

THOUGHTS THAT STICK

LAW, LIFE & EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

THIS MONTH

NEWSLETTER

Insights from the courtroom to the coastline

“You Keep Using That Word.”

If you have seen *The Princess Bride* even once, you already hear it in Inigo Montoya's voice. Vizzini keeps saying “inconceivable” every time something goes wrong, and Inigo finally calls him on it. The word has lost all meaning because it was never being used correctly in the first place.

That scene is funny because it is so recognizable. We all know someone who latches onto a word or phrase and uses it constantly, whether or not it fits. In meetings, in emails, in arguments... the word becomes a reflex instead of a choice, and eventually nobody is sure what the person actually means anymore.

Language does that when we stop paying attention. Words that used to carry weight get stretched thin from overuse. “Literally” now means its own opposite. “Toxic” applies to everything from a bad relationship to that coworker who microwaves fish.

“Gaslighting” went from a very specific psychological term to something people say when someone disagrees with them.



It works the other way too. Sometimes the right word at the right time cuts through everything. A well-placed sentence in a letter can change a negotiation with a prosecutor. A single phrase from a friend can reframe how you see a situation you have been stuck on for weeks. Words are tools, and like any tool, they work better when you use them with some precision.

P.S. “Stop trying to make ‘fetch’ a thing!” (if you know you know)

AS SEEN ON ABC?

I recently appeared on ABC national news to discuss a federal ruling out of New York that is raising serious questions about AI and attorney-client privilege. A federal judge ruled that conversations with AI chatbots are discoverable evidence in certain contexts, meaning anything someone types into the free version of a tool like ChatGPT can potentially be used against them in court. The ruling makes clear that talking to an LLM is very different from talking to a lawyer, even if it feels similar. You can find the segment on our social media pages soon if it's not already there!



The St. Petersburg Bar Association is running a 30-day group Alcohol Experiment starting March 26, with weekly book discussions every Thursday in April. Participants read Annie Grace's *The Alcohol Experiment* and meet to discuss the physiological and emotional side of drinking culture.

Register at www.stpetebar.com.



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The Patron Saint of Second Chapters

Most people know two things about Saint Patrick. He drove the snakes out of Ireland, and his holiday is a great excuse to drink green beer. Both are wrong, or at least incomplete.

Saint Patrick was born in Roman Britain, kidnapped as a teenager by Irish raiders, and forced into slavery for six years. He worked as a shepherd in brutal conditions, isolated from everything he knew. When he finally escaped and made it home, he could have stayed. Nobody would have blamed him.

Instead, he went back. He returned to the country that enslaved him to serve it. He spent decades building churches, educating communities, and advocating against the slave trade at a time when almost nobody in the Western world was doing that. He wrote one of the earliest known personal declarations against slavery, a letter from a man who had lived it and refused to stay quiet.

That part of the story rarely makes it onto a bar napkin.

What interests me most is the choice to return. Saint Patrick had every reason to write off Ireland entirely. He had been victimized there. The easy narrative would have been to define himself by what happened to him and move on. But he rejected that framing. He decided his story was bigger than his worst chapter.

That idea shows up in my work constantly...



Criminal defense clients almost always arrive at the worst point in their lives, dealing with a DUI arrest, a felony charge, and/or a mugshot that now lives on the internet forever. The criminal “justice” system is built to define people by a single event, and it does that efficiently. Charging documents, police reports, and news coverage all compress a human being into one bad night or instantaneous decision.

Defense work pushes against that compression. It insists on context. It asks whether the story being told is the whole story, or just the version that is easiest to prosecute and get a conviction. Saint Patrick's life is proof that the chapter you are in does not have to be the chapter that defines you. But that only works if someone is willing to fight for the fuller version.

There is also something worth noting about how Patrick built his legacy. He kept showing up, doing the work, and letting the results accumulate.

Most of what we know about him comes from two short documents he wrote himself. He had consistency and conviction over a long enough timeline that the work eventually spoke for itself. That is a model I think about when I think about what I want this firm to become.



Happy St. Patrick's Day

Now that St. Patrick's Day has come and gone, and the green beer and parade crowds have cleared out, it is worth remembering the actual man behind the holiday. A former slave who chose purpose over bitterness, a builder who let the work define the story, and someone who proved that where you start does not have to dictate where you end up.

That is a legacy worth raising a glass to. Sláinte!

The Last Cold Snap

By the time this lands in your mailbox, winter in Florida will be mostly a memory. And I use the word “winter” loosely, because what passes for cold here would barely register in most of the country (don’t hate me haha). But there were a few mornings this season where the air had some bite to it, the kind where you grab your only sweater and think about coffee before you think about anything else. For a guy who grew up in Michigan, those mornings are somewhat nostalgic.

I grew up where winter actually meant something. Snow days, warming up the car, that particular sound boots make on packed snow/ice. One of my favorite memories is from a snow day as a kid, the whole neighborhood outside, everyone free for the day, just chaos and snowballs and someone’s dad trying to build an igloo that collapsed twice. There was a simplicity to it that I think about sometimes when life gets loud. Nobody was checking a phone. Nobody had anywhere to be. The entire world shrank down to your block, and that was more than enough.

Ann Arbor winters later added their own chapter. Walking to class at the University of Michigan in January builds a tolerance for discomfort that never fully leaves you. There is something about trudging across campus in negative wind chill that rewires how you think about hard things. You learn to put your head down and keep moving,

because standing still in that kind of cold is worse than whatever is waiting at the other end of the walk. I remember entire months where the sky was gray from morning to night, and you just accepted it as the cost of being where you wanted to be.

The cold taught me something I did not fully appreciate until later. Discomfort sharpens you. When you are freezing, you stop overthinking and start problem-solving. You figure out how to layer, how to keep moving, how to get where you need to go even when the conditions are working against you. That mindset translates more directly into legal work than people might expect.

Cases have seasons too. There are stretches where everything feels stuck, where the discovery is slow, the court calendar keeps pushing, and nothing seems to move. Those are the cold snaps. The temptation is to coast through them, wait for things to warm up on their own. But the work that gets done during those stretches, the depositions, the motion practice, the long nights reviewing records, is usually what determines how the case looks when it reaches a courtroom. The cases that look effortless at trial almost always trace back to months of unglamorous preparation that happened while things felt frozen.

On the other hand, Spring is different. Things start moving faster.

Courtrooms pick up. Clients feel more optimistic. There is an energy shift that is hard to explain but easy to feel. After a few quiet months of preparation, the results start showing up in ways that matter. Motions get ruled on. Depositions produce the answers you were looking for. Cases that felt stuck suddenly have momentum, and you realize the groundwork you laid during the slow stretch is the reason things are breaking your way now.

I have always liked the transition more than either season on its own. Winter forces you to be deliberate. Spring rewards it. The people who used the slow stretch wisely are the ones who look prepared when things speed up. That is true for cases, for businesses, and for most things worth building. Momentum rarely appears out of nowhere. It compounds from effort that nobody saw while it was happening.

There is also something worth saying about why I ended up in Florida in the first place. After enough Michigan winters, you start to wonder whether sunshine might be a better operating environment. Turns out it is. But I do not think I would appreciate St. Petersburg the way I do without those years of gray skies and frozen everything. You need the contrast. The warmth means more when you remember what it felt like to go without it.



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**A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER TO
INFORM AND ENTERTAIN**

The Game's Afoot

There's a reason Sherlock Holmes endures. It has nothing to do with the deerstalker hat or the pipe. Holmes is compelling because he pays attention when everyone else has already made up their mind. He walks into a room full of people who think the answer is obvious, notices what they missed, and pulls the thread until the whole thing unravels.

That feeling, the moment a case cracks open because you caught something nobody else was looking for, is addictive. It doesn't happen every day, but when it does, it reminds you why you got into this work in the first place.

I had one recently where everything the prosecution built depended on a single assumption that nobody had bothered to investigate...

Once we did, the whole case kind of fell apart and our client was vindicated.



Sherlock Holmes would appreciate our approach I think. He never relied on being the loudest person in the room. He just outworked everyone and didn't always accept everyone else's assumptions, and then let the evidence do the talking.

The best part of practicing law is that the puzzle never runs out. Every case has something buried in it that matters, and finding it before anyone else does is the closest thing to a superpower this profession offers.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival (March 27 - April 12)

The festival returns to Clearwater Beach with a 24,000-square-foot sand sculpture museum featuring the theme "United in Sand: Celebrating Sports & Spirit." Eighteen professional sand sculptors from around the world, free sand sculpting classes, beach concerts, fireworks, and food vendors.