While writing this, it struck me that the holidays are upon us. Neighborhoods are starting to sparkle with green and red lights. Christmas music is playing everywhere. I always find that the end of a year is a good time to reflect on the past year, both personally and professionally, the good and the bad, the joyous and the heartbreaking. I recognize the things that I am grateful for, and know that I am blessed with much more than anyone deserves.

I am particularly grateful this year for the family that is TCDLA. When joining TCDLA in 1984, I knew I was going to be the recipient of many resources, people freely willing to help me along the way, amazing seminars, and other materials to develop my practice. What I didn’t know then was that I was joining an association that is as much about personal connections as it is about professional relationships.

I could easily talk about what an amazing year TCDLA has had, and that could fill up pages of the Voice. TCDLA, through the CDLP Committee with chairman John Hunter Smith at the helm, has put on innovative and exceptional seminars across the state, made possible by the Court of Criminal Appeal's grant. It’s great to see new committee chairmen invigorate their work and add new, energetic committee members. New memberships and renewals continue to come in. We have lively discussions on the listserv, and TCDLA received an all-time high in applications from members wanting to join the Board of Directors. I am also pleased with the ongoing efforts of the Legislative Committee, under the direction of Bill Harris, as we prepare for what will likely be a difficult session starting in January.

All of those accomplishments?and many, many others?truly deserve specific recognition. This year, I am compelled to express my gratitude for the lifelong friendships that I have made and that I have been a witness to as a result of my association with TCDLA. Two examples of the dedicated, family aspect of TCDLA deeply touched my heart this year.

Many of us felt helpless and concerned as Executive Director Joseph Martinez' wife, Bertha, became increasingly ill over the summer and passed away a few weeks ago. We watched with feelings of sadness and confusion as she went in and out of doctor visits, emergency rooms, and hospitals, days or weeks at a time with no official diagnosis that made sense to form the basis of a treatment plan. Those who knew Bertha or who spent any period of time with her will tell you they were the better for it. Bertha was an optimistic and positive woman who always looked at life with humble gratitude. She viewed difficult challenges as a blessing and an opportunity to serve God or help others. She was kind and gentle, but, at the same time, a fierce advocate and supporter of TCDLA and the work we do. She believed to her core that the work we do as criminal defense lawyers to help the vulnerable and marginalized was noble and valuable.
We also watched Joseph as he went through the nightmare of seeing his vibrant wife lose her strength slowly, holding on as long as she could. We saw Joseph try to be strong, but his face and voice revealed his fear and exhaustion. Bertha’s rosary and funeral revealed just how much she meant to TCDLA. Past presidents and members came from the far reaches of the state to pay their respects. They did this because TCDLA is a family. As we move forward, especially during the holidays, let us continue to remember Bertha and be there for Joseph.

I am also grateful to Tim Evans and Lydia Clay-Jackson for their selfless dedication to the Trial College. As you all know, the Trial College is one of the most praised and anticipated seminars of the year for TCDLA. There are always more student applicants that can be accommodated, and the faculty is always invested and excited to participate. The College has been as successful as it is because of their commitment to the Trial College and to TCDLA.

In 2017, Tim and Lydia will both become Deans Emeritus of the Trial College and will participate in the planning and future direction of the College. I have appointed Lance Evans and Kerri Anderson-Donica to serve as the new deans. Both have demonstrated a commitment to the Trial College and have been actively participating as faculty for many years. Tim and Lydia will continue to be leaders and provide important guidance to the new deans, again promoting the personal and family-like relationships of the TCDLA participants. Lance and Kerri will serve a four-year term that can be renewed one time. This way, going forward, we will be able to involve more leaders at Trial College, keep the program diverse, and energize faculty and students. Thank you Tim and Lydia for your outstanding leadership?and Lance and Kerri for your willingness to serve.

These two instances represent examples of my gratitude for the people in TCDLA. I hope you can similarly look back over the year and find an example of a personal connection within the association for which you are grateful. When I get caught up in the day-to-day headaches or annoyances of my practice, I try to find a quiet moment to reflect on the many blessings in my life.

Friends, I wish you all the best this holiday season. I am grateful for each of you.

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