

I am a trial lawyer. I practice in the Messina Bulzomi Christensen law firm in Tacoma. Many people do not like what we do. The media often reports of huge jury awards and settlements. Inevitably that is followed by howls about “jackpot juries” and “greedy trial lawyers.” I find that troubling.

I was a high school teacher for eight years. During the last four years I was also a full-time law student at Gonzaga University in Spokane. My wife and I had three children during those four years. I taught at Lewis and Clark High School during the day and attended classes at night. Amazing how much energy one has during youth. I have practiced law for 41 years now and have had a reasonably successful career with a lot of material possessions. Yet, the four years of law school, while we were poor, were years of riches and happiness.

My practice, along with my four great lawyer-partners, has consisted of representing terribly broken and injured people. My memories of law school and my experience with my clients’ stories have, I hope, forged a philosophy of life. I have heard it said that one can never be “too thin or too rich.” I believe the flip side of that coin is, “One can never be too generous.”

We five lawyers agree that, when you represent people who have lost limbs, been confined to a wheel chair or buried a child, it changes you. It has to. You go along and you absorb the pain of the clients and it makes you a different person. Yes, there are lawyers who see damaged people as just a big payday, but only a few and none whom I consider a friend.

As you process one heartbreaking story after another, you come to realize that life is not about who has the most toys, but who has the most joys. Much joy comes from being kind and sharing. This is not always about money. One can be generous in many ways, by a kind word, needed advice, by being there during a hard time, by sharing some special talent, by community service.

Material possessions are wonderful – to be enjoyed, especially as a reward for hard work and talent. Yet, there are so many people out there who cannot enjoy much in life, because of some terrible injury or disability. We see them on a regular basis. We get them money, but it never replaces what they have lost. Some of them are even millionaires, but only in the material sense. Most are actually quite poor as it relates to the joys of life. If you are not wealthy but you and your family are whole and healthy, you have all the riches you need. Remember to share of yourself.