



Negligence Law Section

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Message from the Chair

“Don’t Wait”

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What a year it has been. In the past 12 months, we have watched unusual and unsettling events, including the COVID-19 pandemic which has claimed the lives of more than 195,000 people in America, civil unrest surrounding the “Black Lives Matter” movement and the political divide that exists within our country during this election year. Like many of you, these events have caused us to reflect upon our lives and the times in which we live. It is this “time of reflection” that brings me to the topic of this article.

Several years ago, I was given an article that talked about the story of Thomas Carlyle, who lived in the 1800s and was a well-known writer. The story of Thomas Carlyle had a significant impact on me, and I want to share it with you now.

On October 17, 1826, Thomas, age 30, married his secretary, Jane Welsh. After they were married, Thomas became a well-known author and historian and received many accolades. Thomas was a hard worker and became absorbed in his work. Thomas and Jane had their share of quarrels during their life, but still loved each other dearly. After several years of marriage, Jane became ill with cancer. It was the slow growing kind of cancer that allowed Jane to continue to work as Thomas’ secretary. Finally, after several years, Jane became confined to her bed. Although Thomas loved her dearly, he very seldom found time to stay with her for an extended period of time. He seemed to always be busy with his work. Jane passed away; they carried her body to the cemetery. That day was a miserable day. It was raining hard and the mud was deep. Following the funeral, Thomas went back to his home. He was taking Jane’s death very hard. He went upstairs to her bedroom and sat in the chair next to her bed. He thought about how little time he spent with her before her death and wished he had a chance to do it differently. Noticing her diary on the table beside her bed, he picked it up and began to read.

He was shocked by what he read. On the first page, Jane wrote a single line: “Yesterday he spent an hour with me and it was like heaven; I love him so.” Suddenly, something dawned on him that he had not realized before. He had been too busy to notice that he meant so much to her. He thought of all the times he had gone about his work without thinking about or noticing her.

Thomas turned the page of her diary and read something that broke his heart. “I have listened all day to hear his steps in the hall, but now it is late and I guess he won’t come by today.” Thomas read a little more in the diary. He then threw it down and ran out of the house. Some of his friends found him at Jane’s grave, his face buried in mud. His eyes were red from weeping. Tears rolled down his cheeks. He kept repeating over and over again, “If I had only known, if I had only known.” But it was too late for Thomas. Jane was dead.

After Jane’s death, Thomas made little attempt to write again. Historians have said that he lived another 15 years, but was weary, depressed and a recluse. I tell you this story with the hope that you will not make the same mistake. While our loved ones may need the financial support we provide, it is our love that they really need and want. Make sure you take time each day to show affection to the special people in your life. Always offer a kind word or write a note of encouragement to a person in need. It makes a huge difference. In the end, you will be measured not by your success as a lawyer, but by the way you loved your family and friends. Take time to love them generously.

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