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**THE WILL TO WRITE**

**Thornhill lawyer-songwriter explores new realm of 'emotional law'**

By Paul Leavoy Perspectives

It's been about 125 years since comic opera duo William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan wrote and presented the one-act show, Trial by Jury, blending jaunty lyricism with heavy legalese in a way only Britain's first music theatre team could accomplish.

That may have been the last time law and music were seen in the same room together.

Until now. While Thornhill lawyer Les Kotzer steers clear of the pithy irreverence inherent in Gilbert's libretti, he does win at making two unlikely bedfellows a match made in heaven.

Kotzer has been called the "songwriting wills lawyer," and the description couldn't be more apt.

By day, he sits in his central Thornhill office, providing free assessments of wills and estate documents.

But by night, Kotzer puts pen to paper to craft accessible, universal and meaningful songs that strike to the very core of the human condition.

Actually, day and night don't matter to this songwriter, who crafts his work without pretension or expectation. Rather, he builds a song when the impulse hits him.

The impulse might have hit Kotzer the hardest the moment before writing the fan favourite "Photos in a Drawer."

Shortly after his mother's passing, Kotzer wandered into her bedroom, "One Sunday afternoon," the song goes. Without much premeditation, he opened and peered into a drawer in his mother's dresser. Scattered across the base of the drawer were photos – photos of his childhood; photos of his father and mother together; photos of family reunions.

Suddenly, Kotzer wasn't

as he writes in the song. "Days that went too fast."

"After you lose someone, when you open a drawer like this, all these memories come back in a flood," he recalls. "It really hit a nerve."

For Kotzer, opening the drawer coincided with the opening of a wellspring of latent creativity, something he expressed to some degree as a kid, "when I head a song or made up words to an instrumental, just in my head."

His mother's passing, in effect, awakened a second passion. Shortly after opening that drawer he began what would become a book of lyrics, lyrics that are now being transformed into vibrant song by Thornhill singer Vivian Nicole.

The contour of Nicole's career, to some extent, inverts Kotzer's experience. Rather than coming to song from law, Nicole came to law from song.

Now in her mid-20s, it wasn't long ago the young singer tried her hand at a career in music in California.

An ulcer and an appetite for more led her back to the GTA where she picked up her second passion – a career in law. Now she's a paralegal, but when her mother bumped into Kotzer, a long-time friend, in a coffee shop, she had to tell him about her daughter's beautiful voice. Kotzer, who's the first to admit he doesn't have the pipes to carry the words he writes, was in the market for a good singer, and a new partnership was born.

Nicole warmed up to his lyrics immediately, and now holds "You Made a Difference" – Kotzer's song about his father's impact in his life – as one of her favourites.

"He wrote (the song) for his dad, but really it's kind of universal and relates to any age group and anyone that has gone through some sort of experience with a person who has offered support and love in their life," Nicole says.

According to her, Kotzer's songs aren't the run-of-the-mill tunes that hit airwaves these days.

"Today we don't have a lot of substance in any of our lyrics," she explains. "In his lyrics there is substance; there is meaning. They touch your heart."

So is Kotzer's 'night job' a radical departure from a profession where terms like "love," "support" and "memories" don't quite mesh with a legal lexicon?

Not so, says Kotzer, who argues that both pursuits are different vehicles of expression for the same fundamental impulse: the desire to bring and keep families together.

Wills handled improperly, he says, are a recipe for familial disaster and dismay. It's not the exception to the rule – it's the rule. Kotzer sees it all the time. This trend is what brought

him to write two tomes on the matter with associates, including The Family Fight: Planning to Avoid it and The Family War: Winning the Inheritance Battle. He's working on a third volume currently.

"All will situations carry the potential to tear the family apart," he says. "In many cases the parents have assumed the kids are going to work it out. They often don't work it out, or they try to work it out through hiring lawyers. But how do you split mom's wedding ring in half? You don't, and it should never come to that stage."

To drive the point home with clients in sensitive, inheritance situations, will some-play

tance-centred situations, Kotzer times one of his

**Photos in a Drawer**

*What follow are the complete lyrics to Photos in a Drawer, one of Les Kotzer's first widely-played songs. Kotzer wrote it after spotting photos in the drawer of his mother, shortly after she passed away.*

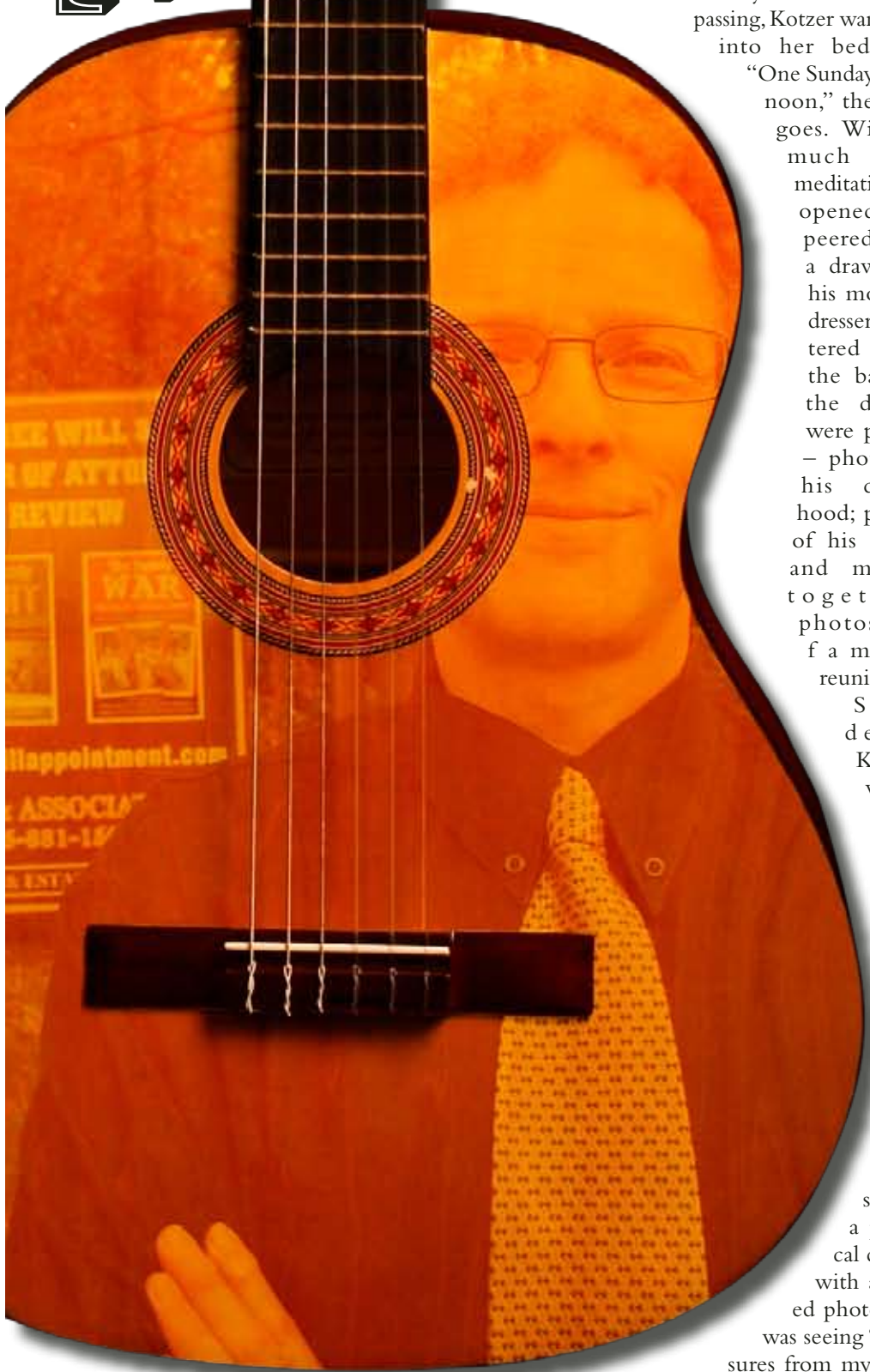
When she passed away  
 I cried and cried for days  
 Wanting what I had before  
 While walking through her room  
 One Sunday afternoon  
 I came across old photos in a drawer  
 I turned to close the door  
 Slowly sat down on the floor  
 Looking through those photos old and worn  
 Treasures from my past  
 Days that went too fast  
 Faces that were edges cracked and torn  
 Photos in a drawer  
 In my hands were photos in a drawer  
 Photos in a drawer  
 She kept old photos haven't seen for years  
 Faces and places haven't seen for years  
 All that time erases the laughter and the tears  
 Photos in a drawer  
 All that time erases the laughter and the tears  
 Photos in a drawer  
 I got up from the floor  
 Put the photos in the drawer  
 Except the few I held so dear  
 Though life won't be the same  
 Once I put them in a frame  
 Her very special moments  
 I'll always have these precious moments near  
 She always thought of them that way  
 All that time erases the laughter and the tears  
 Photos in a drawer

songs to drive the point home.

"I'm a wills lawyer trying to give a message about family."

On one occasion, he was being interviewed by a radio host out of San Francisco, John Rothman, who played one of Kotzer's songs on the air.

"A woman called us up on the freeway, and said 'I heard your song and I was in tears. You inspired me to call my sister. I haven't spoken to her since our mother died,'" Kotzer recalls. "She said, 'You're practicing a new kind of law – Emotional Law – and you've inspired me to do what no other lawyer could get me to do: call my sister. Not through law, but through pulling at my heart strings you reminded me of my family.'"



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Neiman, Callegari, Barristers and Solicitors is pleased to announce that lawyers Beverly J. Morton and Riccardo Del Vecchio have joined the firm following their Call to the Bar on June 19, 2008.

Beverly attended Osgoode Hall Law School and Rick attended University of Windsor Law School, both graduating June 2007.

Beverly will be practising in the areas of Family Law, Employment Law and Civil Litigation. Rick will be practising in the areas of Civil Litigation, Construction Law, Municipal Law and Administrative Law.

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