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No. 9 Vol. 2 **September 13, 2002**

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REFLECTIONS
By Thomas D. Begley, Jr.

On Wednesday, September 4, I had emergency eye surgery at Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As I lay in bed after the surgery looking for something positive in the situation I found a great deal to be thankful for. I suffered a detached retina, which is rare, but modern surgical procedures are now 90 percent successful. Certainly a positive there.

I thought of my new friend Chris Sullivan, the Director of the Disabilities Program at Merrill Lynch. Chris was born without hearing. He is now in his fifties and is relentlessly cheerful and brings great passion to his work assisting people with disabilities. Chris was born with his disability, but has refused to let it handicap him. He has now undergone surgery to have a device implanted in his brain that will enable him to hear. I think of all of my clients who suffer from disabilities that are permanent and how those disabilities have affected their lives.

I thought of my client, John, in his mid-60's and his wife, Marge, who has suffered from Multiple Sclerosis for many years and has been confined to a wheelchair for the last 10. John cheerfully and lovingly cares for Marge, has had their home made handicap accessible, and has purchased a handicap van. John takes Marge out for dinner and shopping and even to parties. Both of them are always up. Entering their home one feels the love in the air. He is a true hero.

My roommate at Wills Eye Hospital, Mike, was a congenial fellow. He was visited by his daughter, a social worker at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, who was both charming and caring. Mike's surgery did not seem to go quite as well as mine and he required considerable additional attention. This involved nurses coming in and out frequently during the night and turning on the lights and making noise. Since it was only one night this did not bother me. I did think of my many clients in nursing homes and assisted living facilities who share rooms with people not as congenial as Mike. A privacy curtain offers little to them in the way of actual privacy with respect to light and noise. Spending weeks, months or even years in such living quarters would require considerable adjustment.

After the surgery the doctor paid a post-op visit and I asked about what restrictions I might anticipate. The doctor indicated I would be unable to work for about one week, unable to drive for about two weeks, unable to perform any strenuous exercise for one month, and for a few days would be pretty much bedridden. I am used to a fast-paced life

with few limitations. Again I thought of my clients who are long-term residents of assisted living facilities or nursing homes, or even those with chronic illnesses who are fortunate enough to be cared for at home. Their limitations are so much more severe.

Lying in a bed at the hospital, time almost stood still. Patients recovering from eye surgery are required to lie virtually immobile for awhile. I remember looking at the clock on the wall noting the time and then looking back later startled to learn that only 15 minutes had passed. Persons suffering from chronic illnesses must endure unending days and nights.

Reflecting on my new limitations I realized I could see out of at least one eye. I thought of my clients who suffer from dementia. While they can usually see out of both eyes, they are unable to comprehend what it is they see.

Considering my inability to drive for two weeks, I thought of the vast majority of my clients who are unable to drive at all for the rest of their lives. Elderly people really do lose their independence when they lose their ability to drive. They become dependent on others to chauffeur them and often need to move to facilities that provide transportation.

I thought of my restriction of being unable to lift weights or swim a mile for one month. How fortunate I am to be able to walk short distances during that time. Many of my clients are homebound and cannot leave their home or they are in wheelchairs and cannot even walk. And finally I thought "Who will run the office when I am away?" How fortunate I am to have a wonderful new partner, Dana Bookbinder, a fine associate, Jennifer Donohue, and a trained, dedicated, hard-working staff. It is likely that the office will run better than ever. I am grateful to my colleagues at the office and need to tell them so more often.

Again I thought of my clients and how dependent they are on family and other paid caregivers. I immediately think of heroes, sons and daughters who have quit their jobs to come home and devote full time to caring for aging parents. These are exceptional heroes. But I begin to appreciate the sacrifices made by other family who continue about their daily lives but with some considerably cost and disruption attendant to caring for the disabled family member. Even the paid caregivers have hearts of gold to enter such a noble profession where their main reward is certainly not financial but giving to others.

Begley & Begley P.C. is a law firm that concentrates on Estate & Tax Planning, Elder Law, Estate Administratio n, Guardianship and Will Contests, Real Estate, as well as Medicaid Planning. We are based in Moorestown, NJ, with offices in Stone Harbor, Lawrenceville & Philadelphia, PA.

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