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Why January?



WHY START THE NEW YEAR IN WINTER?

The month of January kicks off by welcoming the new year — there are countdowns, fireworks, and of course, the ball drop in a freezing-cold Times Square. But why? Why do we start our calendars when much of the U.S. is in the dead of winter? Why January? The short answer is Julius Caesar and Roman politics.

The calendar had long been a political tool in Rome. Depending on who was in power, Roman pontifices would add or subtract entire weeks from the year, manually adjusting the term limits of elected officials. As you could imagine, this caused a lot of chaos, because months frequently slipped out of time with the changing seasons. After becoming emperor, Julius Caesar brought about some much-needed reforms.

Inspired by the Egyptian solar calendar, Caesar fixed the Roman year at 365 days and instituted the leap year to keep months aligned with the solstices. He moved the new year

from the spring to the day that elected officials traditionally began their year-long terms, Jan. 1.

This choice carried spiritual significance, since January was named for Janus, god of doors and gates. What better month to celebrate new beginnings? Under Caesar and subsequent rulers, the Roman Empire expanded its reach, carrying its calendar with it. While much of Europe adopted Caesar's calendar, New Year's Day remained a hot-button issue for centuries.

Thanks in part to the spread of Christianity and to the colder conditions in Northern Europe, there was a lot of resistance to the January start date. Religious leaders saw it as a pagan holiday, and much of Europe chose to restart the calendar on March 25, during the Feast of Annunciation. Much of Catholic Europe officially recognized Jan. 1 as the start of the new year after Pope Gregory reformed the solar calendar again, correcting certain mathematical errors made in Caesar's day. There were still holdouts, however. In fact, England and its American colonies continued to celebrate New Year's Day in March until 1752.

So there you have it — we were very close to having our fireworks celebrations in lovely spring weather. Ultimately, the ubiquity of the Gregorian calendar won out, as the demands of our increasingly interconnected world made a shared calendar a necessity. So if you struggle to start your New Year's resolutions this winter, blame Julius Caesar.

LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

From Construction to the Law

For most of my life, if you had told me I was going to be an attorney, I wouldn't have believed you. In fact, from the time I was in junior high, I thought I knew the exact path my life was going to take — as the son and grandson of two masonry contractors, my future seemed all but set. But, while I didn't realize it at the time, as I took up the family trade, I was laying a solid foundation for a career in the law.

Contractors occasionally play a role in legal cases, especially those concerning premises liability. A professional opinion on whether a staircase is up to code, or whether a handrail was necessary or adequate, can make all the difference in determining who's at fault for a bad fall. However, I didn't think much of this legal work until I met my wife, Renee.

Renee and I met in 1999, and as our relationship grew, so did my interest in the law. Specifically, I saw the amount of good a personal injury lawyer can do for a person in need. In the past, I'd thought of insurance companies as being neutral, fair arbiters of injury cases. But, as I paid attention to the cases Renee worked, I saw just how often these large companies tried to get out of paying claims fairly.

I saw this time and time again, when insurance adjusters and defense attorneys argued that dangerous conditions were safe, when it was

obvious to me and the experts Renee consulted on the case that there were code violations. That's when I realized I had a unique perspective that could help people facing these and other injury claims. I decided to take the plunge and headed to law school in 2008.

While being an expert advisor on premises liability cases was my most direct exposure to the legal world, I soon found that contracting had other skills that prepared me to become an attorney. The ability to negotiate, for example, is extremely important in both professions — whether you're trying to hold a supplier to their end of the bargain, or reach a settlement that reflects the gravity of a client's injuries, the underlying principles are the same.

It also helped that I'd run my own contracting business for the past 25 years. I was far more prepared to jump into such a high stakes job than I may have been had I gone straight from college into law school. I knew what it meant to work hard for the people relying on me and had learned the personal accountability to follow through on that responsibility. But more than anything, my decades in construction have given me the perspective of the average person.

I often tell people: "Being a lawyer isn't hard; being a laborer is." Having worked with my hands since I was a



teenager, I know what it's like to get by on the sweat of your brow and just how much a serious injury can set you back in those circumstances. I'm proud to be in a position now where I can help hardworking people stand up to the likes of large insurance companies.

So, while making the leap from construction to law may seem like a wide gap to clear at first glance, the two lines of work have proved very complementary. I love waking up every morning knowing I get to help people in need. I may not have imagined I'd be an attorney one day, but now that I am, I can't imagine doing anything else.

On behalf of our whole firm, have a happy and healthy new year,

— Doug Black

CTRL, ALT, DELETE YOUR CLUTTER

Tips for National Clean Up Your Computer Month

Everyone relies on technology. Computers, laptops, tablets, and phones are staples of modern life. However, it's easy for these devices to become cluttered with old photos, files, and general disorganization. Luckily, January is National Clean Up Your Computer Month and an excellent time to get your technology in order.

START BY DUSTING

Over time, computer towers can become clogged with dust, which creates additional, unwanted heat within your computer. Regular cleanings will increase the lifespan of your computer and protect its essential components. Compressed air is great for removing most of the dust and other particulates. If the fans or filters are too dirty, you can remove them from the tower to clean them better. If you use water or

liquid cleaning products on them, be sure they are completely dry before placing them back into your computer.

ORGANIZE YOUR FILES

Naming and arranging the files on your computer in such a way that they're easy for you to find can end up saving you a lot of time. Declutter your workspace by creating one file for pictures, one for Word documents, one for spreadsheets, and one for programs to eliminate the hassle of frantically searching for the files you need.

BACK UP YOUR COMPUTER

Be sure to back up your computer before you start deleting things. This acts as a safety net in case you delete something you didn't mean to. Additionally, consider installing a second hard drive. The extra space



can help with storing important files without having to worry about how much room is left.

CLEAN UP SPACE

Any files you'll never use again should be deleted. Likewise, any programs you haven't used in a while should be uninstalled. Check your hard drive for files that might be taking up unintended space on your computer. And remember to empty the recycling bin — it's easy to forget just how much goes in there.

CONCUSSIONS/TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURIES

What To Do About These Invisible Injuries

As this newsletter was going to press, an accident befell Doug Black, whom you met on the cover this month. While putting up Christmas decorations for his family, Doug suffered a bad fall, hitting his head in the process. Thankfully, Renee got him to the hospital where he was able to receive the care and rehabilitation he needed. Thankfully, he fully recovered.

One injury that was immediately apparent to Renee was Doug's concussion/brain injury. Any accident involving head trauma can cause this dangerous and often hard-to-detect condition, meaning it often goes undiagnosed. Renee and Doug have both had clients who have gone significant lengths of time without knowing they were suffering from a traumatic brain injury. Luckily, they caught it early, knew to consider it at the outset of Doug's treatment, and were able to get him immediate and effective treatment. With this event fresh on our minds, we want to share our knowledge on concussions and brain injuries to help you identify them

if you or a loved one are ever in a similar situation.

SIGNS Keep an eye out for the following symptoms after an accident:

- Confusion/memory loss
- Dizziness, nausea, and head aches
- Ringing in the ears
- Mood swings
- Impulse control issues
- Slurred speech
- Loss of consciousness
- Slow mental processing, difficulty multitasking
- Loss of sense of smell/taste

Not every concussion/brain injury is the same, but if one or more of these symptoms manifest after a head injury, seek medical attention.

DIAGNOSIS Neuropsychological testing can help determine whether you are suffering symptoms of a head injury. The use of high-tech scanners such as a 3 Tesla MRI machine can also

detect the presence of a traumatic brain injury.

TREATMENT After a diagnosis, the best thing you can do is treat your symptoms and wait for the injury to heal. Limit your exposure to bright lights, loud noises, and situations where a sudden loss of consciousness would put you in danger. Ideally, a rehabilitation center like the Cottage Rehabilitation Hospital in Santa Barbara can provide an ideal setting for this recovery, giving patients access to doctors who specialize in rehabilitation and staff who specialize in occupational, speech, and physical therapy.

LEGAL HELP We were lucky in Doug's case. Not only could his injuries have been so much worse, but he and Renee knew to consider a concussion and traumatic brain injury at the outset and where to get treatment for it. It just goes to show these kinds of injuries can happen to anyone, but having experienced legal and medical help on your side can make all the difference.

HE SAID — SHE SAID

Evidence Made All the Difference in This Motorcycle Accident

Even experienced motorcyclists can find themselves in serious accidents, especially when the negligence of another driver is to blame. This happened to one of our recent clients who'd been heading down State Street when a car pulled out in front of him from a nearby parking lot. He'd been riding motorcycles for years and handled the situation as best he could: going into a slide to reduce the force of collision. Still, while this split-second decision did a lot of good, it didn't leave our client unscathed.

The worst injury the motorcyclist ended up suffering was a broken wrist. Unfortunately his initial surgery failed; eventually, he had to undergo wrist fusion surgery. Despite the pain and suffering he endured, the other driver's insurance tried to get away with settling the case for a low value, initially only offering \$500,000.

It didn't help that the driver who had cut off our client adamantly denied she was at fault. Throughout the process, she claimed our client had been speeding, and, while her insurance company didn't firmly stand behind this view of events, they were happy to use the uncertainty surrounding

the accident to try to settle the case for less than what we assessed was full value. It's these situations where an experienced personal injury lawyer makes the difference.

Our office found witnesses and obtained photographs of the scene of the accident as well as damage to the respective vehicles, and we were able to get a clear picture of what happened. We enlisted the help of reconstruction experts and left no stone unturned in the search for evidence that would help our client. In the end, our thorough investigation, the arguments we made, and our reputation as experienced, tough



litigators were enough to convince the insurance company not to take the case to trial. We negotiated a \$1.2 million settlement — a great settlement for our client and more than double the original offer.

Having lawyers with the experience to uncover the evidence you need, the knowledge to get the right experts on board to support your case, and the skills to negotiate with the insurance company can make all the difference. Once insurance companies know they are dealing with a diligent personal injury firm that puts in the work to develop their clients' cases and support their clients, they often change their tune rather than risk a trial.

WORD SEARCH

N A C B E Z C A P N T F
O H T H V P Q D R U H I
I B D C A U K O X R G R
T P J K A M C B B V I E
U F A R G I P Y W M N W
L H I R R E R A U S D O
O U T P T A P N G B I R
S H A M U Y S F F N M K
E C G N I Z E E R F E S
R W A W I N T E R E B N
Z J N O K V X Z J L V O
C E L E B R A T E D N W

AQUARIUS	FIREWORKS	PARTY
CAPRICORN	FREEZING	RESOLUTION
CELEBRATE	JANUARY	SNOW
CHAMPAGNE	MIDNIGHT	WINTER

SIMPLE PANCAKES FROM SCRATCH

Everyone should be able to make pancakes without a boxed mix. This recipe is no-frills fantastic and can probably be made without so much as a trip to the grocery store.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp sugar, optional
- 2 eggs
- 1 3/4 cups milk
- Unsalted butter or canola oil, to grease

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat a griddle or skillet to medium-low.
2. In a mixing bowl, combine dry ingredients (including sugar if you like a sweeter pancake). In a separate bowl, beat eggs into milk. Gently stir the liquid ingredients into the dry ones. Mix only until flour is moistened. Clumps are fine.
3. Add some butter or oil to the skillet. If the butter foams or oil shimmers, the temperature is correct. Pour in a pancake of any size, cooking until bubbles form, about 2-4 minutes.
4. Flip and cook other side for 2-4 minutes. Serve warm.

Inspired by The New York Times