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# THE VERDICT THAT MATTERED MOST

*That One Decision Taught Me About Building a Life That Matters*

As November arrives and Thanksgiving draws near, many of us pause to reflect on what we're thankful for: family, health, home, and the moments that make up our everyday lives. This season always reminds me that the most meaningful turning points in life often come from quiet, difficult choices, the kind that shape not just our careers, but the lives we build.

For me, one of those choices came nearly 20 years ago, standing in a courthouse hallway. I was in the early years of my career, handling big cases, taking verdicts, and living what I thought was the dream. But my wife and I wanted a family, and I didn't want to be the dad who was never home.

That morning, I had just taken a verdict in one case when my boss called with my next assignment:

*"Get to Queens. You're picking another jury this afternoon."*

It was a case I had never worked on. I loved the courtroom, but I was rarely outside it. Evenings blurred into weekends, vacations disappeared into trial prep, and sleeping was a luxury.

That day, I asked myself a question that changed everything:

*"Is this what success looks like?"*

That night, I made my decision. I gave notice and walked away.

On my first Monday morning, I put on my suit, grabbed an empty briefcase, and walked into Brooklyn Supreme Court. I went from courtroom to courtroom, pretending I had cases, just to look like I belonged. I shook hands, said hello to familiar faces, and told everyone, "I'm on my own now. If you need a trial lawyer, I'm available."

There were no clients. No road map. Just belief.

The early months were lean, and there were moments when I wondered whether I had made a huge mistake. But my *why*, the hope of having a family and building a life I could actually live, kept me going.

We became parents for the first time at 39, then again at 41 and 42. Each one felt like a miracle. I often think of that exhausted young lawyer and how close he came to missing the life he was working so hard to build.



Over time, I've learned that success isn't about income, awards, or titles. It's about alignment, when your work and your life reflect what you value most. Freedom doesn't come from walking away; it comes from choosing intentionally, every day, what to hold onto and what to let go of.

So, this Thanksgiving, I encourage you to take a moment to reflect on your own *why*.

- Are you living by your values, or by your obligations?
- Are there parts of your life that no longer fit who you've become?

It's not always about dramatic change. Sometimes, it's pausing long enough to notice where your energy goes and asking whether it's going where you truly want it to.

The years move fast. We can't recover lost time, but we can realign, starting today, with what matters most.

When I look back now, I realize the verdict I'm proudest of isn't in any courtroom. It's the one that allowed me to be home, watch my kids grow up, and build a life centered on what truly matters.

This Thanksgiving, I hope you find a moment of quiet gratitude for how far you've come, for the choices that shaped you, and for the people who make it all worthwhile.

Wishing you and your loved ones a joyful and meaningful Thanksgiving.

*-Brian O'Connor*



# Before Smartphones, There Was Water

## GETTING OUT OF BED LONG BEFORE THE SNOOZE BUTTON

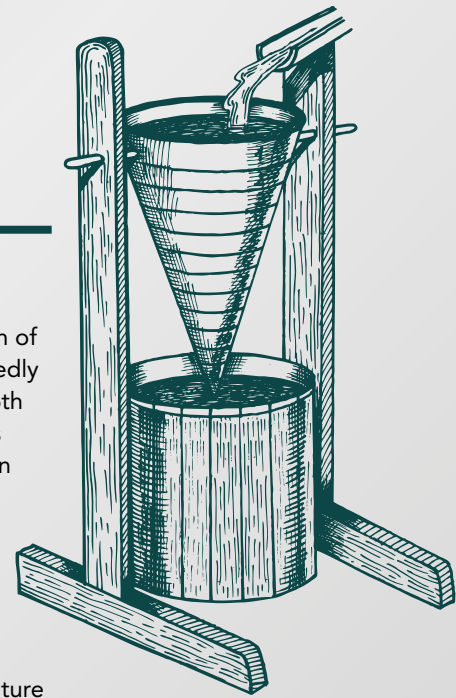
Members of Generation Z may find it difficult to believe that people used plug-in alarm clocks to help them get up on time in the morning. However, that seemingly archaic means of timekeeping has nothing on how people managed wake-up time before cellphones and even electricity, as we use it today, became staples of daily life.

In the 4th century BCE, the Greek philosopher Plato created a method to ensure students at his academy, which once counted Aristotle among its pupils, woke up at the correct time each day. To perfect a foolproof system, he turned to a surprising tool: water. He constructed a set of clocks that operated using two basins. One basin would slowly empty into the other throughout the night; when the second basin was full, rattling pebbles or whistling air awakened students from their slumber. Known as *klepsydra* (or “water thief”) clocks, these timekeepers were astonishingly accurate.

About a century later, Greek inventor Ctesibius of Alexandria expanded on Plato’s design by incorporating mechanics that produced sounds not unlike those of the more modern cuckoo clock. Ctesibius’s version remained popular until the pendulum clock emerged in the 1650s.

Although Plato often gets credit for creating aquatic-based alarms, some variation of the *klepsydra* concept allegedly dates back to at least the 16th century BCE. Archaeologists uncovered a tomb inscription detailing how an Egyptian court official of the era devised a similar system. Regardless of its definitive inventor, the water clock roused people long before phone apps, proving that nature often provides solutions to problems centuries before human technology catches up.

While the water clock was undoubtedly an imaginative masterpiece, it is still reasonable to argue that the “*snooze*” button remains the most critical time-related creation known to man.



# ICE CREAM IN YOUR POCKET?

## YOU CAN'T EVEN MAKE UP THESE STRANGE FOOD RULES

When it comes to state laws about food, specific provisions on the books from past years may leave a funny taste in your mouth, and potentially get you in a heap of trouble if you break them. This fact is especially true in parts of the South, where your lunch order may need to come with a side of legal advice.

### Cones and Captured Horses

If you want to stay on the good side of law enforcement in Alabama, always remember that ice cream cones are for licking, not sticking in your back pocket. While it’s pretty safe to assume the thought of engaging in the latter activity hasn’t crossed a single mind in 2025, there was a time when horse thieves would stick ice cream in their pockets to attract equine abductees. Considering that we rarely share the highway with horses these days and most people would prefer not to turn the seat of their pants into a sundae, it’s a safe bet this charge won’t fill up courtrooms for the foreseeable future.



### Finger-Licking Fun ... or Else!

On the subject of making a mess with food items, eating chicken with your hands can be a sticky thrill, and is the *only* way to partake in poultry eating without running *a-fowl* of the law in Gainesville, Georgia. If you want to enjoy tasty chicken in that city, stock up on wet wipes and skip the knife and fork, as eating it with utensils is a crime. Although the ordinance banning knives and forks when consuming chicken was meant as a joke by the local police department, chucking the rule may draw some disapproving clucks when dining in the place affectionately known by locals and city officials as “the Poultry Capital of the World,” especially during its renowned Spring Chicken Festival. Perhaps only a good lawyer can help determine whether the law also applies to vegan “chik’n” options.



# TAKE A *BREAK*



## SLOW COOKER BRISKET

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 (1-oz) envelope onion soup mix
- 1 lb carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 lb baby golden potatoes
- 1 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 3 celery stalks, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 large sweet onion, cut into 8 wedges
- 1 3-lb piece of beef brisket (flat cut)
- 2 1/2 cups beef stock
- 8 fresh thyme sprigs
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 8 whole garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp cornstarch
- 2 bay leaves

### DIRECTIONS

1. In a small bowl, combine soup mix, sugar, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle over brisket.
2. Place meat, fat cap side down, into an 8-qt slow cooker.
3. Top brisket with thyme, garlic, bay leaves, carrots, potatoes, celery, and onion.
4. Whisk stock, Worcestershire sauce, and cornstarch until fully dissolved. Add to slow cooker.
5. Cover and cook on high for 5–6 hours until tender.
6. Remove to a cutting board, fat side up. Remove thyme and bay leaves.
7. Thinly slice brisket against the grain.
8. Serve with vegetables, drizzled with gravy from the slow cooker.

Inspired by [ThePioneerWoman.com](http://ThePioneerWoman.com)

## DIVIDING HOMES, NOT HEARTS

### Co-Parent Like a Pro After Separation

Divorce or separation is often stressful, but it should never be used to draw battle lines for your children.

Dissolving a marriage or partnership can be as logistically challenging as it is emotionally draining, especially when developing a positive and effective co-parenting situation. Here are a few suggestions for creating and sustaining clear communication and responsibilities when you and your former spouse/partner no longer live or parent under the same roof.

#### The Key Steps Toward Stability

First and foremost, all co-parenting arrangements need a consistent plan for success. A written co-parenting plan should include the custody agreement, travel and/or relocation considerations, financial responsibilities for both parties, schedules (e.g., school pick-up/drop-off times and who is responsible for fulfilling these commitments), and details regarding the child's education and health care needs. A document of this nature helps solidify both parties' involvement and holds each accountable for what they've agreed to do on the child's behalf. Additionally, it helps prevent disagreements or misunderstandings that could lead to arguing in front of the child/children, a scenario to avoid as much as possible.

While a divorce may present logistical obstacles for one or both parents, it is critical to work toward maintaining the child's existing friendships and activities, even if they require spending more time with one spouse over the other. For example, if your child's best friend lives closer to your ex-spouse, accommodating the continuation of this close relationship will help your child maintain a sense of normalcy.

#### The Risks of Reticent Relationships

When the end of a marriage or relationship results in a breakdown in communication or cooperation, these fractured ties can have a potentially devastating impact on your child. Common effects of unhealthy co-parenting on children include reduced performance at school, lowered self-esteem, and difficulties in maintaining healthy relationships with others.

If communication has devolved into acrimony or has resulted in either side failing to fulfill their parental duties, seeking counseling from a trained professional is one way to help steer the ship in the best possible direction for your child's health and peace of mind.



# INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1** The Verdict That Mattered Most
- 2** What Snooze Button? The Ingenious Ways People Used to Wake Up  
Who Knew Eating Could Get You in Legal Trouble?
- 3** Slow Cooker Brisket  
Divorce Isn't Easy, but Co-Parenting Can Be
- 4** The Chocolate Event That Had Kids Crying, Not Smiling

## Willy's Ruined Chocolate Experience WHEN AI MARKETING GOES HORRIBLY WRONG



Never fail to deliver on a promise of chocolate to children.

House of Illuminati, a London-based event company, learned this lesson the hard way when it hosted what angry parents and disappointed kids in Glasgow considered one of the biggest scams in children's entertainment history. The disastrous day went from offering scant amounts of lemonade and jellybeans to prompting cries of terror and calls to Scottish police, and artificial intelligence was at least partially to blame.

In early 2024, social media feeds in the U.K. were abuzz with vibrant images promoting "Willy's Chocolate Experience," an immersive event boasting chocolate fountains, costumed characters, and "a day of pure imagination and wonder." Naturally, people assumed the event was a tie-in with the then-recently released film "Wonka" and a nod to the imaginary world created by the classic 1971 movie "Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory."

Unfortunately, what attendees experienced when "Willy's Chocolate Experience" arrived that February was far from a fairy tale. Instead of rivers of sweets, they were treated to half-filled cups of lemonade and

(in some instances) a single jellybean served in what appeared to be an abandoned warehouse. The scenery was cheap, while the actors struggled to perform through hastily provided scripts. One character, The Unknown, was a masked and frighteningly attired figure that prompted youngsters to recoil and cry in fear. Perhaps most disturbingly, there was *no chocolate* to be found.

Naturally, people called the police amid demands for refunds, and the lackluster affair was shut down. Subsequent revelations that creators used AI to generate the online marketing images and that the \$44 event was not an officially sanctioned "Wonka" undertaking also brought into question House of Illuminati owner Billy Coull's background, including his history of publishing AI-generated books on conspiracy theories and taboo subjects.

Although Coull's fraudulent and exploitative marketing scheme was reprehensible, it's far from his worst transgression. Around the time House of Illuminati was shuttered in late 2024, he was forced to register as a sex offender after it was revealed he had followed up his "Willy's Chocolate Experience" fiasco by sending unwanted explicit messages and images to an unidentified woman.