



LAW Speech for Reflection

I recently had the privilege to speak at the New Admittees Breakfast, hosted by the Marion Griffin Chapter of the Lawyers Association for Women. Although my message was directed towards our newest members of the bar, it was my intention that it be something that resonated with the entire audience. I'm sharing the speech with you in hopes that as you go into the holiday season and begin to think about how you want to show up in the new year you may be inspired or encouraged.

– Judge Stephanie J. Williams

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To our new admittees, congratulations on your impending admission to the Tennessee Bar. You've crossed a line that few people ever do. The long, grueling nights studying and preparing for class, the endless readings, the indescribable stress of passing the bar exam, and your relentless pursuit of perfection—as a student—are all behind you.

You are now transitioning into long, grueling nights preparing for trial and billing hours, more endless readings, the indescribable stress of obtaining a good outcome for your client, and the same relentless pursuit of perfection—as a lawyer. And for that you are to be celebrated and commended.

But seriously, take that in for a moment. You are a lawyer and from this day forward, you hold something extraordinary—the ability to change lives with your words, your reason, and your courage. You are also now the official lawyer for your friends and family members who view you as an expert in every area of the law, regardless of what your actual practice area is.

As your keynote speaker today, I feel compelled to share a few things about myself that I think you should know:

- I went through law school in a non-traditional way, juggling single parenthood and commuting from Nashville to Knoxville to attend law school at UTK (Go Vols!).
- After graduating from law school in 2002, I worked in a small firm, primarily practicing family law. I transitioned from there into my own practice, still dedicated to family law. In 2014, I began to serve as the Special Master of the Fourth Circuit Court of Davidson County, a family law Court, under the leadership and direction of my dear, beloved friend and mentor, the late Judge Philip E. Smith. I now have the honor and pleasure to serve as the Judge of the Fourth Circuit Court and have done so for a little over a year. So, my legal career spans over 20 years.
- My children are now grown, ages 31 and 29; I have two grandchildren, ages 6 and 2; I have no pets; I like to read; and my faith is my foundation.

- Oh, and I am 51 years old. Of all the things I just told you about myself, the most important, right now at least, is that I am 51.

Now at 51, some people will say, “You are still a baby.” To you, I am truly grateful and say, “Thank you!”

Others will refrain from calling me old, but they may give me a sweet *bless your heart* smile and say, “51? Oh wow! You certainly don’t look 51!” Okay well... thank you?... I guess that’s a compliment.

And people like my younger doctor tell me that, and I quote, “At your age, it’s a good thing to run certain tests and do various screenings.” To her I say... nothing. I just give her that “look” and think about a lot of things I’d like to say, kinda like I do in court sometimes.

That said, I’m still cool enough to know what 6-7 means, which apparently is absolutely nothing!

In any event, the reality for me is, at 51, I am getting older as evidenced by the fact that:

- I wear readers (which are always within reach),
- I am a super early riser,
- I find naps to be treasured gifts,
- Staying up late is any time after 9:00 p.m.,
- I put two spaces between a period and the beginning of a new sentence, and
- I’m increasingly concerned about what the parking situation will be when I go anywhere.



If you don’t understand any of that, just keep living!

But also, I find 51 to be a bit of a turning point in my life. It’s a season of reflection and an acute awareness of my mortality; an awareness that one day what I have to say won’t matter anymore. That younger generations are on my heels, waiting to take over the world and my role in it; that time is a precious commodity and how I use that time is what matters most. It is a call to Live My Legacy with everything I do, to take nothing for granted, and to make the most of each day.

So, while I’d love to share with you tips to being a great lawyer, I’m more compelled to share with you something much deeper: tips to living your best life, and living a meaningful life while engaging in the practice of law. This includes fostering and building community among your peers and colleagues, fostering and building healthy relationships outside of work and professional settings, with friends and family members, and living your legacy, beginning right here, right now, today.



It is a call to Live My Legacy with everything I do, to take nothing for granted, and to make the most of each day.



BUILD COMMUNITY IN THE LEGAL WORLD

I will be honest with you, while very rewarding, your work as a lawyer can at times be difficult and exhausting. There will be days when the hours stretch too long, when clients demand the impossible, when justice feels like a mirage shimmering on the horizon. You’ll question your path; you’ll question whether you are correctly analyzing a case or advising your client properly. You’ll wonder whether you’re making a difference. You may become overwhelmed. You may even be tempted to take the easy road and just close a deal at any cost to collect the check.

But that's not why you chose this profession, is it? You chose this profession because something in you believed in the power of fairness. You believed that words could protect the weak, that rules could shape society, and that truth was still worth chasing. That belief, along with the community you build with colleagues and friends in the legal world will be your *fuel*.

Being involved in professional organizations like the Tennessee Bar Association, the Nashville Bar Association, the Napier-Looby Bar Association and LAW, just to name a few, is where you will find true friends, support, and mentorship among colleagues. They are who you can call and lean on when you need extra help, encouragement, and a reminder of why you matter and why your work matters. They will speak to you from their learned and lived experiences in the law. They will challenge you and help you grow throughout your journey. You will be able to learn from their mistakes, while receiving kindness, grace, direction, and support from them when you encounter challenges and your own mistakes (and trust me, that will happen).

These relationships are essential to your success and your well-being as a practitioner. Please do not isolate yourself as a practitioner in law. Build a community, take advantage of bar-related events, and make friends. You are now a member of a unique club; however quirky it may be at times. Immerse yourself in its culture and cultivate long-lasting relationships.



Also, be a mentor. Each generation of lawyers rises because the one before it reached back to lift them. Be that hand for someone else.

At its core, the law is not about paperwork or precedent. It's about people, how they are treated and how we treat them. It's about relationships.

Every case file represents a human being, whether it's a business owner, a family, a victim, a dreamer. Behind every statute is a story about what we, as a society, decided to value. Never let the technicalities make you forget the humanity, not only in your clients but in your colleagues who you will find on the other side of the case. Get to know your colleagues and treasure them.



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BE PRESENT FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The relationships and community you build in the practice of law are just the beginning to living your best life as a legal practitioner. The relationships you foster outside of the legal world are even more important and they demand and deserve your dedication, time, and attention. Your relationships and the time you spend with friends, spouses, significant others, children, and aging loved ones should be cherished and intentional.

There will always be another hour to bill, whether YOU bill it or not.

In contrast, a child's first words and first steps only happen once. There is an expiration on the sweet voice of a child; there is an expiration on the time you can spend with siblings, parents, grandparents, and other family members; there is an expiration on the *quality* of that time you spend with them.

Do not let these moments and life events pass you by. Be present for your loved ones and embrace the here and now.

In addition to fostering and maintaining healthy relationship at home, be involved and impactful in the community. You will have opportunities to serve on boards with missions that are important to you. Take them! Your input and contribution are quite valuable to boards and organizations all over the city. Your impact will extend beyond the office or courtroom to allow these entities, their missions, and the individuals they reach, to be better served.

Because when you strip it all down, being a lawyer is more than representing clients for pay. It can mean standing in the gap between chaos and order. Between power and vulnerability. Between what is and what should be. Whether you are being paid as retained counsel or offering your talents and experience to a cause that is close to you.

Think about that: You have the privilege of helping write the story of justice in your generation.

That's not a job. That's a calling.

LIVE YOUR LEGACY



It's been said that the best lawyers approach cases with their endings in mind. To do this, you must decide at the outset what you want to see happen—how do you want your case to end? Once you do that, the path you'll take to get there will come into focus. Your steps along that path will be well defined. You'll be calm, relaxed, and in complete control of yourself and your case.

And sometimes, as your case develops, your desired end may change too. That's all right. If your desired end changes, you simply adjust your path to get to your new end. What's critical is that at any time along the way, you know exactly where you're going. You always have your end in mind.

One day you may reach your 51-year-old epiphany, as I have. You will recognize that what you do should have meaning, and you should be intentional and mindful about what you leave behind for future generations. You will begin not only to practice law with the end in mind, but to live life with the end in mind.

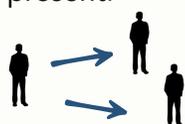
So, I ask you this question: If today were your last day, what would you be remembered for? What would be your legacy?



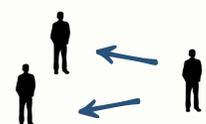
We often think of a "legacy" as something we leave after we're gone: a will, a name on a building, a foundation. But legacy isn't just what you leave behind, it's what you live right now. Legacy is not about possessions; it's about impressions. It's not about what people will say when you're gone; it's about how you make them feel while you're here.

Every day, we're writing our story and our legacy with our words, our work, our relationships, our choices.

Another thing about legacy, it isn't reserved for presidents, inventors, or billionaires. Every teacher who inspires a student leaves a legacy. Every parent who models kindness leaves a legacy. Every friend who listens when no one else will leaves a legacy. Just think about the people who have shaped your life. Most of them probably didn't realize they were shaping your future. But they did, simply by being present.



That's the hidden power of legacy: it multiplies quietly.



Like seeds planted in a garden you may never see bloom. Your words, your kindness, your example, these are the seeds. And one day, someone will grow and bloom from them.

There's a difference between leaving a legacy and living one. To leave a legacy means to focus on how people will remember you. To live a legacy means to focus on how you impact them now. Living your legacy means showing up—for your friends, your colleagues, your family, your team, your community, and your clients—with purpose, passion, and consistency.

Legacy begins with character. People may forget your words, but they'll never forget your example. Integrity doesn't always make you popular, but it makes you permanent. When you choose honesty over convenience, humility over ego, service over self, you're building a foundation for a legacy that outlasts your lifetime. At the end of our lives, people won't remember our job titles or possessions. Again, they'll remember how we made them feel:

- Were we kind?
- Were we encouraging?
- Did we listen?
- Did we love well?
- Did we play well?

You might never know how far your influence goes. A kind word today could inspire a young person to chase their dream. A small act of generosity could change a family's future. How do we live a legacy intentionally?



- **Ask yourself daily:** "What will people remember about how I showed up today?"
- **Prioritize people:** People are our greatest resources.
- **Serve something greater than yourself:** Legacy grows when your purpose extends beyond personal gain.
- **Be consistent:** Great legacies are built over time—one day, one choice, one act of courage at a time.

Live your life as if every word, every choice, every gesture is a seed for the future—because it is.

Let's not just leave a legacy in our work in the law — let's live one. Let's be the kind of people whose lives whisper long after our voices are gone.

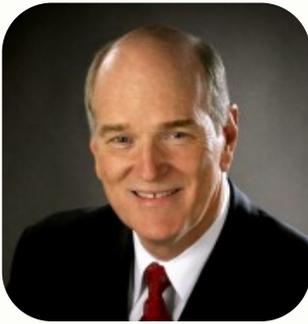
“Every day, we're writing our story and our legacy with our words, our work, our relationships, our choices.”

– Judge Stephanie J. Williams



Third Circuit Changes...

Judge Phillip Robinson Retirement



As many of you are aware, Judge Phillip E. Robinson has retired from his service as Judge of the Third Circuit Court of Davidson County. He was appointed to the bench by Governor Bill Haslam in March 2012 and subsequently elected to the seat in August 2012 and subsequently reelected in 2014 and 2022. Prior to his judicial service, Judge Robinson practiced law for 36 years, focusing primarily on divorce and family law. During his 14 years on the bench, he was known for his legal knowledge and being consistently prepared, professional, and thoughtful.

To celebrate his retirement and his years of service to Davidson County, all are invited to a reception on December 4, 2025, from 2:30–4:30 p.m. in the hallway directly outside courtroom 603.

Serving as the judge of Third Circuit Court for the last 13 years has truly been the highlight of my professional career. I will miss my staff and courthouse friends who have become like family to me. I will also miss terribly all of the many attorneys who appeared before me and whom I considered friends, even though I had to rule against you from time to time. Thank you all for your kindness and the many courtesies you have extended to me over the years."

– Judge Phillip Robinson



Judge Bethany Peery Glandorf Appointment

Following Judge Robinson’s retirement, Governor Bill Lee appointed Bethany Glandorf, formerly Special Master of the Third Circuit Court, as the new Judge of the Third Circuit Court. Last week, Judge Williams had the honor of swearing Judge Glandorf into her new role. Joining the event were her husband; Judges Robinson and Binkley; Chancellor Moskal; and Special Masters Kristen Menke and Dana Ballinger; 3rd and 4th Circuit Court staff; and other courthouse team members

The Fourth Circuit is excited to have Judge Glandorf serving the families of Davidson County and we look forward to both supporting and working with her in her new role.



I am thankful for my family and friends and the members of the bar and the Nashville community who supported me during the nomination process. Judge Robinson has been a wonderful mentor and role model, and he will be sorely missed by us all. I am ready to hit the ground running to serve the families of Davidson County, and I look forward to working with everyone to ensure that Third Circuit Court remains a place where families can find clarity, stability, and compassionate justice."

– Judge Bethany Peery Glandorf



Adoption Week with the 4th

Termination of Parental Rights & Adoption CLE

November 18 & 19, 2025

Thank you to everyone who participated in our very first TPR & Adoption CLE! A huge thank you to the amazing presenters and panelists who shared their stories and expertise. Topics covered included filings, voluntary and involuntary terminations, Guardian Ad Litem appointments, trial tips, and more. We are grateful for the Family Matters Community Enrichment Fund for allowing events like this to take place.



Come to the Dec. 17th CLE for your chance to snag a blanket!



Home for the Holidays

November 20, 2025



Ornaments, cookies, and poinsettias in the courtroom? Say less – Home for the Holidays was a success! For National Adoption Day and Month, the Fourth Circuit Court was transformed into a winter wonderland and had the honor of finalizing nine (9) adoptions. Celebrating permanency for children is a privilege and would not be possible without the family members, court staff, and attorneys that come together to provide safe homes for children in Davidson County.

Thank you to all who attended this year. *Mark your calendars: Home for the Holidays 2026 will be on Thursday, November 19th!*

Cyber Monday Deal:

OUR GIFT TO YOU!

End of Year 4th Circuit CLE
and Holiday Mix & Mingle

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17TH
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

\$50, 2.75 CLE Credits Available

Scan or click the QR code for
more info and to register:



2026 PLANS

PRACTICE TIPS

UPDATES TO CHAMBER RULES

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

*HIGH FUNCTIONING DEPRESSION
PRESENTATION BY EMILY MOON, LPC*

*Followed by a
HOLIDAY MIX & MINGLE**

*All drinks and food will be the responsibility
of the ordering party.

Paralegals, legal assistants,
and support staff welcome!

TOP NOTE ✨

@THE TOWNPLACE SUITES

505 3RD AVE N.

Virtual Appearance Option



Calendar

December

S M T W Th F S

				4		
	15		17		19	
	22	23	24	25	26	
	29	30	31	1	2	

12/4: Special Master’s Case Management Docket at 9 a.m. Via Zoom.

Judge Robinson’s Retirement Reception at 2:30 p.m.

12/15: Final Adoption Docket of 2025

12/17: 4th Circuit End of year CLE and Holiday Mix & Mingle

12/19: Final Motion Docket of 2025

12/22-1/2: Court Closed for Winter Holidays*

**OPs will be heard on 12/22 and 12/23*

January

S M T W Th F S

	29	30	31	1	2	
					9	
				15		
	19					

1/1-2: Fourth Circuit Closed for Winter Holidays

1/9: First Motion Docket of 2026

1/15: Judge Williams’ Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m. in Person or Via Zoom

Judge Williams’ Dismissal Docket at 2:30 p.m.

1/19: Court Closed for MLK, Jr. Holiday

Share!



@JudgeStephanieJWilliams



Judge Stephanie J. Williams

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