

Episode 16:
 Exiting the Courtroom: A Trial Lawyer Finds Nature Photography
 (6/18/2018)

Segment	Who	Copy
Intro	Richard Turner	I'm the kind of guy that voices speak to. I know it's kind of weird but voice of well, I don't know, maybe it's God, maybe it's my soul, maybe it's whatever, maybe I'm making it up, but whatever it was it said to me, "Richard, all you do is swagger around in a courtroom and argue with people. There's all kinds of things going on out there in the world and you're missing it. Don't let the miracles pass you by." I'm snapping my fingers at that moment I decided to go beyond my law practice. I had no idea what I was gonna do, I just knew I had to do something different.
		INTRO MUSIC
Podcast Overview	Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major life and career changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act.</p> <p>For today's podcast, I had a fascinating conversation with a man who just turned 80 years old and is named Richard Turner. We sat down at the kitchen table of his home in Sacramento, California. And he told me about his first act that included working as Governor Ronald Reagan's personal attorney and then as a high-powered trial lawyer. But at the age of 60, he had a series of epiphanies during a month long sabbatical wandering around the Western United States. And he eventually left the bar and became a nature photographer. And a pretty successful one at that.</p> <p>Here's Richard's story....</p>

	Andy	So I wanna go way, way back. I think it's 60 years ago. I wanted you to tell me about your decision to become a lawyer.
	Richard	My parents put me on the soapbox literally when I was five years old and said, "You're gonna be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court someday." Well, I was five years old, I don't know about courts or chief justices or anything else, but the word lawyer stuck with me. And that was my goal. I went to Stanford undergraduate and then I switched sides so to speak, and went up to Berkeley, I went to Cal and law school there.
	Andy	I'm curious, what did you like about the law?
	Richard	I liked Dick Tracy because he was a detective and because he solved problems. And it spoke to me as a child, "Yeah, this is a guy that takes on issues and problems and he does something good about them." And that's what I thought about the law, that this is a place where I can help people solve problems.
	Andy	His first job right out of law school was with the State of California's Attorney General's office.
	Richard	The Attorney General said to me, "If you go where I tell you to go when you pass the bar, I'll pay for you to study for the bar and take it." Well, I was broke at the end of three years in law school and four years at Stanford, so this sounded pretty good. I said, "Yes sir." And that's what happened. When I passed the bar he said, "You're going to Sacramento." And I said, "Yes sir," and I drove up here not knowing anything about the community or the office and started my career as a Deputy Attorney General.
	Andy	You started when you were like, 25 or 26, something like that?
	Richard	Yeah. I was six years at the Attorney General's office. I lucked out. There was a lot of attrition in the guys just ahead of me. So I ended up being the head of the administrative law section in Sacramento at an early age, at age 30 or 29 maybe it was. Way too early, to be honest with you. But it was a great position because from that I was, I mean, I think having that job and having the notoriety if you will that came with it, resulted my going to the governor's office.
	Andy	So in his early 30s, Richard Turner became Governor Ronald Reagan's attorney. It was a job he held for four years.

	Richard	<p>My title was Assistant Legal Affairs Secretary. I was his personal lawyer. I mean I didn't draft his will, but I was his personal lawyer as far as state affairs was concerned.</p> <p>My job basically was to go in on a daily basis and tell him what was going on in the state that he should know about, from forest fires. And generally my advice to him was we ought to put them out.</p> <p>I handled extraditions, pardons, commutations. And simple legal stuff like in the Department of Health, do this or do that. Can the governor's office declare a state of emergency under these circumstances? And I handled pornography.</p>
	Andy	That was pretty wide ranging.
	Richard	It was. It was wonderful.
	Andy	Tell me about after working with the governor's office, did you go to private practice at that point?
	Richard	I did. I wanted to be a trial lawyer. And I went in and told the governor, "Governor, I'm going to leave your office. I wanna go try cases." And he said, "Don't do that." He said, "You'll starve." He says, "I'll make you a judge." I said, "I don't wanna be a judge. I'm too young to be a judge."
	Andy	<p>So Richard "hung out a shingle" and started a law firm. He grew it to 15 lawyers and 40 employees. And he became a very successful trial lawyer working on a number of high profile cases.</p> <p>But at the age of 60, he started questioning his life and the rough and tumble of the legal profession.</p>
	Richard	I didn't wanna be in a war zone anymore. I didn't wanna wake up trying to figure out whose life I'm going to ruin today on behalf of my clients. I finally discovered that perhaps doing that was not a kind thing to do. And many, many, many of my cases could have been settled without trial and without trauma and without all the expense.
	Andy	At some point, this boiled up to a point where you said, "I'm gonna go away for a month." Talk about what drove that and then your month trying to figure things out.
	Richard	Well, I had the first of several epiphanies, and the epiphany was, I had to do something about my aversion to conflict. So I told my wife I'd be back in a month. And I got in my car, turned the ignition on and drove away.

	Andy	This is like a spot decision. You decided this one day?
	Richard	<p>Yes.</p> <p>I had no idea where I was going. I just got in my car and drove east. I ended up in Idaho.</p> <p>I did take a sleeping bag with me, and I slept on the ground in various camping sites in Idaho. And, one morning I woke up with this feeling that there was a presence. I had an intuitive feeling there was a presence. Well, it was more than an intuition. Pulled my bag back over my head or I had it over my head, I pulled it off my head and there was this furry belly about two feet above me, giant Bull Moose sniffing me.</p>
	Andy	And you're just lying on the ground sleeping.
	Richard	<p>I'm lying on the ground sleeping and he's sniffing me with his giant antlers a couple of feet from my face and he could have taken me out in a moment but he left.</p> <p>And later on he went to a nearby pond and started to eat vegetables, grass off the bottom of the pond or algae, whatever it was and I took a picture of him. And I didn't know what at the time but that picture would be a significant moment in my life.</p>
	Andy	We'll come back to the importance of that picture in a few moments. But after the moose incident, Richard drove North to Montana. And he landed a job working on a cattle ranch.
	Andy	So you were a high-priced lawyer making hundreds of dollars per hour and now you're bailing hay or something?
	Richard	<p>Well, I was bucking hay. That's a tough job, bucking hay by the way, I don't recommend it to anyone. I learn how to ride a horse and participated in cattle drives. I taught the owner of the ranch's son how to fly fish. It was a great experience. Actually my pay was not significant, let's put it that way. Basically, I got room and board, but the board if you will was terrific. In the morning, hot coffee with warm rhubarb pie, homemade rhubarb pie, and this was terrific.</p>
	Andy	So Richard is working for two weeks as a ranch hand. And that's when he had his second epiphany.

	Richard	<p>I'm sitting by the West Fork of the Bitterroot River which is a nice little trout stream going through the ranch. After my warm rhubarb pie, mist is coming off the stream and the meadow is out in front of me with wildflowers in and it was just a magic moment when I had my second epiphany.</p> <p>I'm the kind of guy that voices speak to. I know it's kind of weird but voice of well, I don't know, maybe it's God, maybe it's my soul, maybe it's whatever, maybe I'm making it up, but whatever it was it said to me, "Richard, all you do is swagger around in a courtroom and argue with people. There's all kinds of things going on out there in the world and you're missing it. Don't let the miracles pass you by." I'm snapping my fingers at that moment I decided to go beyond my law practice. I had no idea what I was gonna do, I just knew I had to do something different.</p> <p>I got home and told my wife, I quit.</p>
	Andy	<p>You eventually become a nature photographer and you've shown me a number of your pieces which are gorgeous. How did you come down that path?</p>
	Richard	<p>I took some pictures on my trip to Montana and Idaho with a consumer camera, including the picture of the moose I talked about, feeding in the pond. And I brought them home and showed them to a guy named Ted Sirland who's passed away but was at that time a well-respected portrait photographer in Sacramento, professional.</p> <p>And he says, "Richard, these pictures are terrible. You've got little moose, big pond. You need big moose, little pond." And that was my first lesson in composition. And you know, that kind of turned me on. I thought, you know, "I'm not going to stand for this. Some guy telling me my pictures are terrible. I'm going to learn how to take pictures."</p>
	Andy	<p>You started studying photography. Did you think you'd get to a point where you could sell your photographs and make money at this?</p>
	Richard	<p>Never. I never expected to sell my work. I never thought it would be good enough. I just wanted to learn how to take good pictures. But people did say after a year or so, you know, "These are pretty good pictures of flowers, mostly of flowers, you know. Maybe people might like to see your work, why hide it? Why sequester it in your closet? Why don't you let people see it and find out if it's, you know, saleable," I guess? I didn't do it for money at all.</p>
	Andy	<p>On a lark, Richard decided to display his photos at an Art Show at the Sacramento Elks Club.</p>

	Richard	<p>We signed up for it, 45 bucks to rent a space. I had not a clue what to do,</p> <p>We rented some stuff from a company here in Sacramento where you could put your images on these panels and we had not a clue how to put this together. People are coming into the art show, we're trying to figure out how to put all this stuff together.</p> <p>We finally did and a lady comes along and looks at...we had this bird of paradise framed beautifully in a gold frame, my wife did it. And she said, "Do you guys bargain?" My wife being my business person of sense says, "No, we don't bargain, this is art." I'd never heard any of this before but so the lady says, "Okay." And she writes a check out for \$575 to buy this piece of art that I produced.</p> <p>So that's what started me off, is this serendipitous event, this lady coming along and fell in love with my picture.</p>
	Andy	And that started his path as a professional nature photographer.
	Richard	After that I thought you know, there aren't a lot of art shows and can't sell \$500 pictures very often, so I'll sell greeting cards, and people said, "Why don't you do that and people will see your work." So I did and I started selling the cards. And I've sold about 54,000 to this day.
	Andy	That's a lot of cards.
	Richard	It's a lot of cards and I made every one of them myself. And I really love to do it.
	Andy	Eventually you published a book of your photography and poetry and it's called, "I Can't Always See My Path... But I Keep On Walking." Tell me about that phrase and how you came to title the book that.
	Richard	<p>I have a path, a spiritual path. My path is to make people happy with my work. Sometimes I can't see my path because I'm involved in other things. But I keep on walking. I keep on trying, I keep on doing my art, I keep on writing my poetry, and I keep on sharing it with people because it makes them happy.</p> <p>Instead of people being angry at what I'm doing which is typical in law practice, people are angry, I make people happy. What a great thing to do.</p>

	Andy	In addition to his art, Richard does a good deal of public speaking about his second act.
	Andy	When you give a talk at some of those different conferences and places, what is your primary message? What are you trying to communicate to people?
	Richard	Change. You can change if you want to. You can change for the better if you want to. You can do things that you don't think you can do if you want to. You can do things that make you happy if you want to. I think that's really important for people, particularly in older age. You get above 50 and you think you're stuck or you know, the only thing ahead of you is retirement and sitting around reading the newspaper. No, that's not true. I had not taken a picture or sold a picture until I was in my mid-60s. So you can change at any age. I'm still changing.
	Andy	Was that big leap of leaving the legal profession a difficult change for you?
	Richard	It was a welcome change, not difficult at all. No, I was free. I sensed freedom. I could go on take pictures of beautiful birds and beautiful flowers. They don't call me disgusting names.
	Andy	Now, you must have left a very lucrative career though. Was it hard to leave it from a financial perspective?
	Richard	No, you know, I'd saved some money and had enough to live on. And you know, I don't own a yacht but I'm okay.
	Andy	So, if you were giving advice to someone who is considering a second act, what would you tell them?
	Richard	Do it no matter how stiff the odds might seem. You can do it, anyone can do it. You can do it even if you wanna be a caregiver instead of a waitress or if you wanna leave a job as a medical doctor and become a fishing guide, you can do it. Do what feeds you. Do what makes you feel spiritually together.
	Andy	So, do what feeds you, how do you discover what feeds you?
	Richard	Well, I think you have to think about it a lot. And thinking might turn into meditation. I think meditation is a great tool to find out who you are. I know that sounds to people who aren't accustomed to meditation, that might sound a little far out but it's a way of centering oneself. It's a way of reaching out to spirit if you will, that's what I call God, spirit. It's a way of centering oneself and of letting stuff come in that ordinarily in the course of your daily activities wouldn't.

	Andy	So you just celebrated an 80th birthday. You spent essentially let's say 40 years in the legal profession, and you've now been a photographer for let's say, 20 years. As you contrast those two, do you wish you'd gotten to the nature photographer earlier you think in your path, or is that just the way your life worked out?
	Richard	<p>Great question. I don't regret anything that I've done professionally. And I don't regret the time it took me to do it, it's just the way it worked out. I don't have any regrets.</p> <p>I look back on my law practice with the thought that I could have been kinder and gentler with people, rather than to be this tough trial lawyer that didn't brook any difficulties by the other side. So, I do...it's not a regret because it's just the way I was at the time and it's what you're expected to do. I mean, nice guys don't win cases. Your client's paying you to win a case. They're not paying you to lose, so I think I did what was honorable at the time, but I'm really glad I don't do that anymore.</p>
	Andy	Has the last 20 years of your life as a nature photographer, as a poet, as a speaker, been a happier period than your time as a trial lawyer?
	Richard	Yes. Definitely. No question about it. If you spend all day arguing with people and plotting to do somebody else damage, that's not a happy life. Taking pictures of beautiful flowers and sharing them with people is a great experience.
	Andy	<p>As I left his house, Richard gave me a copy of his book. And he gave me half dozen greeting cards that he personally produced and signed. His photography is absolutely beautiful.</p> <p>But what he really shared was his wisdom. And via this episode I get to share that with you. It's the wisdom of a man who was courageous enough to leave a profession and a life that wasn't feeding his soul. And for that lesson and gift, I'll always be grateful to trial lawyer turned nature photographer Richard Turner.</p>

OUTGOING MUSIC		
Thank-You and Show Credits	Andy	<p>My special thanks to Richard and his wonderful wife Prem for hosting me and sharing his story on today's podcast. I hope you'll check out his website at www.rturnerphotgraphy.com, and the wonderful art that he produces.</p> <p>I found his words about change so powerful, I just want to share that with you one more time:</p>
	Richard	<p><i>You can change if you want to. You can change for the better if you want to. You can do things that you don't think you can do if you want to. You can do things that make you happy if you want to.</i></p>
	Andy	<p>That's it for today's episode. We hope you'll keep listening. A new "Second Act Story" is just around the corner.</p>