. Yet in an instant I knew it was so in my memory of the depth of kindness, humility and authenticity I recall in his eyes that so inspired people to dig deep and reach well beyond themselves."

"Then my sister told me about cement and chicken wire. 'Did you know Dad also received a similar such medal from the president of Vietnam?' The story she then relayed is the sole and soul reason why [we began this project]. As I recall the story, he was in a village of some many hundreds of

local civilian people, together with his engineering personnel. The command from HQ came through that the enemy were approaching and that the army unit was to be airlifted to safety. This was the only form of escape given that the village was on a peninsula surrounded by water and the only land exit was in the path of the approaching opposing forces. There were no boats nor were there any trees to build boats. Unfortunately, the command was soldiers-only to be airlifted, which meant that the locals would likely perish."

The commands did not sit well with my Dad. So, he risked his life (and his career should they succeed) to challenge his personnel to come up with an alternative plan. Talk about Neil Armstrong holding his nerve with 30 seconds of fuel left to land on the moon. His team willingly followed.

All that was available was cement, chicken wire, a team of well-motivated and inspired engineers and hope. And with that, they constructed the boats that evacuated everyone to safety."

Errol shared the story to encourage others to be the engineers who care for people by solving seemingly unsolvable problems, embracing their differences and disagreements, and leading by example. As it happens, he is a Barrister – fancy word for attorney – and asks me: "The world is counting on us. If not us, who? If not now, when?" Very timely and relevant questions for me and for our legal profession.

Speaking of timely and relevant, I must take a moment to tell you about the Economics and Law Office Management Survey. The KBA Membership Committee has spent two years adapting this completely confidential survey to gather information to help guide your management and planning decisions and to monitor trends within the profession locally. The link to this KBA-specific survey is in an August 19 email from the ABA Division of Bar Services. Please take the few minutes to participate. You will provide important insight and you might win the \$500 American Express gift card incentive.

Thank you for letting me share this story within a story within a story. It depicts leadership in its purest unselfish form -- supporting others to be their best selves for the good of all. Exemplified by a commander with his personnel, between siblings, and among colleagues, leading with a servant's heart has a place in every aspect of our lives.

This message is for you and dedicated to my father, whose birthday would be this month. Clearly, I did not inherit his skills with chicken wire. He entered Georgia Tech at age 16, graduated, obtained a second engineering degree at the United States Military Academy West Point, and served 30 years in the Army, including three wars. Always focused on the needs and well-being of others, he did not talk about his successes and accolades. We learned of those from other people. He was born on September 11, 1922. I was calling to wish him a happy birthday as the first plane struck. We spoke throughout the day as each tower fell and during the strike on the Pentagon, where he had been stationed on our family's return from Germany. You see, he would not turn on the news out of concern for upsetting my mother, who was very ill. He remained completely calm for her. Daddy was servant leadership personified. He was the Person in the Arena.



Lochlin W. Caffey, Sr.



Rebel on Rabbit Patrol