

Next Year, Let's Take A Broader Look At Justice

OPINION: A lawyer discusses why his humble roots and professional platform compel him to help others.

Robert Benson, The National Law Journal

December 26, 2016 | 0 Comments

SHARE

PRINT

REPRINTS



A woman dries clothes near the ruins of an old building in Managua, Nicaragua.

Photo: Javier Galeano/AP

During the Christmas season in 1998, I learned that I was making partner at my law firm. I was also preparing for another trip to Central America, where I had been doing volunteer work every year during the holidays.

But this trip would be different. As I walked through the poorest barrios of Managua, Nicaragua, I met children who were trying to survive on the streets, addicted to drugs and dealing them, abused and abandoned — just as I had been. That trip changed my life.

MORE THAN A VOCATION

I began to view my legal career as more than a vocation. I began to look at it as a means by which I can accomplish a greater good.

In 1999, in parallel with my legal career, I started a Section 501(c)(3) charity called Arms of Love International. Joining with my colleagues and friends, we built four homes in Managua and hired local couples to care for abandoned children in a family environment.

Juan was one of the first eight children who moved into the new homes. Abandoned as an infant, Juan had grown up on the streets of Managua and had never attended school. To survive, he washed windshields and dealt drugs.

Less than a year after Juan was moved into a home, Hector, who was abandoned at only two months old, was moved into the same home.

That was just the beginning. Arms of Love continues to care for nearly 100 children in multiple countries — and is now caring for an entirely new generation. The first generation is in their twenties, college graduates with careers and families of their own.

When my parents adopted me out of a children's shelter in Santa Clara County, California, in 1968, they could not have foreseen the chain of events they set in motion. That thirty years later, right after Christmas, I would begin establishing homes for other abandoned children. Or that this Christmas, Juan would give Hector the encouragement he needed to face the greatest challenge of his life.

Four months ago, at the age of 15, Hector was diagnosed with leukemia. Juan rallied the young adults they grew up with at Arms of Love and recruited them to donate blood. Juan stayed with Hector at the hospital during his chemotherapy.

Hector, fighting for his life, started caring for other children in the hospital, and committed to someday become a doctor specializing in pediatric hematology.

Three weeks later, Juan sent me an e-mail that brought my life full circle. "Today, I have started a new chapter in my life," Juan wrote. "I am officially married, the first one in my family. I was always impacted by the fact that I could look at you and say to myself, if you made it, I can make it. You encouraged me to keep moving forward. You gave your best, invested your time, and sacrificed your life to create a future for me."

LIFE IN A NEW LIGHT

Juan, Hector, and I share a common bond — we were each abused and abandoned as children.

A single act of love in 1968 changed the trajectories of our lives, from brokenness to wholeness. And after more than 25 years of practicing law, I have come to view justice in a new light.

A BROADER VIEW OF JUSTICE

Justice is integral to our judicial system, and it is furthered when we provide pro bono services to people in need.

But justice is a broader concept. Justice is accomplished any time we bring restoration to a life or a situation that is lacking something that it used to have, or that it ought to have in a world that is just.

It is providing a home to the homeless; medical care to the ill; equality where there is discrimination; freedom to those oppressed or trafficked in slavery.

As members of the legal profession, we are uniquely positioned to advance such justice. We are skilled leaders and advocates. We have access to financial resources. We have networks that include professionals of all walks of life, clients in every industry, subject-matter experts, officials in government, and people of influence.

When we combine those resources with personal action that is motivated by our love for others, lives change.

This Christmas, we don't know the outcome of Hector's illness, but we know the end of his story.

Like Juan and myself, Hector has moved from the greatest poverty — feeling unwanted and unloved — to knowing that he is valued and cherished, by those who chose to become his family and friends. Nothing can take that away from him.

In the coming year, let's embrace a broader view of justice, one that responds to the hurt and brokenness of the world around us.

Doing justice does not always involve providing legal services. Sometimes justice demands that we ask ourselves a different set of questions. When we see a need, can we meet it? When we see conflict, can we bring peace? Where there is despair, can we bring hope? When we are aware of people who have been devalued and mistreated, can we communicate through our actions that they are valued and loved?

Being a lawyer is a vocation. Justice is a way of life. And when we commit to doing justice in the lives around us, we can make a difference — and bring restorative change to a broken world.

1 | 2 | [VIEW FULL ARTICLE](#)

Robert Benson is an intellectual property partner in Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe's Orange County and Taipei, Taiwan, offices. He focuses his practice on patent litigation, licensing and other commercial litigation.
