

Never Will I Be Atticus Finch.

Alan Nelson
Nelson Law Firm, PC

Never say never, you hear all your life and forever.

But I dare to say what they say never do. I say Never. Never will I be Atticus Finch. Never will I be Mark Lanier or Frank Branson or the late John O'Quinn.

Never will I be a charismatic teller of stories to juries like Jim Perdue, senior or junior. But I can blurt out opening statements, questions and closings, awkward or uncomfortable they may be.

Never will I be number one in my law school class. But I graduated.

Never will I be number one on the State Bar exam. Or number two. But I passed.

Never will I own a law tower with a special justice flag on the penthouse, however much I want one. I'll just have an office down a hallway somewhere.

Never will I see my own private jet with my own private pilot. I will continue to scrounge my mileage points.

Never will I see attorneys scurry to carry my brief case and sit around me as decorations. I will see a client observe me at an office supply store, and act surprised I'd buy my own briefcase.

Never will I be immune to the whims and storms of the economy. I will continue to try to surf out this tempest as best as I can.

These statements deal with self-esteem and self-image, which I thought I never cared about. But putting these statements down with a bit of self-indulgent fierce pride seems defensive. Perhaps my ego is at issue.

Once I heard a lawyer who had made millions state to another lawyer who made millions: "I asseverate that everyone else is just a meatball, a stack of meatballs covered with sauce."

It was disturbing to hear that I was a meatball in a stack of sauce-covered meatballs, and even more disturbing to hear the word asseverate spoken out loud. I don't mind confessing I looked up the word at the time because I didn't know what it meant. I had a vague idea that to asseverate meant you transform your inferior into an ass, dumb enough to be dumped on a pile of spaghetti. While it is a transitive verb, it means to assert vigorously. I like my speculative definition better.

But that is an aside, to delay the impact of the fact that you're just one of the herd. If you're normal, you suppress the truth from yourself as long as possible. But when that thought emerges, it hits with an emotion like losing a finger. You can't believe that you are not the best and most talented. You feel the past years' labors harden and grow cold around you like fossilized amber around an ancient insect.

To cope, you fill your immediate attention with irrelevant memories. You find yourself saying trite maxims. You ponder some inane mystery, ignoring the force of time passing you by. You seek comfort in drink or drugs or dragons, then swear, wail and run at your job with a pace impossible to sustain. You seek to avoid being T.S. Eliot's attendant lord, an easy tool.

But as you see your life measured by discovery deadlines and depositions, the truth emerges: being a lawyer is a way of life, a sometimes grim social statement in a sometimes grim reality. You can't hang up the tool bag, take a shower and watch a game because you've finished your work for the day. But you're distracted by the knowledge you're not memorable, a cause célèbre, a prototype of the academy. Part of you wants to stop this slide down the gravity rainbow, but another part knows it will never, never stop, and continue long after you die. You know you'll never be Atticus Finch.

I asseverate I'm OK with that.