

SAN DIEGO

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Attorney of the Month

Patrick Griffin,

Griffin Law Office APC, San Diego

Passion and Small-Town Values Lead to Success

PASSION & SMALL-TOWN VALUES

LEAD TO

SUCCESS IN THE COURTROOM

The path for most successful San Diego attorneys starts at an early age. For Patrick Griffin, it began while being raised with his three siblings in the small town of Ennis, Montana, by a mother who he describes as a “smart as they come, Montana Cowgirl with a big personality” and a father who is a “competitive hockey player from Detroit, very pragmatic and reserved.” Exactly how small of a town is Ennis, Montana, you may be thinking? Answer, VERY, with a population of only 900, a graduating high school class of only 35 students, no stoplights, no fast food restaurants, and with the nearest movie theater an hour’s drive away.

“Growing up in rural Montana was great and it wired me different, which has proven to be very helpful to me as an attorney over the years. It taught me the importance of hard work, integrity and reputation. Growing up in a small town everybody knows everything! Even the high school teachers I had knew everything about me before I started their class,” says Griffin.

This small-town environment is also where Patrick developed his deep competitive nature and a drive to succeed through sports. He was an all-state athlete in basketball, football, and track in high school and ran track while attending the University of Montana. Being competitive is also what gave Patrick the drive and fortitude to eventually leave small-town living and make his way to San Diego. “Not many people ever get out of Ennis, Montana, let alone find a career they love in the best city in America. Everyone knows everyone where I am from, so any missteps or successes are magnified, which is very similar to our legal community,” explains Patrick.

Being competitive is also what led Patrick to become an attorney. “Early in my career, I quickly learned that becoming a

trial attorney would be a great way to get that same competitive rush that sports gave me while growing up in Montana. There’s also a rush that comes from being in front of a jury. It’s a surreal experience being able to get up there and duke it out mentally with a prosecutor and a judge. I love it,” explains Patrick.

To put himself in the best position to “hit the ground running,” he attended Stetson University College of Law in Florida, which *US News & World Report* ranks as the #1 trial advocacy school in the country. While attending, he was also part of a trial team that won three national championship tournaments and dozens of regional tournaments. “This very specific legal training allowed me to eliminate much of the learning curve that most attorneys go through in their first few years in practice,” explains Patrick.

When asked why he chose criminal defense as his area of expertise, he explains, “I was always laser focused on being a trial attorney. It wasn’t until my first job in law school for a criminal defense firm that I realized that criminal defense was my calling. For some reason drafting contracts didn’t light my fire... it’s different when someone’s life and liberty are on the line. It raises the stakes and drives me to always perform and compete at my best like nothing else ever has.”

He also credits much of the valuable experience in criminal defense he obtained in his early years with working for a prominent law firm while attending law school. At this firm he was given the opportunity to work on some very high-level criminal defense cases, many of which were federal cases, which had him writing appeals. “We won the first appeal I wrote, and I could see the angles of how things worked and that gave me the confidence that I could actually do this. A huge amount was put on my plate and the first one worked out. It was a completely





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different ball game for me after that,” explains Griffin.

When asked what type of client is best for his work style, Patrick explains it’s the client who is looking for more of a personal connection with their attorney. “We are not a big flashy firm. Our niche is to combine courtroom skills, work ethic, integrity and passion for advocacy using a small-town mindset and let our work do most of the talking for us,” says Griffin.

PASSION FOR ADVOCACY LEADS TO A HAPPY BIRTHDAY

This passion for advocacy was needed when Griffin was managing his own firm and was contacted by a young woman living in Washington state. She was on active duty in the Army and in an absolute panic because she had been notified by her command that she had a warrant for arrest in San Diego and the Army was going to separate her. She had a six-month-old daughter and very limited resources.

Griffin made an appearance for her and took care of her warrant for no charge. He realized quickly that she was completely innocent. He also realized that even though the woman was innocent, the District Attorney was never going to back down. She was charged with felony battery and inflicting great bodily injury. A conviction would have resulted in a strike, prison time, immediate dishonorable discharge from the Army, financial ruin, and a court order keeping her away

from her new step son.

The 2017 case resulted from an incident when his client and her fiancé dropped her fiancé’s son off at his ex-wife’s house. His client had never met the ex-wife before. While they were dropping the child off, the ex-wife shoved and pulled his client’s hair and during the struggle her engagement ring caused a gruesome injury to the ex-wife’s eye.

Griffin says, “I left no stone unturned and invested more time in prepping for the case than I usually do just to make sure there wasn’t a shred of doubt that she would be acquitted. I did the trial portion without being paid because I just couldn’t let her take a deal that would have ended her military career and probably have also ruined her life. I just couldn’t let it happen. The cross examination of the alleged victim was a bloodbath.” The jury deliberated for about an hour before returning the not guilty verdict to all charges.

“The day the not guilty verdict was read was my client’s daughter’s first birthday, which made the outcome even more rewarding,” Griffin says.

PERSPECTIVE AND EMPATHY FIRST

One of Griffin’s most challenging cases was a recent first-degree murder case in which his client faced a sentence of 50 years to life—a perfect example of a case where the defense

attorney's role isn't just to "get the client off." The question of what happened was crystal clear because of video evidence and multiple statements by his client. But not all cases are black and white, and this one certainly wasn't.

The question of what happened was settled, leaving only the why of what happened to build a case on. The case was extremely tragic, forcing Griffin to see the world through the distorted reality of his client to truly understand why the shooting happened. Griffin says that often criminal defense attorneys are facing a steep uphill climb and there is no such thing as a motion for new facts. "This was a case that looked hopeless on the surface, but I was able to find an answer to the why that ended up being the difference in my client having a life outside of prison and dying in prison. The case helped give me a different perspective of my role as an advocate and taught me a lot about empathy."

AN AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY

Griffin says he takes pride in taking on the awesome responsibility of being the person tasked with stopping the

government from destroying someone's life.

A commitment that deep requires passion and empathy, he says. "To be a trial lawyer, and a criminal defense trial lawyer specifically, you have to be wired a certain way. I often see former prosecutors switching to the defense side and that always makes me scratch my head. I could never imagine being a prosecutor. That is no slight to prosecutors, but the deck is so stacked against criminal defendants, it takes a certain mindset to go to battle against the government and its unlimited resources. I truly think I have the coolest job on the planet. I get excited to spend a weekend prepping for a jury trial. I get excited to come up with creative ways to tell a story. I think it's obvious that I enjoy doing what I do, and the clients take notice."

An equal amount of empathy is also a requirement, he says. "Criminal defense is unique in that often our clients do terrible things. I think to do this job and do it well you have to be able to put yourself in your client's shoes. Nobody should be judged only by their best day and nobody should be judged only by their worst day. A person's life experiences guide their decisions and I need to be able to understand where my clients are coming from to properly advocate for them."



Patrick's hometown of beautiful Ennis, Montana.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Griffin's management style is to be reasonable, accessible, casual and to have the ability to examine both sides of any situation. "I'm not a cracking the whip in your face type of guy. I try to set an example. As long as I lead by example, I think it's easier for my staff to follow suit."

He says he is lucky because the people he hires have an interest in the firm's practice areas. He notes that in the past he has had people who came in and just "punched the clock," but that his team today is a group committed to the firm's goals. "Criminal defense gives you that kind of benefit because it's so much more interesting," he says. "I don't have to delegate a lot. My clients will only talk to my support staff for housekeeping stuff, exchanging documents and so on, so there really isn't much of a conflict. The time crunch can be a challenge. It's not like an associate at a big firm where all they have to do is focus on being a lawyer, whereas I have to also focus on getting clients in the door and building the practice. They don't conflict."

One of Griffin's primary goals is to eliminate the typical attorney/client barriers. He focuses on getting to know his clients on a personal level, so they feel comfortable with and treat him more like someone they are just enjoying a conversation with. Two important principles guide his actions: first is to never oversell. "I don't ever promise anything I can't deliver. I am sure I have lost quite a few potential clients to attorneys who promise the world, but I think that is counterproductive in the long run. Trust is the most important thing you can have with a client and if you start the relationship off by overstating something it will be hard to ever regain credibility," he says. The second is to actually care about each client. "It sounds simple, but it's important to make sure they know you care deeply about the outcome, not just the retainer. I try and convey that I am invested in the outcome." One of the joys and strategies for success in his career choice is the opportunity for continued learning, Griffin says. "It's never over. There's just no possible way to ever know it all—not even close. It's important to constantly be searching and learning new and creative ways to advocate for your clients. There's always something else to pick up on and hone your craft with." ■

Contact

Patrick Griffin
Griffin Law Office, APC
402 West Broadway, Suite 1925
San Diego, CA 92101
GriffinLawOffice.com
(619) 269-2131

EXPERIENCE



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» EDUCATION

- Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, The University of Montana
- Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, The University of Montana
- Juris Doctor, with Honors, Stetson University College of Law

» AWARDS & REVIEWS

- Facebook – Excellent 5 Star, 35 Ratings, April 2018
- Yelp Reviewed – Excellent 5 Star, 44 Ratings, April 2018
- AVVO Rating – Excellent 5 Star, 9 Reviews, April 2018
- Locale Magazine - Top Law Firm in San Diego 2018
- The National Trial Lawyers: Top 100 Trial Lawyers
- American Institute of DUI/DWI Attorneys: 10 Best

» PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- Appellate Defenders Inc.
- San Diego Criminal Defense Bar Association
- National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
- California Attorneys for Criminal Justice
- San Diego County Bar Association
- American Bar Association
- Consumer Attorneys of San Diego
- California DUI Lawyers Association

» BAR MEMBERSHIPS

- California
- United States District Court, Southern District of California