

## Final Argument

By Clifford Irving  
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Review by Hans Sherrer

The following is a reproduction of the gist of a conversation in a greasy spoon restaurant in the early 1990s between a waitress named Velda and a customer, apparently an author, who will only be identified as Mr. I. A customer sitting in the booth next to Mr. I's overhead the conversation that took place when Velda sat at Mr. I's booth while she was on a break.

Mr. I: Hey Velda! Going on your break?

Velda: Uh huh.

Mr. I: Sit down and take a load off your feet.

Velda: Sure. Thanks. I see you're scribbling away.

Mr. I: Yeah. I'm making some notes about publicizing my new book.

Velda: So what's it about?

Mr. I: Hum. The short version is a lawyer at a crossroads in his life takes an unexpected adventure.

Velda: Legal shmegal. Sounds like a snoozer.

Mr. I: No! Before the guy became a highly paid civil lawyer at a prestigious Florida law firm he was a top state prosecutor.

Velda: Yeah? So what?

Mr. I: Well you see, through a weird series of events he finds out that in his last case as a prosecutor, 12 years earlier, one of his witnesses committed perjury that the defendant had confessed to him!

Velda: Is that unusual?

Mr. I: No. It happens all the time.

Velda: So why should I care?

Mr. I: This was a capital case. The defendant was a kid in his late teens convicted of murdering the man who employed him as a yard handyman. Then he was sentenced to die in "Old Sparky." That's the name for Florida's electric chair.

Velda: Is that the one that when they turn on the juice a guy's head smokes like a forest fire and flames shoot out like a 4th of July sparkler?

Mr. I: Yup!

Velda: Sure gives new meaning to going out with a bang. Aren't lots of guys sentenced to be fried like a crispy critter?

Mr. I: Yes. In Florida. In most other states they are sentenced to die by lethal injection. But that's beside the point. You see this witness exchanged his made-up testimony to a different prosecutor in exchange for having charges against him dropped in that case. And he was told what to say in the kid's case by the detective in charge, who the lawyer later finds out *also* lied on the witness stand.

Velda: Well, is it unusual for a cop to lie?

Mr. I: No. It happens all the time. But what was unusual was this cop lied to protect the *real* killer!

Velda: So the kid waiting to be grilled without cheese is the wrong guy.

Mr. I: Bingo!

Velda: And this lawyer guy has a pang of conscience or something about the wrong guy getting a one-way ticket to visit "Old Sparky."

Mr. I: Righto!

Velda: Wait a minute ... It was 12 years ago. So the kid must be pushing up daisies by the time this lawyer guy finds out he made a lulu of a boner.

Mr. I: No. That's just it. He lucks out because the kid has been fighting his case. Appealing every which way he can to every court he can. So he's still alive. But he's scheduled to be executed in a month and the clocks ticking!

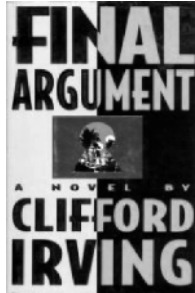
Velda: Let me guess. The lawyer dude decides to become some kind of Good Samaritan and save him.

Mr. I: Well he decides to do some poking around. So he visits the kid to see what he has to say for himself.

Velda: Must be in his late 40s or so. You know, going through the mid-life crisis thing.

Mr. I: Sort of. He's a partner in a successful law firm, married with children, and he's got all the toys. You know. House on the ocean, snazzy sailboat, and so on. But yeah, something is missing.

Velda: Oh yummy! He starts



fooling around! Now you're talking!

Mr. I: No. He wants meaning in his life. Not hot babes!

Velda: You sure no fooling around?

Mr. I: Well ... he did have an affair with the murdered man's wife.

But that was before the man was murdered.

Velda: That's it? No juicy stuff?

Mr. I: He doesn't have time Velda! The kid ... well he's now in his early 30s ... is rapidly headed for his date with the electric chair if the lawyer can't dig up new evidence to convince a judge to stay his execution!

Velda: Stay? Does that mean the lawyer dude just wants to put off the kid getting his big jolt of juice until another day?

Mr. I: Sheesh. No! He needs to delay the execution to give him time to see if there is enough new evidence to convince a judge to give the kid a new trial.

Velda: This lawyer dude cute?

Mr. I: He's an average Joe in good shape for his age .... but the story isn't about that Velda! It's about how he goes about unraveling the murder case that *he* put together 12 years earlier.

Velda: Isn't that a little ... you know ... schizo?

Mr. I: Well, after he becomes the kid's lawyer his law firm partners think he's lost his mind, the state bar wants to throw him out of the fraternity of brotherly lawyers, and he gets charged with felonious assault after he punches a mouthy prison guard in the face and breaks his nose.

Velda: So he's running on three cylinders and a loose cannon to boot. Hum. That's more like it! Danger Boy in a suit!

Mr. I: Yeah, sure, if that's how you want to look at it. But its dangerous business to dig up a past that some very serious people want to remain buried. So it takes someone who is living a little on the edge to take the chance.

Velda: So what's the upshot of all the lawyer guys' digging and poking around?

Mr. I: He's able to delay the kid's execution by getting what is called an evidentiary hearing.

Velda: An evidently what?

Mr. I: Evidentiary hearing. It is a court hearing where the judge can decide if there is enough evidence to give the kid a new trial.

Velda: So what happens?

Mr. I: Well. The lawyer peels the prosecution's case, which is his case from 12 years ago, apart piece by piece like it was an overripe onion.

Velda: Wadda ya mean? How'd he do that? What happens?

Mr. I: No dice Velda. You'll have to read the book. If I tell you'll blab it to all your friends and customers.

Velda: Ah come on. Be a sport. Fess up.

Mr. I: Oh, all right. But lean close.

Mr. I and Velda: Whisper, whisper, whisper.

Velda: Wow! Really!

Mr. I: Yup!

Velda: I've got to give it to ya. Your book sounded a little nerdy at first, but you've got me a little bit interested.

Mr. I: That's what I've been trying to tell you. It isn't written for lawyers. Although it may help turn on a light in their mind, as well as in that of police, prosecutors, judges, and yes even your friends, that so called incriminating evidence against a person may be nothing more than a convenient way of avoiding looking for the truth.

Velda: Incrimawhat?

Mr. I: Never mind. But since you're interested, I'm sure you'll tell your friends and customers about it, and that you know the author. After all, I've got to keep selling books so I can keep leaving you big tips!

Velda: I need em. So I'll be a one gal publicity machine for you. By the way what is its title?

Mr. I: *Final Argument*. But you won't know what it means until the last pages of the book.

Velda: Ooohhh. I've got to get back to work.

Mr. I: I'm leaving, so I'll see you next time Velda.

Velda: Bye.

*Final Argument* is out of print, but inexpensive used copies are readily available from Internet book sellers, including Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com.

