

The Lawyers of Endless Summer



photo by Dee Norman

by Deirdre Norman

“It was the Law of the Sea, they said. Civilization ends at the waterline. Beyond that, we all enter the food chain, and not always right at the top.”

— Hunter S. Thompson

If, as Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story stated in 1829, “the law is a jealous mistress,” then surfing is the wicked friend from high school who takes you on insane

road trips that force you to find your outer edges on nature’s very best roller coasters again and again and again. And, of course, dodge a few sharks while you’re at it.



Richard "Juez" Atlee



Allen "Beeze" Beasley



Jeffrey "Sitos" Breit

For six lawyers from Virginia, surfing is a passion, a culture, a sport, and the thread of a story that has woven through their lives for over forty years, tying them together through high school, college, law school, marriage, children, work, and all the life in between. They estimate they have been on over thirty surf trips together to destinations around the United States and the world, including Hawaii, Costa Rica, the Caribbean, and Nicaragua. This summer they will head to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and the story begins again.

Their names are lawyerly — The Honorable Richard Y. Atlee of Yorktown presides over the Virginia Court of Appeals; Allen W. Beasley is a former insurance defense attorney who now works as a plaintiffs' counsel; Jeffrey A. Breit is a renowned trial lawyer who also teaches law school courses at William & Mary, Harvard, and Columbia; Donald S. Clarke runs his own firm in Virginia Beach handling cases from civil and criminal litigation to corporate law; Robert G. Morecock is a partner in a busy criminal and personal injury firm, as well as a general district court substitute judge; and Charles J. Zauzig is a well-respected medical malpractice attorney in Fairfax with a national reputation.

But in decades of surfing together they have developed the patois of the surfing culture. Atlee becomes "Juez," Beasley answers to "Beeze," Breit rolls with "Sitos," Donald goes by "Donaldo," Morecock becomes "Cebollo," and Zauzig has been known as "El Presidente" since his stint as president of the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association. Despite their love of Latin America, according to Breit, this scholarly group speaks "a combined ten words

of Spanish,” though not for the lack of trying — hence the tendency toward Spanish nicknames. According to all of them, and perhaps surfers everywhere, the goal is to find the best waves with the least amount of people on the beach — when Costa Rica got too crowded for them the group looked elsewhere, to destinations in Nicaragua and Mexico.

The surfing lawyers first came together before they were lawyers — back in the 1970s when Beasley, Breit, Clarke, and Morecock were just four Virginia Beach high school kids who loved to surf. Breit’s father was renowned trial lawyer Cal Breit, but the others had no connection to the law. Surprisingly, all four eventually ended up going to law school: Beasley to Richmond, Breit to Tulane, Clarke to the University of Baltimore, and Morecock to Washington & Lee. All four continued to surf (says Morecock, “There is an old saying that ‘if you stop surfing, you never really surfed’”). As the years passed, Morecock (a self-described “apostle of surfing”) and Breit brought Zauzig and Atlee into the group.

They have surfed together in Virginia Beach, thousands of times in Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and in remote locations around the world. The last trip the group took, in 2015, to Nicaragua, was also the first trip to include wives or girlfriends. “I don’t think any of them really want to go back with us,” says Morecock, “but at least, after forty years, we became enlightened.”

For years the trips have been guy trips, filled with washed-out roads, bad directions in foreign languages, beer, rum, and remote beaches where a surfer can ride a big wave all the way in without fear of running into a tourist. According to Morecock, the group has “...forded rivers with water up to the car door tops, crawled wide-eyed through ancient colonial villages that defy description, and interrupted, we’re pretty sure, the operation of a drug cartel landing strip.” Their journeys and their waves have taken them past sea



Donald “Donaldo” Clarke



Robert “Cebollo” Morecock



Charles “El Presidente” Zauzig



The Parker-Atlee Wedding

turtles, across rope bridges, alongside active volcanoes, and down the infamous *Cerro del Muerte* (literally: “summit of death”) highway in Costa Rica.

When asked where the worlds of the law and surfing intersect, there is a unanimous: “They don’t.” Don Clarke points out, “They are distinct in my mind. I often think about surfing when I’m working, but I don’t usually think about work when I’m surfing.” And yet somehow, this group has managed to

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put together two surfing CLEs over the years for the Virginia Beach Bar Association that included judges and lawyers and travel to Troncones, Mexico, and Nosara, Costa Rica. The details of these trips are slim: Evidently what happens on a CLE surfing trip stays on a CLE surfing trip.

And so the surfing is the ultimate escape from the pressures of the law, a world unto itself, a place to recharge, and to forget and to remember perhaps what it was like to be young and carefree and concerned with nothing more than the next best wave. Breit recalls going surfing during college in the shark-infested mouth of the Mississippi River in the Gulf of Mexico during a hurricane. These days, the father of four finds himself connected to the area for a different reason: he is one of fifteen attorneys who represent the 125,000 fisherman and businesses that were impacted by the BP oil spill in the Gulf.

Says Breit of the lack of law-related conversation on surfing trips, “The only exception was when Judge Atlee and all of us were in Nicaragua and his name came up for the Court of Appeals. We dropped our surfing for a few hours trying to track votes in the Senate and the House. My memory suggests a cold beer toast after he was confirmed.”

Although five of the group are in their early sixties, Atlee is just 44. Atlee, who was the last to join the group in 2008 after being introduced to the others by Breit, was married in July to Virginia Beach Assistant Commonwealth’s Attorney Caitlin Parker (Morecock introduced them). Of course, the surfers showed up for his wedding with their families, and of course they gave the groom a gift he will be certain to use in the future: a custom surfboard by Virginia Beach surfboard legend and guitarist Bill Frierson. Each member of the group signed the board before presenting it to Atlee as a surprise gift soon after he returned from his honeymoon — which did not involve surfing — in Alaska.

As they gather to present Judge Atlee with his surfboard, the group shares the easy camaraderie of people who know each other well and who have done much together — they tease each other about their surfboards, their clothing, their age. More than one of them questions the sanity of continuing to

surf into their sixties. Morecock lost the tip of his ring finger when a surf leash wrapped around it and “popped it off.” Atlee tore his bicep muscle, Breit damaged his shoulder, and Zauzig messed up his knee. Clarke had to have surgery on an injured cervical disc. And they have all endured numerous “strange viral assaults” caused by new foods and different waters.

As for wildlife encounters, they have confronted giant insects, crocodiles, sting rays, and scorpions as well as the more obvious sharks. Breit was chased into shore by two sharks in Costa Rica, opting, as he recollects, to “...take the wave in on (my) stomach, as I wasn’t about to fall.” Twice, the group has left a surfing locale only to have a surfer be attacked by a shark there the week after they left. They know the dangers, but then again all surfers do. As Breit points out, when they all first started surfing the boards didn’t even have leashes: “So when you fell off, you had to swim all the way in. In Hatteras, that swim often came at great risk and significant exhaustion.”

When asked if surfing makes him a better lawyer Clarke says, “I believe surfing makes you a better person; surfing tends to keep you humble. You take off on a wave, pull into a barrel, make it out and you own the world. The next one gets you slammed to the bottom, hit the reef and that’s that. The point is, you are not in control. This, I believe, makes you a more spiritual and devout human being, which translates to more compassion as a lawyer.”

This month the group heads off to Puerto Vallarta for another chance at practicing their terrible Spanish, dodging sharks, toasting the sunset with a rum drink or a cold beer, and waiting outside the break for the perfect wave. The law may be a jealous mistress, but surfing is the friend you made in high school that can still make you laugh almost forty years later.



1. As many boards as there are surfers.
2. Walking to the break, Playa Manzanilla, Mexico.

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