

Hello, again.

When you last heard from me, I was preparing for open-heart surgery. It was planned and non-emergent, but getting your chest cut open is just as unnerving no matter how long you know it's coming. Maybe more so, the longer you know.

The short version of this story is that the operation was a success, my recovery was easier than expected, and I'm mostly back to "normal," whatever that means anymore.

The longer version goes like this:

Traveling for a major surgery is no light endeavor. I knew that when I chose a surgeon at New York City's Mount Sinai Hospital, and I can reaffirm it now. It's tougher on everyone involved, from the patient to those who travel with him to those who stay home.

That said, I wouldn't have done it any other way. When facing something so serious, you need absolute confidence you've done your homework and made the best choice possible. As I navigated a half-day of pre-op appointments, I knew that I'd done so. As I said in my last column, do your own research.



Public Policy
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But: Remember your Burns as well. The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men ...

My last conversation at the hospital the day before the operation was with the surgeon. I'd traveled to New York so he could perform a special kind of valve-replacement procedure not available to me in Atlanta. Almost as an aside – the same way I'd learned about the Ross procedure from another surgeon – he said in about 0.5% of cases, the surgeon learns mid-operation that the patient's anatomy won't allow for it. Just one in 200 patients; surely nothing to worry about.

Well, I may not be one in a million but evidently I am one in 200. He had to pivot, and I ended up with the same outcome, a new valve from a cow, that I could have gotten in Atlanta. I'm still "fixed," just with a greater chance of needing another surgery down the road.

Yet, I wasn't overly disappointed when the anesthesia began to clear and he told me what happened. A bit disappointed, sure. But I also knew that if I hadn't tried what I thought was best, I forever would have wondered "what if?" Eliminating that pang of doubt and regret was worth it.

As I got less groggy and more reflective, I realized something else. Medicine, especially a major surgery, isn't a computer program; it doesn't simply spit out the result of the inputs you entered. We are unique beings with quirks and subtleties that can't be wholly foreseen despite our array of diagnostics.

I think we have a tendency to forget that. I know I'll have more sympathy with the next athlete on my favorite team who doesn't meet – or, as we've come to expect, beat – the expected recovery or timeline for returning from a procedure. (But please, don't let it be Ronald Acuña Jr.)

It's similar to the overwhelming feeling I had during the births of both of my children: Despite our medical knowledge and advances, on some level we're still up against nature, and we haven't completely tamed it.

There's one other element I need to mention, last but not the least. That's the power of prayer. It certainly shaped my sense of calm before the surgery, and after learning it didn't go the exact way I'd planned.

I know people were praying for me, because they told me so. Many readers wrote to tell me you'd offer up my situation to our heavenly Father.

I have prayed before for a sense of peace amid a time of turmoil. Never before have I truly experienced what Paul, in his letter to the church at Philippi, called the peace "which surpasses all understanding." But then, never before have I known of so many people interceding on my behalf. I am grateful to them, and to Him.

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Some advice to a great grandson for the coming year

Dear Cameron Charles Yarbrough:

It is a new year and once again an opportunity for me to share some thoughts with you as you face a future that is going to be full of challenges. But, then, all futures are challenging because they are filled with unknowns. What counts is how you deal with those challenges.

First off, take nothing for granted including life itself. When you are young, the assumption is that whatever you didn't get done today you can make it up tomorrow. There are no guarantees that there will be a tomorrow. Every day is a precious gift. Don't waste a single one.

Be the best you can be at whatever you choose to do. Pursue excellence. But don't try to live up to other people's expectations. Be self-motivated and keep raising the bar yourself. There is no finish line.

Be able to look yourself in the eye at the end of each day and tell yourself you did your best. It may not have been good enough but in your heart you will know it was your best effort and that is what matters.

If you break it, own it. I'm not talking about dropping a doodad in a gift shop. I am talking about making a mistake. We all make them but what is important is how we deal with those mistakes. Remember Grandma Jane's admonition: You are free to do whatever you choose to do in life. You just have to be prepared to deal with the consequences of your decisions. If it

was a bad decision, don't make excuses, try to rationalize it or blame someone else. Learn from it and don't do it again.

Your last name honors your great-great grandfather who was one of the most

principled men you could ever have known. Please don't do anything that would sully his memory. If your name is in the paper, be sure it is for something good you have accomplished and not for something that would embarrass us and bring dishonor to the family and to a man we loved and admired.

Don't try to be popular with your peers because you want to be liked. Be yourself and you will find

out who your friends really are and that they will like you for who you are. There will be those who don't have your motivation or your abilities and will try to drag you down to their level. Don't let them. Don't be a follower.

Be careful what comes out of your mouth. Don't brag when you have success or whine when you don't. Avoid hyperbole. And keep your language decent. You can make your point without taking God's name in vain, throwing in a reference to excrement or using the f-word. It is not necessary and it makes you look like a inarticulate hoodlum.

I hope you will say "Yes ma'am" and "Yessir" and not "yeah" and "no" when talking to adults. Also, don't forget to say "thank you" when someone does some-

thing nice for you, whether it is showing you how to tie a bowtie or checking you out at the grocery store. You will never offend anyone by showing them your appreciation.

Know that there is more to life than work. There is life itself and it is composed of little things that are, in fact, not little at all. Swinging in the hammock. Hanging out with your dad. The laughter of little sisters. Ice cream with sprinkles at the beach. Waffle House on Saturday mornings. In years to come, you will remember these things long after you have forgotten your Grade Point Average or where you finished in your cross-country competitions.

I urge you to dream big. Someone is going to discover a cure for an incurable disease, become President of the United States, write a great piece of music or invent something that will change lives for the better. Whoever does, had big dreams. There is nothing to keep you from dreaming big except yourself.

That's enough advice for this year. I hope you find some of this useful. Frankly, some of it I wish somebody had shared with me when I was your age. It might have made my life a bit easier.

Chances are I won't be around to see how you turn out but from what I have seen so far, I think you are going to do just fine. And never forget how much I love you. It's a bunch.

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Dick Yarbrough

Land of the lost history lesson

"Daddy, I'm scared."

This was an oft-heard refrain at bedtime in the Robbins' abode when our children were little, along with "Daddy, I'm thirsty," "Daddy, I'm hungry," "Daddy, I'm going to throw up," "Daddy, I've got to go the potty," "Daddy, tell me a story," and "Daddy, I can't go to sleep at 6 o'clock."

Our children just didn't like to go to sleep, especially when it was daylight (which is when this Daddy often tried to put them to bed when left to his own devices).

I recall one night when my son (then six years old) had fears that seemed semi-genuine.

"Daddy, I can't go to sleep. I'm scared," he said.

I took the bait.

"Okay, what are you scared of?"

"Dinosaurs, Daddy," he said with a chill. "I'm scared a dinosaur is going to eat me."

I chuckled, then sat down on the edge of his bed.

"Son, there is no such thing as dinosaurs," I said reassur-



Len's Lines
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edly. "They're extinct."

"But Daddy, I'm not scared of their stink," he said. "I'm scared of them eating me. Didn't you hear me?"

Another chuckle.

"No, no, they are EXTINCT, meaning they are no longer around," I explained to a puzzled brow. "They all died hundreds of years ago. There are no more dinosaurs on earth."

This bit of inaccurate infor-

mation was met with silence.

Finally, he offered, "Who told you that?"

"Well, I read about it when I was in school."

"I think things have changed since then, cause I see them on TV all the time," he said.

"No, but, see, son, that isn't real," I replied. "Those dinosaurs on TV are pretend, like cartoons. It's fake."

He wasn't buying it. And I wasn't so sure either.

"How did they die then?"

"They became extinct

because they, well, they, didn't have any food to eat or anything to drink and they all died because of that," I mustered, trying to remember what I slept through in seventh-grade science.

"They couldn't find anything to drink?"

"Yeah, that's right," I said with a sudden spark of confidence.

"Why didn't they just drink water in lakes or puddles or have a Coke or something?"

"They didn't have Coke back then, son," I responded.

"Why didn't they go to the grocery store to get something to eat?"

"They didn't have grocery stores back then," I responded.

"Why didn't they go to the Dairy Queen?"

"They didn't have a Dairy Queen back then," I responded.

"Why didn't they eat dogs?"

"They didn't have dogs back then," I responded.

"They didn't have dogs?"

"No," I said sensing the end of the inquisition. "They didn't have dogs."

Apparently satisfied, he turned over, as if he was ready to go to sleep. I said, "Good night," stood up and started walking out of his bedroom.

"Daddy," I heard softly as I reached for the door.

"Yes," I said, standing in the doorway.

"Daddy, if the dinosaurs didn't have anything to eat or drink, why didn't you give them something to save them?"

"I didn't have time," I replied. "I was too busy inventing fire."

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Letters to the Editor are always welcome

The Donalsonville News reminds letter to the editor writers that shorter is better. Concise letters are not only better read, they are more likely to be published because limited space is available. Almost any point can be made in 350 words or fewer, so this is set as an upper level for length.

Unsigned letters, letters signed with a fictitious signature, copies of letters sent to public officials, or letters containing unverified or anonymous quotes will not be accepted.

We limit letters on a subject when we feel it has been thoroughly aired to the point of letters becoming repetitive. Also rejected are letters that are libelous, in bad taste, or are personal attacks on individuals or private businesses.

Writers must include addresses and telephone numbers. These are for identification purposes only, and will not be published.

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