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Brittany Scheier – Dealmaker, Stroke Survivor and ‘A Real Woman’



Allison Ruth Photography

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In the middle of the night on a Sunday three years ago, Brittany Scheier awoke “feeling incredibly nauseous.” Minutes later, she was lying on her bathroom floor unable to move the right side of her body, unable to stand and unable to see anything “other than a small pinprick” of light.

Only a week away from her 27th birthday and two months away from her lifelong dream of graduating from the University of Texas School of Law and becoming a lawyer, Scheier screamed out for help from her roommates.

Emergency room personnel initially falsely accused Scheier of drug use – only to learn five hours later from an MRI that she suffered a severe stroke. Three days later, she had a second, even more severe stroke.

Family members and even UT law school officials told Scheier to quit school and focus on her recovery.

“I simply refused to drop out,” she told *The Texas Lawbook* in an exclusive interview. “I was not

going to let the stroke and resulting disabilities stop me from going after my lifelong dream of becoming a lawyer.”

Despite extraordinary pain, a 30% loss of vision, memory problems and continued weakness on her right side, Scheier finished classes, passed her exams, received her law degree and aced the rigorous state bar exam.

Three years later, Scheier is an associate in the Houston office of Kirkland & Ellis, the world’s richest law firm. She has worked on more than two-dozen mergers and acquisitions, including five transactions with a deal value of more than \$1 billion. And last winter, she led her first M&A deal – Stan’s Home Services Holdings, an Austin-based portfolio company of Treaty Oak Equity, in its acquisition of New Mexico-headquartered Wagner Mechanical, a heating, plumbing and electrical services company.

Just last week, Scheier was one of the lawyers who represented Houston-based Noble Corp. in its acquisition last week of Pacific Drilling.

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Partners at Kirkland say Scheier is “an extraordinary legal talent” with an “unlimited future legal career.”

Last month, the American Heart Association announced that Scheier, who turned 30 three weeks ago, has been selected as one of its 2021 “Real Women,” a volunteer position that will allow the Kirkland corporate lawyer to share her harrowing medical experience and her extraordinary fight for recovery with young women across the U.S.

“The goal of the Real Woman campaign is to raise awareness of heart disease and stroke in women,” she said. “One in three women will lose their life to cardiovascular disease, but simple lifestyle changes can reduce a woman’s risk for heart disease and stroke by as much as 80%.”

“I hope to bring awareness to this through my stroke story. It’s not normal for a woman to have a stroke at 26,” she said. “I didn’t know a stroke was happening because I didn’t know the signs and symptoms. I thought a stroke only happened to people my grandparents age. If I had known, I could have been an advocate for myself in the hospital and maybe my stroke could have been diagnosed sooner. That delayed diagnosis cost me a lot. I may never have had any disabilities if they had diagnosed it sooner.”

Scheier was born and raised on a farm near Salem, South Dakota. Her dad is a fourth-generation farmer, growing corn and soybeans.

From an early age, Scheier knew she didn’t want to farm for a living, but she loved natural resources.

“I’ve wanted to be a lawyer for as long as I can remember,” she said. “In third grade, I actually dressed up as a lawyer for career day. Not sure exactly where the idea came from, but the older I became and the more I learned what a lawyer actually does, the more certain I was that I wanted to pursue law.”

Scheier went to the University of Wyoming, where she majored in both business administration and environment and natural resources. Then she was off to law school in Austin.

“At UT, I took every available class that focused on energy – particularly focusing on renewable energy classes,” she said. “Energy is essential to the way we live our lives and impacts every aspect of society. I was excited to study such a dynamic field, and now as a practicing attorney at Kirkland, I’ve had the privilege of working on transactions that are truly changing the energy landscape.”

Kirkland partners met Scheier through UT’s LawMeet program and the Texas Business Law Society. They quickly recognized her talent and fierce determination and hired her in September 2018.

“[Brittany] demonstrated superb drafting and negotiation skills as well as leadership potential – skills that she carried with her to Kirkland,” said Kirkland partner Anthony Speier in Houston. “She’s a hard worker, is resilient and pushes through challenging situations in both her professional and personal lives.

“Brittany stood out on-campus because of her bright and friendly personality, but once she arrived at Kirkland, Brittany’s hard work, tenacity and drive to succeed are the traits that distinguish her and drive her continued success,” Speier said.

In less than two-and-a-half years, she was on the Kirkland legal teams that represented WPX Energy in its \$12 billion merger with Devon Energy, Parsley Energy in its \$2.27 billion acquisition of Jagged Peak Energy and private equity firm KKR in its \$900 million partnership with NextEra Energy Partners.

What is Scheier’s favorite part of dealmaking?

“The signing,” she said. “It’s a rush and challenge to put together all the pieces of a deal to take it through to signing. Each deal is different in structuring, complexity, size and bargaining power of the parties. I enjoy working with all of the outside parties and internal teams to put the puzzle pieces of a deal together. I feel such a sense of accomplishment in resolving the issues and getting the deal done.”

Scheier became involved with the American Heart Association when she moved to Houston in 2018. She is a leader for the AHA’s Young at Heart program.

In February, the AHA selected Scheier to be one of 20 national spokeswomen to speak with women’s groups across the country about their heart or stroke journeys.

Scheier’s story of what happened to her starting March 4 is a lesson that is a cautionary tale for young women.

“I was carried into the ER around 3 a.m. that morning with what I found out later were classic stroke symptoms (nausea, right sided weakness, headache etc.), but because of my age, the doctors and nurses thought I was on drugs,” she said. “I had a nurse or doctor come into my room every half hour or so asking me what drugs I had taken the night before, even though my roommates and I kept telling them that we were just out at the wineries and do not

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do drugs.”

A neurologist ordered a CT scan and MRI five hours after she arrived at the hospital and the diagnosis of a stroke was made.

“Typically, strokes are diagnosed within an hour of someone arriving at the hospital,” she said. “Terrified and helpless eventually did turn into angry the longer I laid in a bed in the emergency room.”

Hospital officials were about to send Scheier home after three days when she started to develop a massive headache, her eyesight diminished and she developed memory problems.

“My mom pushed for an MRI before being discharged because of my worsening condition, and turns out I was having a second stroke – five times larger than the stroke I had two days prior,” she said. “I was transferred to the ICU. The doctors prepared my parents that I might not make it through the night. Thankfully, the bleeding in my brain eventually stopped, and after four more days in the ICU, I was able to be discharged.”

After conducting round after round of tests, doctors diagnosed Scheier with a rare pain syndrome that can occur at any time after a stroke – thalamic pain syndrome, which was treated through medications.

Three weeks after suffering the stroke, Scheier tried to return to classes.

“The following several weeks of classes were a blur,” she admitted. “I was balancing school with my recovery and adjustment to my disabilities. In between classes, I had to focus on my stroke recovery with several hours a day of physical, vision, occupational and speech therapy.”

Scheier said that UT law school officials “provided an incredible support system and resources” that helped her make it to graduation.

As a Real Woman, Scheier will share her story with the goal of reaching as many people as possible to raise awareness and help women take charge of their own health.

“The biggest advice I have is to not let your health slip away while working in big law,” she said. “Trust me, I know how hard it is to balance working 80-plus hours a week with eating healthy – or even remembering to eat – and getting physical activity. Eighty percent of cardiac events is preventable.

“I would do everything in my power to not go through the struggle and challenges that I went through with my stroke.”