Two Decades in Defense – Why I Chose the Plaintiff's Path

BY RENEE FINCH, ESQ.

In December 2020, a woman sat across from me, somber and unable to meet my gaze. Just a year earlier, she had been an executive, a high-powered woman in a C-suite office. Now she was quiet, timid, and broken. Until that moment, I had spent every minute of my professional and legal career defending against cases like hers.

For 20 years, I worked with insurance companies, both as an employee and as retained counsel. Those years were spent evaluating claims, minimizing exposure, and dissecting cases to strip away the humanity of pain and suffering. I knew the playbook, the pressure points, and the strategies designed to limit injury recovery. But over time, something in me shifted. The insight that once helped me defend cases began to reveal where the system falls short for the truly injured seeking justice. This isn't just a story about changing roles; it is about changing perspective. After two decades in defense, I chose the plaintiff's path. I left behind something I had dedicated my life to building, only to start over with the goal of using everything I learned in defense to fight for the people on the other side of those claims. What follows is what that crossing taught me about both sides of the aisle and about the system we share.

I received a referral from a friend about a plaintiff's case. I saw something in the client, Danielle, which mirrored me. She came to me broken after an accident that had nearly taken her hand. In a moment, she had lost her independence, her livelihood, and her sense of self. A once-successful, independent woman sat before me, a shadow of her former self. I knew the case would be challenging, and we might lose. That didn't deter me, however. In that first meeting, I felt a shift in my perspective. Danielle needed help, and I was determined not to let her down. For the next four long years, we battled at every turn. A large corporate defense firm was hired to file motion after motion, delaying justice. I was fortunate to meet Nick Rowley through Trial Lawyers for Justice; working alongside him brought a new perspective to the practice of law. He taught me to see the story within the evidence and to humanize cases. In the end, we secured a settlement—one that would change Danielle's and my life forever.

Delivering that settlement turned my view of the law on its head. The weight of what we had accomplished together was overwhelming. For the first time in my career, I felt I made a true difference that brought peace into a once dark and despondent place. At that moment, I resolved to start over, to walk away from the world of defense and start anew in a space where I could help. I founded Summit Trial Attorneys in April 2025 and have never looked back.

A sentiment, however, that I do not share with some of my fellow plaintiff attorneys is the idea that defense attorneys are evil or soulless. In my time as a defense lawyer, I was called many derogatory things by "the other side" (soul sucker, dream killer, heartless, etc.).

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Truly, I never felt that to define me as a person. For many years, I worked on suspected fraud cases. My litigation world was small—filled with low-speed accidents, suspected capping, staged losses, and overtreatment. It was in that space that I understood the real purpose of my former position. Fraud hurts all of us. Those matters have no place in what we do, defense or plaintiff alike. It is easy to feel that personal injury cases are meritless when all the matters on your desk fit into that category.

Defense work serves a necessary and true purpose. It is the mechanism that tests claims and guards against unnecessary excess, ensuring that our system remains sustainable and balanced. Crossing over to the other side has highlighted for me the lack of understanding among us all. We all serve a purpose in the world of civil litigation, and I hope, perhaps in a small way, to level that understanding. It is not necessary to vilify each other. Finding common ground and recognizing the value of what we all do will only enhance our justice system. I used to be part of "them," and I promise you all that they do care, just differently. Understanding the opposition is not just the decent thing to do; it is where leverage lives, and where justice prevails.

This conviction is not mine alone. When I founded Summit Trial Attorneys here in Las Vegas, I deliberately built the firm around this philosophy. My partner, Jaclyn Kliewer, a Boyd Law graduate who spent more than six years defending major insurance companies and corporations, made the same transition for the same reasons. In the Las Vegas legal community, where the plaintiff and defense bars are small enough that you see the same attorneys at American Board of Trial Advocates events and across the courtroom on Monday after sharing a table on Friday, mutual respect is not optional. It is the foundation of effective practice. Making cases intentionally hostile and personal only undermines the outcome of your client's case.

After 20 years in defense, choosing the plaintiff's path was not a rejection of where I came from—rather, it was the evolution of how I define justice. True justice is not one-sided; it depends on a system in which both plaintiff and defense counsel fulfill their roles with skill, integrity, and respect. My years in defense taught me that the most effective advocacy stems from understanding the other side of the aisle, not dismissing it. The path forward – both for a more productive legal system and, ultimately, for better outcomes – lies in that balance. Fight hard for your client but never lose sight of the shared purpose in that courtroom.

I am honored to call myself a plaintiff attorney. Fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves used to sound like a cliché, until I felt it for the first time with Danielle. I value the many friendships among my peers and appreciate the support I have received along this journey. Every case that comes through Summit's doors is a reminder of why I started over; and why it was worth it.

RENEE FINCH is a personal injury attorney and the founding partner of Summit Trial Attorneys. A seasoned trial attorney, she specializes in sexual assault claims, complex personal injury matters, product defect cases, and bad faith insurance matters.