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A Year of Change and Growth

MY GRATITUDE-FILLED REFLECTION ON 2023

The holiday season always inspires me to reflect on the many reasons I have to be grateful. This year has been filled with significant moments, challenges overcome, and reasons to be thankful. For a start, Jenny and I celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary in August! Our three sons, each with unique personalities and aspirations, continue to bring joy and fulfillment to our lives.

This year brought about a major change to our law practice — I moved our primary office from Manhattan to Staten Island. After more than 20 years in Manhattan, the decision to relocate was driven by a desire to be closer to home and to contribute more directly to the community that has given us so much over the years. Staten Island is not just a new office location; it's a commitment to serving the local community and has allowed us to forge stronger connections with our clients and neighbors. It's a decision I am truly grateful for as we head into this holiday season.

On a more personal note, I helped my dad complete a major accomplishment this year. My father had an idea to write a book about his life for decades and began the project 20 years ago. As

with so many things, it fell by the wayside. With my encouragement and assistance, the book is now complete and getting ready to print. My dad is thrilled to finally finish this project, and I'm happy I could help him achieve something meaningful.

This shows it's never too late to meet your goals or revisit and reignite one of your passions or projects that may have been left behind. If there's something you want, you should go for it. Instead of focusing on past setbacks or opportunities lost, I find it helps to look to the future and what you can still accomplish going forward.

I'm still on my journey to lose 30 pounds and roughly halfway there as I write this article. The SMART goal framework I outlined in my previous newsletter has proven helpful to my progress. I've stayed on the right track by having a specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound quest in mind.

Of course, keeping the weight off will be at least as challenging as losing it in the first place. I'm doing my best to be intentional about my eating and exercise because I don't want to set the same goal a year from now. I'm working out the details for when the time comes.

I'm also setting new goals as I look forward to the new year. Specifically, I've recently hired a new client relations representative who is helping ensure our clients receive consistent communications throughout every stage of their case. We have also invested in our systems and processes and are implementing new software to allow our clients to check their case status online.

Communication is crucial because my clients allow me to go to work and do something I love every day. I'm most grateful for my clients, and I never want them to feel like I'm taking them for granted. Thank you all for your support throughout 2023, and I wish you all a joyous holiday season and the best of luck in accomplishing what you set out to do in 2024.

-Brian O'Connor



Outsmart Car Thieves:

KEEP YOUR VEHICLE SAFE AND SECURE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is a time of joy, celebration, and giving, but unfortunately, it's also a time for car thefts and break-ins. In fact, according to the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), New Year's Eve and New Year's Day have the highest reports of vehicle theft. During the holiday season, thieves know that vehicles may be packed with valuable gifts and see your car as an opportunity to get rich. To keep your car and belongings safe this season, here are nine precautions you can take.

Park wisely.

Choosing where and how you park your car can make a significant difference in its safety. Dim and isolated areas are more inviting to thieves, so when possible, opt for well-lit and busy areas to increase the chances of bystanders spotting a potential burglar. When parking in a lot or garage, consider proximity to your destination as well as security cameras and personnel.

Lock it up.

It may sound obvious, but many car thefts occur because owners forget to lock their vehicles. Always double-check that your car is securely locked, and don't rely solely on remote key fobs. Criminals can use technology to intercept these signals — instead, use traditional key locks if your car has them.



Be smart with the spare key.

According to the NICB, 69,351 vehicle thefts took place in the U.S. in 2016 because drivers left their spare keys or fob in the car. Leaving your keys in your car just makes vehicle theft easier, so keep your spares safe at home or in your pocket.

Hide valuables.

Thieves are more likely to target a vehicle if they can see something of value inside. Before leaving your car, stow away shopping bags, electronics, purses, and other tempting items in the trunk or out of sight. Even loose change or charging cables can attract unwanted attention.

Use your garage.

A locked garage provides an added layer of security for your vehicle. Ensure the garage doors are in good working order and equipped with strong locks.

Get to know your car's security features.

Modern vehicles have lots of security features, such as secondary car alarms, kill switches, and tracking systems, so learn how to activate them. Before leaving your car unattended, ensure your car's security system is active and all doors and windows are properly secured.

Invest in a steering wheel lock.

Steering wheel locks, also known as "club" locks, are classic anti-theft tools. They make it much more challenging for criminals to drive away with your vehicle by not allowing your steering wheel to be turned. While that may seem old-fashioned, they still get the job done!

Be alert after parking.

In parking lots and garages, when walking away from your vehicle, scan the area for anyone loitering. Criminals tend to be on the lookout for individuals who are not paying attention to their surroundings. If you notice anything that doesn't look or feel right, move your vehicle to a safer location.

Don't leave your car running unattended.

During winter months, it's tempting to warm up your car while you wait inside. However, leaving your vehicle running on its own is an open invitation to thieves. Always stay with your car when it's running or invest in a remote starter that allows you to start your car without a key.

Keep in mind that prevention is essential for a worry-free and secure holiday season! Don't become another statistic — protect your vehicle from criminals and ward off theft by keeping these simple tips in mind.

TAKE A *BREAK*



SMART STRATEGIES FOR A KID-FRIENDLY NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

Make It to the Countdown Without a Meltdown

Holiday celebrations are some of the most exciting moments for kids, be it trick-or-treating or tearing open Christmas presents. But properly celebrating New Year's Eve may be a struggle for the little ones. If you've let your kids try to stay up until midnight in previous years, you may have experienced sleepiness, tantrums, and cranky mornings the next day, which isn't the best way to start the new year.

Well, this time around, you can be better prepared! Thanks to countless clever parents sharing their tips and tricks, we've compiled the most genius hacks that will make this New Year's Eve not just kid-friendly but actually fun!

A little secret won't hurt 'em.

Have you tried a faux countdown? You can save yourself the headache entirely by implementing a little white lie. Changing all the clocks forward isn't exactly new, but now, with the help of streaming services and YouTube, you can make a bulletproof fake countdown.

At your preferred bedtime, play last year's New Year's Eve countdown on the TV. Amp up the celebrations with a rowdy countdown, cheering, and glasses of sparkling apple cider! Then, bring the festivities to an end and get your kids ready for bed. It's as easy as that!

If they do stay up, make it fun!

Of course, if you would rather stay up with your children, feel bad lying, or don't think you could pull the wool over their eyes, then here are some creative ways to keep them entertained until midnight without a meltdown.

- Number colorful balloons and let your children pop one every 30 minutes or hour. You can even fill the final balloon with confetti to celebrate New Year's Day!
- Have everyone dress up fancy to make your at-home party feel more like a New York celebration.
- Create a bucket list together for everything you want to do in 2024.
- Get outside and play with sparklers!
- Every hour, turn off the lights, play a song, and crack some glow sticks for a dance party!
- Make fun and easy party appetizers together.
- Look through old photos and videos of the past year together.



When you plan ahead, you can ensure your kids have enough activities to make it to midnight without any hassle. Of course, the fake countdown is always an option, too!

SKILLET CHICKEN POT PIE

Inspired by [TheModernProper.com](https://www.themodernproper.com)

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup sliced celery
- 2 cups sliced carrots
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 1/2 tsp celery seed
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 cup milk
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 2 cups peas
- 4 cups cooked chicken
- 1 package frozen puff pastry, thawed
- 1 egg

Directions

1. Heat oven to 425 F.
2. In 12-inch cast-iron skillet over medium heat, melt butter, then add onion, celery, and carrots. Sauté for 5 minutes.
3. Add flour, salt, pepper, celery seed, and garlic powder to pan and stir. Sauté for 2 minutes. Slowly incorporate milk.
4. Add stock and bring to a simmer, whisking until mixture thickens. Add peas and chicken.
5. Roll out pastry sheet into 16-inch square on floured surface. Cut into 3-inch squares and place overlapping onto chicken mixture.
6. In a small bowl, whisk egg with 1 tbsp water. Brush egg over pastry and place in oven for 25 minutes or until golden and bubbling.





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'The Blind Side' Controversy

THE TUOHY FAMILY VS. MICHAEL OHER: A Legal Showdown

The story of how Michael Oher went from a young homeless boy to an NFL star captured the hearts of many and inspired the critically acclaimed 2009 film "The Blind Side." However, behind the heartwarming tale lies a complex legal battle between Michael Oher and the Tuohy family, who adopted him during his teenage years.

Oher alleges that Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy misled him into accepting a conservatorship instead of adoption and that he never received fair compensation for his portrayal in the movie. In his petition filed in a Tennessee court, Oher seeks to end the Tuohy family's conservatorship over him and requests a full accounting of any funds he should have received. In response to the petition, the Tuohys expressed their heartbreak over the situation while accusing Oher of demanding \$15 million and threatening negative press coverage if they didn't comply.



Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy claim they have always been upfront with Oher about the conservatorship and that they have split all profits from "The Blind Side" equally with Oher. Still, the heart of Oher's lawsuit lies

in the claim that they led him to believe he was signing adoption papers when, in reality, they were for a conservatorship. This legal arrangement gave the Tuohys significant control over Oher's life, his story, and the substantial financial gains resulting from it. Oher asserts he did not receive what he was rightfully owed.

Oher's lawsuit is not only about financial matters but also the emotional stress that came with recently learning he was not legally a member of the Tuohy family, which he had believed for years. Furthermore, the case brings into question the safeguards for young individuals who may enter into legal agreements without a complete understanding of their implications. Seeing how this blockbuster lawsuit shakes out in the coming months and what the verdict means for other young people in similar situations will be interesting.

