

# Message from TLC President

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## Lonely

One of my favorite things to do as a kid was to get to go visit my uncle, Larry Don Gilbert. Uncle Larry lived in the east Texas town of Kilgore, Texas, which was about 18 miles from Henderson, where I grew up. He was around ten years my senior, and he was my idol. Looking back, I appreciate how incredibly tolerant he was to let a little kid like me hang out with him and his friends. Uncle Larry was everything a kid growing up in Texas in the 60s aspired to be: he was an incredible all-round athlete, he had pretty girlfriends and, with both parents working from *can* to *can't* every day, he had an absurd amount of freedom.

One of my favorite stories about Uncle Larry was when he and three of his buddies were joyriding in the family station wagon. It was a 1960 model red Ford. They were all twelve years old. Uncle Larry was driving, though obviously he did not have a driver's license or have permission to take the car out. While tooling down one of the main streets in Kilgore, they met a police car traveling in the opposite direction. Instead of acting nonchalant and driving by, they all ducked down until they drove past. Luckily the police officer was not looking at the seemingly-unoccupied car driving by and they got away.

While Uncle Larry and I never got into any serious trouble, I became much wiser to the ways of the world. I felt really big getting to hang out with high school boys. One of his friends really liked to cuss and so I could really impress my hometown friends with the vocabulary words that I was able to pick up on my overnight stays.

I can remember like it was yesterday, sitting in the front seat of the car with him, the wind buffeting us as all the windows were down on a hot summer day and the AM radio blaring. One of the songs that he and I loved to sing at the top of our lungs was a Bobby Vinton song from the 60s, "Mr Lonely".

*"Lonely, I'm Mr. Lonely  
I have nobody for my own  
Now I'm so lonely, I'm Mr. Lonely  
Wish I had someone to call on the phone  
Now I'm a soldier, a lonely soldier"*

*Away from home through no wish of my own  
That's why I'm lonely, I'm Mr. Lonely  
I wish that I could go back home..."*

It was written while Vinton was in the army and came out as the Vietnam war was escalating for American GIs. I can still hear the song in my head and feel a tinge of sadness thinking about that poor soldier with no one to call or send him a letter.

Loneliness.

It affects us all from time to time. We all know that empty feeling of loneliness.

We all know that trial lawyering is a lonely endeavor. Even our significant others that are not trial lawyers do their best to empathize with the pressures unique to our profession, but despite their best efforts just cannot. So many of our journeys we must walk alone.

We all have spent those late nights and long weekends preparing for trial. We have all been there for those 16- to 20-hour days, just before or during trial. There is so much of our work that has to be done alone. By ourselves. Because no one else can really do what must be done.

Our time during this pandemic with mandatory social distancing, working from home, seeing others only virtually through Zoom or some other platform (who knew that "zoom" would become such a common word in our collective vocabulary and ever mean anything other than a description of a motorized vehicle accelerating?) has only exacerbated that unfortunate attribute of what we do.

In my own household, thankfully, sheltering in place has brought us closer. We have been able to spend more quality time together than ever before. That has definitely been a positive. My 16-year-old daughter, however, badly misses her friends. She vows that she will never, ever again say that she does not like school. *Right*. My son, who just finished his first year of law school, didn't go to a summer program at his school but, instead, is clerking at our law firm and sleeping in his old room. My wife and I have gone on many, many long walks and have consumed several of the latest offerings on Netflix and Amazon.

The distance of other relationships have definitely taken a toll. I've not been able to be face to face with my mother who lives in a very good home about two miles from me since early March.

The old man who lived down the road from our farm died. I affectionately called him "Mr. Howard." He would not stand for me calling him "Mr. Engledow." He was a good guy. He loved keeping an eye out for things. He loved to go down to our lake and feed the catfish. I missed being able to pay my last respects.

I have missed my church and seeing the people with whom I have developed a relationship over the years. Even though I may not know them well, I miss that interaction.

Of course, the inability to actually gather together with the upsetting events that have occurred to the Trial Lawyers College have made it even harder to process. Strangely, even though distance might have made it impossible for us all to meet up face to face, just the fact that we couldn't made it even harder for me.

All of this has made me feel that old, unwelcome and uncom-

fortable feeling of loneliness.

The other day while contemplating my own loneliness, I started thinking about my friend Chris King. He was black. He was one of the first African Americans to actually attend my school. Chris was not very tall, stocky and had close cropped hair. He had the best smile. He was very brave. I cannot begin to imagine the courage that it took to come to my all-white school as an insecure junior high kid. I know you all remember those adolescent years. That period of our lives where the very last thing that one wants is to be is different. Chris was the first to integrate. He was alone. He was a hero. My current journey pales in comparison to Chris King's.

A national hero died this month with the passing of Congressman John Lewis. My wife, daughter and I had the wonderful experience of getting to hear him speak in my hometown a couple of years ago. I wrote about that experience in an earlier column. What a fearless, giant of a man. Imagine his loneliness in spending his first night in jail after getting into "good trouble" as he called it. He was arrested around 40 times in his efforts to bring equality to the races. Thinking of the immense courage of a man like John Lewis makes me feel almost silly to dwell on my own discomfort.

I ran across this poem by Robert Frost again the other day. It has meaning to me in this time of change.

#### Acquainted with the Night

*I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in the rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.  
  
I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat.  
And dropped by eyes, unwilling to explain.  
  
I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street.  
  
But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
One luminary clock against the sky  
  
Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.*

My acquaintance with the night is so insignificant when compared to those heroes whose journey has ended and those still on the front lines fighting for racial equality. They make me even more resolved to be an anti-racist. They inspire me to speak out at every opportunity to shed light on racial inequality. We all must be Warriors in the fight against gender and racial injustice.

We all must do more. 🍎