

Adverse Witness



Laird Lile takes the plunge at Victoria Falls, South Africa



All caught up

As busy professionals, we easily can get caught up. Caught up with our law practices. Caught up with our bar service. Caught up with our community volunteer activities. Caught up with the responsibilities of our kids and our homes. Caught up with life in general. In the seemingly perpetual busy state of life, we risk missing out on unique opportunities.

Well aware of my extensive commitments, last fall I began planning a trip with my son to celebrate his anticipated graduation from high school. The plan morphed into the two of us spending 30 days exploring Africa, encumbered only by what we could fit into our backpacks.

During our time in Africa, we visited five countries, traveling by train, plane, automobile, and bus. In Cape Town, we ran off a cliff with only a piece of canvas (a hang glider) strapped to our backs, landing inches from the Indian Ocean. Between Zambia and Zimbabwe, we jumped off a perfectly good bridge with only an elastic cord (a bungee) tied to our ankles for a free fall of 364 feet. In Botswana, we walked alongside the king of the jungle. And in Tanzania, to top it off - literally - we spent seven days on Mt. Kilimanjaro, reaching the summit of 19,341 feet.

But none of those fascinating experiences held a candle to the absolute highlight of the trip: being with the young man traveling with me. Watching my son interact with fellow travelers on the train from Johannesburg to Cape Town, while observing him making new friends and learning about the area we were passing through; seeing him as comfortable in a hostel as he was in a fine resort; viewing him at a political demonstration of the African National Congress in Cape Town; accepting his challenge to partake in adventurous activities like the hang gliding and bungee jumping experiences; being with him when he ordered his first Guinness, and joining him in his first wine tasting at a vineyard. The most amazing highlight of all was simply observing this intelligent, compassionate human being, who will soon head off to Charlottesville, Virginia, to matriculate in Mr. Jefferson's University and begin his life as a young adult.

The resounding message I want to share from this experience is simply this: Nothing, nothing you are doing right now is so important that you cannot grab these kinds of unique opportunities. But how, you ask? How can you be gone (and I mean really gone, even allowing the emails to back up; I came home to 6,862 in my inbox) for that long?

The key to all of this is setting expectations. My clients were informed months in advance of my plans; in fact, several clients eagerly shared stories from their own African adventures. Prospective clients were warned of my unavailability leading up to and during the time I would be away. Opposing counsel and co-counsel were all understanding. Those in leadership roles with the bar groups with which I am involved were informed in advance of my absence. Judges were flexible and cooperative. Most of all, my colleagues at my practice were as supportive and encouraging as everyone else who learned of our plans.

While the reasons and justifications I could have espoused for not taking this trip were endless, the motive was quite simple: Not missing out on this incredibly unique opportunity to spend meaningful time with my son, Langdon, as he enters the next chapter of his life.

Now, I just need to get caught up!

