

Ten Things Every Trial Lawyer Could Learn From



TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILM CORPORATION

Vincent La Guardia Gambini

By Judge Joseph F. Anderson, Jr.

Twenty-five years ago, 20th Century Fox Studios set up shop in Monticello, Georgia, to film a whodunit comedy. The movie's director, Jonathan Lynn—an Englishman with a law degree from Cambridge—imposed a rather unusual directive: All courtroom scenes were to be technically accurate.

The resulting movie, *My Cousin Vinny*, quickly became an all-time classic. In 2008, the *American Bar Association Journal* named it the third best legal movie of all time. The two that ranked above: *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Twelve Angry Men*. Intellectual heavyweights, such as Justice Antonin Scalia, rate it as their all-time favorite movie. Marissa Tomei, then an unknown actress without much screen experience, won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.

Moreover, because of Lynn's insistence on proper courtroom procedures, snippets from the movie are used by law professors around the country to teach evidence, ethics, civility, criminal procedure and trial advocacy. The movie has demonstrated phenomenal staying power, and memorable lines from the film ("What is a 'youte'?") have achieved cult status.

The story line is simple enough: Two college students (Bill Gambini and Stan Rothenstein) from New England are traveling through the deep South when they stop for food at a convenience store—the delightfully named "Sac-O-Suds." Shortly thereafter, they find themselves in the clutches of the local sheriff, charged with murdering the clerk at the Sac-O-Suds.

Five hundred miles from home and with no funds to employ counsel, they use their one phone call to contact Vincent La Guardia Gambini, Bill's cousin, to come to their aid. Vinny, a newly-minted attorney from Brooklyn, New York, arrives in the quintessential Southern town along with his Chinese-food-loving, unemployed hairdresser, car expert/girlfriend, Mona Lisa Vito (Tomei) as the proverbial fish out of water.

Vinny's leather jacket, silver-tipped boots, and Brooklyn accent make it apparent to everyone in the courtroom that he is "not from around here." He has neither seen nor tasted "a grit" before. Appearing in a capital murder case immediately after passing the bar exam, Vinny is clearly in over his head.

In the courtroom, things "go South" in short order. Vinny offends the judge with his casual dress and less than professional courtroom demeanor. He lies to the judge about his criminal trial experience. He is twice held in contempt of court. And, after each day's adjournment, he finds himself in hot water with Mona Lisa, to whom he has promised marriage, but with the nuptials to be scheduled "after I win my first case." Things go so badly for Vinny that moviegoers just knew he would end up victorious, as he did.

The movie is actually a paean to the American system of justice. Two wrongfully accused individuals are acquitted; and everyone (including the prosecutor, defense attorney, and the judge) walks out of the courtroom delighted with the result. And Vinny and Mona Lisa ride off into the sunset in their Cadillac Coupe de Ville to tie the knot.

It is easy to dismiss Vinny as a bumbling, short-tempered and ill-prepared lawyer who stumbles onto the truth in the course of a trial that he is clearly not ready for. However, I submit that by the time Judge Chamberlain Howell (Fred Gwynne) dismisses all charges, Vinny has laid down some teaching points that all of us in the legal profession would do well to study. Over the years, I have watched *My Cousin Vinny* dozens of times. In tribute to Vinny, I have culled what I believe are his 10 most salient characteristics that every lawyer should strive to emulate.

1. Perseverance

Early in the film, we learn that Vinny has failed the bar exam not once, but five times! He succeeded, however, on his sixth try. The ink is barely dry on his law license when he finds himself in hostile territory defending a cousin who will probably never pay him.

The local train, noisy pigs, a



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plant whistle, and a screech owl keep Vinny awake at night; Lisa chooses an inappropriate time to talk about her biological clock; and the town's only dry cleaner closes "because of the flu" with Vinny's only suit locked inside. His judge is a fastidious Yale Law graduate and a stickler for the rules who obviously does not observe casual Fridays.

Despite the many setbacks he endures, Vinny's devotion to his clients and the cause of justice never waivers. The lesson here: Good lawyers are not quitters.

Abraham Lincoln's remarkable journey through a series of setbacks, both legal and political, has been well-chronicled. Another lawyer-President, Theodore Roosevelt, concisely laid down what should be the credo for lawyers everywhere:

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again;

who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

Comb the pages of history and you will find countless examples of lawyers who refused to give up in and out of the courtroom.

2. Cross-Examination Part I

The late Irving Younger secured his position in the pantheon of great lawyers with lectures, books, and articles on all aspects of trial advocacy and evidence. Perhaps his most widely-read article, *Cicero on Cross-Examination*, boldly sets out Younger's "Ten Commandments of Cross-Examination." Hundreds of articles have been written on the subject of cross-examination, but, in my view, no one comes close to Younger in setting out the dos and don'ts of this important aspect of trial practice. Several of Younger's Commandments:

- Be brief.
- Short questions, plain words.
- Never ask a question to which you do not know the answer.
- Minimize the opportunities for the witness to explain.
- Do not ask the witness to repeat the testimony he gave on direct exam.
- Save the explanation for summation.

In my courtroom, I sometimes see lawyers violate Younger's precepts. I have my own theory why: It's Perry Mason's fault. Lawyers of my generation grew up watching Raymond Burr portray Perry Mason, a gravel-voiced, steely-eyed criminal defense lawyer who never lost a case. He usually coaxed a confession out of someone else or revealed the culprit during the preliminary hearing. Sometimes it was the witness on the stand who broke down and confessed; other times it



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was a spectator in the audience. The important point is that this revelation or confession always occurred at the dramatic end of Mason's scintillating cross-examination.

My theory is that lawyers of my generation, who grew up on a steady diet of Perry Mason episodes, earnestly or subconsciously believe that sometime during their careers as trial lawyers, they too will experience the euphoria of a "Perry Mason moment." And they've passed it down to the next generation.

So some of today's lawyers expect, by the sheer force of their abilities as a cross-examiner, to cajole a tearful confession (or at least a valuable concession) from the witness on the stand. As a result, they question the witness endlessly; they allow the witness to repeat the direct testimony that the jury has already heard. They ask a witness to explain. They quarrel with the witness. They ask the one question too many — all in a futile attempt to orchestrate a surprise ending.

Vinny, on the other hand, gets it right. Thanks to writer Dale Launer, we see a textbook example of effective cross-examination. Consider Vinny's cross-examination of Ernie Crane, who lives in the trailer next to the Sac-O-Suds. On direct, Crane had identified Vinny's two clients as the perpetrators he saw fleeing the Sac-O-Suds:

Q. What are these pictures of?
A. My house and stuff.

Q. House and stuff. And uhh,

what is this brown stuff in the windows?

A. Dirt.

Q. Dirt? What is this rusty, dusty, dirty looking thing over your window?

A. It's a screen.

Q. A screen. It's a screen. What are these really big things right in the middle of your view from the window of your kitchen to the Sac-O-Suds? What do we call these big things?

A. Trees?

Q. Trees? That's right. Don't be afraid, just shout 'em right out when you know. Now, what are these thousands of little things that are on trees?

A. Leaves?

Q. Leaves. [Laughs] And these bushy things between the trees?

A. Bushes.

Q. Bushes, right. So, Mr. Crane, you could positively identify the defendants for a moment of two seconds looking through this dirty window [indicating], this crud covered screen [indicating], these trees [indicating], with all these leaves on them [indicating], and I don't know how many bushes [indicating].

A. Looks like five.

Q. Uh un. Don't forget this one and this one.

A. Seven bushes.

Q. Seven bushes. So what do you think? Is it possible you just saw two guys in a green convertible and not necessarily these two particular guys?

A. Well, I suppose.

Q. I'm finished with this guy.

This simple, yet powerful, colloquy drives home a critical point—the witness did not have a good opportunity to see the events about which he testified on direct examination. If this examination were to occur in a real courtroom, some attorneys would not be satisfied with the pithy exchange set out above. He or she would have to further determine the exact dimensions of the window; the method by which the dirt had accumulated on the window pane; the years of exposure to oxidation required for the rust to form on the screen; the leaf formation and shedding process of the trees; the genus and species of the bushes (magnolia japonica or magnolia grandiflora?); and the distance, to the nearest inch, from the house to the convenience store. All of this detail, at best, would likely diminish the significance of the cross examination and, to make it worse, waste time, annoy the jury, and completely undermine the central point to be made by the cross examination.

3. Cross-Examination Part II

One important aspect of cross-examination that Younger did not teach is the fact that not all adverse witnesses are created equal. And different witnesses call for different approaches to cross-examination. Vinny obviously recognizes this as he deftly takes on two additional eye witnesses to the crime.

The first, Constance Riley, an elderly African American female, is a vulnerable and quite loveable individual. She clearly has no agenda and merely recites what she believes her 80-something-year-old eyes saw on the day of the crime.

Recognizing that a confrontational approach to cross-examination will be counterproductive with such a sympathetic witness, Vinny is the

perfect gentleman on cross. He helps the witness with her glasses. He asks her when she last had her prescription checked. And he performs a simple in-court experiment that clearly shows that the witness's vision is impaired. Then, rather than going in for the kill, Vinny simply shrugs his shoulders and asks, "Whatdayathink?" She replies, quite softly and apologetically, that she needs a new pair of glasses. Vinny's approach is genuine—as though he was casually speaking with one of his mother's dearest friends.

Contrast that with Vinny's approach when cross-examining Sam Tipton, the grits cook. Tipton is a burly, gruff short-order cook who yearns to do battle in the courtroom. And Vinny obliges him. Catching the flaw in his timeline, and drawing upon recently-acquired knowledge of how long it takes to cook regular (i.e., non-instant) grits, Vinny carefully locks him into his timeline and then exposes the fallacy of the witness's recount of the critical events.

Trial advocacy professors refer to this as the "pin" and the "pounce." You *pin* the witness to his story, lock him in good to what he has said, and then you *pounce* on the flaw you have demonstrated.

When Tipton sticks steadfastly to his story, Vinny waltzes around the courtroom asking the witness if the laws of physics (as applied to boiling water for grits) will "cease to exist" on his stove. For good measure, he asks Tipton if he bought his grits from the same fellow who sold Jack the magic beans for the beanstalk.

During the critical part of Tipton's cross, Vinny employs a tried-and-true courtroom tactic: As the damaging admission is coming from Tipton's lips, Vinny deliberately walks away from the witness, so that Tipton is looking at, and speaking to, Vinny's back. Vinny then turns and says, "I'm sorry, I couldn't hear that last answer. Would you please repeat it?"

The point is, Vinny could get away with bare-knuckled cross-examination with Tipton, but not Riley. And Vinny was smart enough to know that.



Vinny was able to do what good trial lawyers do — think on his feet.

4. Proper Use of Experiential Experts

Ultimately, Vinny wins on the strength of his expert testimony regarding the tire marks left by the culprits as they sped away from the Sac-O-Suds. His expert, however, was not a graduate of the Masters of Automotive Engineering program at the University of Michigan, charging \$800 per hour. Nor did the expert have an extensive record of testifying in high profile trials. Rather, Vinny calls upon his initially reluctant fiancée Lisa, who is allowed to testify, not based upon her educational achievements or her litigation pedigree, but instead upon her experience "rebuilding trannies" and such at her father's garage.

In 1999, the Supreme Court held in *Kumho Tire Co. v. Carmichael* that the nuanced approach for determining the admissibility of scientific expert testimony it had laid down in 1992 in *Daubert v. Merrell Dow* applies to nonscientific, technical expert testimony as well. And, these technical experts may qualify as experts without a Ph.D. after their name—experience in the field is sufficient. In *Kumho Tire*, the expert's credentials were his "long experience working for Michelin."

Before *Kumho Tire*, some had argued that *Daubert*, with

its nonexclusive list of factors to be applied by trial judges as gatekeepers to carefully regulate what expert testimony the jury gets to hear, should be confined to scientific testimony and not to more mundane technical matters such as tire pressure and so forth.

Alert moviegoers — those who watched *Mona Lisa* deliver her compelling testimony seven years earlier — already knew this.

In short, Vinny teaches us that expert testimony can often be a game-changer at trial, and that even an out-of-work hairdresser, given enough experience in the repair shop, can opine on such things as positraction and limited slip differentials as compared to solid axles (and the tracks they leave on the pavement).

5. Ability to Modify Trial Strategy

Vinny's defense is that his two clients are victims of one of the most improbable coincidences imaginable: Immediately after Bill and Stan leave the Sac-O-Suds, the real culprits—who look much like Bill and Stan—arrive at the store driving exactly the same car (presumably a 1964 Buick Skylark convertible with metallic mint green paint), driven by Bill Gambini.

On the third day of trial, however, as Vinny peruses one of the many crime scene photos that Lisa has taken, he notices something peculiar about the tire marks left on the pavement by the car of the fleeing murderers. Although the car rode the curb for a distance, both tire marks are the identical width. This indicates that the getaway car had positraction and independent rear suspension—features that the '64 Skylark did not have.

Upon discovering this significant piece of circumstantial evidence, Vinny quickly modifies his theory of the case: The culprits were driving a General Motors automobile, metallic mint green in color, but not a Buick Skylark. Then, when Lisa dazzles the audience with her knowledge of 60s-era General Motors products, it becomes clear that a '63 Pontiac Tempest, not a Buick Skylark, left the tire marks in front of the Sac-O-Suds.



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Vinny was able to do what good trial lawyers do—think on his feet. Although Vinny’s change of plans was brought about by a more careful examination of his own evidence, more often, the issue of changing trial strategy arises when your opponent does something you did not expect. In either event, you must be able to adapt at trial.

No trial ever follows a prepared script. In the give-and-take of trial, the ability to abandon some plans and to modify others is critical. You must be able to deal with unexpected situations, just as a military officer must adjust to the vicissitudes of war. As Eisenhower said, “Battle plans are fine—until the battle starts.”

Thorough preparation and a reasonably high confidence level will equip you with the mental tools to deal with the inevitable surprises of trial. Recognize the possibility that something could go horribly wrong, and preconceive how you could effectively handle such contingencies. An exercise that may help you prepare for the unpredictable vagaries of trial is to vet your case with your associates, family, friends—anyone who will listen. Tell them that you don’t want platitudes about your case—you want them to attempt to tear your case apart.

Frequently, lawyers fail to heed subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) hints from the judge, both while arguing motions before the judge and when presenting a case to the jury. In motions practice, judges sometimes directly or indirectly indicate that they may be willing to reach the

result that the party seeks, but by a different route. Good lawyers pick up on these hints.

Similarly in jury trials, attorneys sometimes seek to introduce a piece of evidence under one theory, but the judge suggests that another argument might be the basis for a favorable ruling. It is surprising how frequently attorneys remain wedded to their initial approach and ignore or cavalierly discard the judge’s attempt to throw them a lifeline. Of course, in many instances there may be a quick and definitive answer as to why the judge’s proposal will not work, and my sense is that lawyers sometimes shy away from responding directly for fear of alienating or embarrassing the judge.

Quite to the contrary, most judges appreciate if the lawyer candidly indicates why the judge’s proposed course of action is not feasible and then returns to his or her original argument. This is preferable to leaving the judge wondering why the lawyer has not pursued his suggestion.

6. Keep Your Ego in Check

As the trial begins, Vinny is the prototypical wiseguy from Brooklyn. He scoffs at Lisa’s attempts to help him. He uses profanity in his opening statement (“Everything [the prosecutor] just said is bulls..t!”) He repeatedly lies to the judge. He does a victory dance of sorts when he coaxes favorable information from an early witness. In other words, he is a know-it-all. Inexperienced as he is, he thinks that he alone has the

formula for success at trial. And that formula includes being overly hostile to the other side.

But as the trial moves along, an amazing metamorphosis occurs. Vinny comes to realize that Lisa’s assistance is not only helpful, but essential. She takes the all-important photograph of the tire marks. She schools Vinny on criminal discovery obligations.

While this is happening, the prosecutor, Jim Trotter III (Lane Smith), is giving Vinny lessons on civility. Although he strikes hard blows in the well of the courtroom, Trotter eases up after adjournment. He offers Vinny his hunting lodge so he can get some sleep away from the nightly train. He takes Vinny hunting. He turns over his investigative file as soon as Vinny mentions it. He graciously discusses his career path and the practice of law in his community generally with Vinny during idle moments during the pretrial proceedings.

In short, the trial is a transformative event for Vinny. By the time the case is dismissed, Vinny has come to realize the importance of relying upon capable assistants. He has also learned that lawyers can be adversaries and colleagues at the same time. After his surprise victory in the courtroom, Vinny doesn’t gloat. Instead, he shakes hands with his opponent and with the judge who jailed him twice.

Just as Vinny was able to adjust his legal defense as the case progressed, he was able to overcome his bullheadedness about the practice of law and life in general.

The fact that we at the bar have a law license hanging on our wall does not mean that we have a monopoly on wisdom. We must constantly be on guard to keep our egos in check. It has been said many times by many people that you never stop learning. Good lawyers should always be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things.

In the process, we should appreciate that assistance provided by junior partners, paralegals, and our spouses or significant others. And win, lose or draw (mistrial), always practice civility in the courtroom. Shaking hands with your opponent following a hard-fought

trial used to be a standard ritual of trials in America. We don't see that gesture enough anymore.

7. A Life Outside the Law

At the risk of sounding politically incorrect, I am compelled to repeat Justice Joseph Story's nearly two-century-old admonition that "[T]he law is a jealous mistress." I can say from personal experience that a career in the law can be all-consuming if you let it.

Midway through the movie, we learn that Vinny seems to have the work/life balance thing worked out. He has a hobby—magic and card tricks. He also has a passionate and enduring, albeit combative, relationship with Lisa.

Every lawyer should have an avocation—something of interest totally unrelated to the law, and about which he or she is truly passionate.

Having a life outside the law can actually make one a better lawyer. It makes for a well-rounded individual who can relate to those 12 ordinary lay citizens in the jury box who will decide your next case.

I read somewhere that many people spend the first 90% of their life working to make a lot of money. They do so at the expense of their health. Then, for the last 10% of their life, they spend all the money they've made trying to get their health back.

Do not be consumed by your work. Take time to exercise and be mindful of your mental and emotional health. Spend adequate time with your family and remember—you won't get a second chance to go to those dance recitals and little league ball games.

8. Have a Mentor

Midway through the movie, we learn that Vinny has latched onto a mentor—Judge Malloy, who is back in Brooklyn. Vinny represented himself in a traffic case before Judge Malloy and won. Impressed with Vinny's tenacity and relentlessness, the judge invites Vinny to lunch and encourages him to go to law school. And it's obvious that the two have remained friends.



*Both in life and
in the courtroom,
lawyers should be
promise keepers.*

The concept of mentoring is as old as the classical Greek philosophers. They considered wisdom to be one of the most important virtues, and many spent their lives passing along experiences and ideas to younger associates who, in turn, did the same for the next generation.

Mentoring for lawyers is a centuries-old part of our profession. It was not that long ago that lawyers could bypass the traditional bar exam, or even law school, by serving an apprenticeship with an established law firm. The English Inns of Court employed this practice.

In recent years, the professional bar and our law schools have recognized the value of more structured mentoring programs. These programs have proved quite valuable in helping fledgling lawyers navigate the rigors of the law school process, and in helping them understand the obligations of civility and professionalism that are a central obligation of our profession.

If that's not enough, the South Carolina Bar recently instituted a mandatory mentoring program for first-year attorneys. Still in its infancy, the Bar's program has been well-received by novice attorneys, as well as seasoned lawyers.

9. Pro Bono Activity

Jonathan Lynn has noted that *My Cousin Vinny* reverses the traditional stereotypes: Vinny, Lisa, and Bill are all blue-collar New Yorkers. The Southerners in the movie, on the other hand, are not ignorant country bumpkins. Instead, they are generally well-to-do and appear to come from old money. Judge Chamberlain is a Yale Law graduate who plays chess. The prosecutor, Jim Trotter III, is a well-dressed gentleman who gave up a lucrative law practice to become a prosecutor. In scenes that were deleted from the final cut, we would have learned that Bill's father is deceased, and his mother, who is very poor, suffered a heart attack and cannot, for that reason, attend the trial.

So there is no scene in the movie where Vinny and Bill discuss a fee. It's clear, therefore, that Vinny is setting an example for us all when he takes the case pro bono.

Those of us fortunate enough to practice law are enormously privileged. We have the opportunity to participate in the administration of justice in the greatest democracy the world has ever known. We may not get rich, but we are generally assured a comfortable standard of living.

We have all been warmed by fires we did not build. We have all drunk from wells we did not dig. We have stood on foundations we did not lay. In other words, there comes a time for all of us in the law to give back.

The price of privilege is duty. Throughout our careers at the bar, we should always be mindful of the needs and troubles of those on whom fortune has not smiled.

What better way to do so than drafting a will, reviewing a contract, writing a letter, or even handling a lawsuit for those who cannot afford legal services.

My friend William Hubbard, immediate past president of the American Bar Association, speaks powerfully of the large and growing "justice gap" in America, with studies showing that as many as 80% of the poor, and between two-fifths and three-fifths of those

of moderate means do not have meaningful access to our civil justice system. At least one party is self-represented in three-fourths of the civil cases in the state courts of the United States.

10. Keep Your Promises

Vinny has promised Lisa that they will marry after his first courtroom victory. As they are leaving the courthouse, Vinny suggests that they get hitched the following weekend. Lisa will have none of that. After reminding him that he would not have won without her assistance, she reaffirms her plans for a full-blown wedding gala, complete with bridesmaids and a sit-down dinner. As the car speeds off over the rolling red clay hills of Alabama, with Travis Tritt in the background singing *Buckle of the Bible Belt*, Vinny just smiles, and the audience has no doubt that he will keep his promise.

Both in life and in the courtroom, lawyers should be promise keepers. As one scholar noted in 1989, “Credibility with the judge handling your case is the most precious resource in your satchel, and one of the most fragile.” Change the reference from satchel to tablet and the advice is still good. The same is true with opposing counsel and your client.

That’s 10. I rest my case. Although Vinny committed several *faux pas* and technical errors, he gives trial lawyers 10 skills to emulate. And Jonathan Lynn and Dale Launer have given our profession a wonderful teaching tool while producing a gem of a movie that gives the public at large renewed faith in the common law trial and the adversarial system as the best way to determine the truth and achieve justice. ■

Judge Joseph F. Anderson, Jr., is an Article III federal judge on senior status for the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina. He joined the court in 1986 after being nominated by President Ronald Reagan. On November 16, 2014, Anderson assumed senior status. He is a past contributor to VOIR DIRE.



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Postscript: Vinny Trivia

1. In the original casting proposals, Danny de Vito was to play Vinny; Geena Davis to play Mona Lisa; and Will Smith to play Rothenstein. NOOOOO!
2. Dale Launer and Jonathan Lynn did their homework. Before writing the script, Launer rented a car in New Orleans and set out on a tour of several deep-South states to get ideas for the movie. Not surprisingly, he experienced many colorful episodes, some of which made it into the movie. Included among those were getting his car stuck in red mud; the piercing cry of a screech owl, and (of course) grits on every restaurant menu. He also talked with a prosecutor in Butler, Alabama whose persona showed up in Jim Trotter III in the movie. Prior to shooting the movie, Lynn traveled to Monticello and watched an actual trial to better equip himself to direct the movie. The case was a murder case with an African-American defendant and a nearly all-white jury. The jury acquitted, giving Lynn a degree of skepticism about what he had heard about Southern justice. Also, Lynn was fascinated to observe what occurred at lunch each day: The lawyers on each side of the case, along with the presiding judge, sat down at the counsel table in the courtroom and enjoyed a lunch consisting of sandwiches and beer (yes, beer). Lynn thus got a quick lesson in civility, observing that in America, lawyers can be fierce advocates in the courtroom and still remain friends. Also, at the trial, Lynn heard two remarks by the prosecutor that found their way into the movie. One was the pronunciation of heinous (“high-_-nus”), and the other was a reference to “our little ole ancestors.”
3. When Lynn and Joe Pesci were prepping the film at the Mayflower Hotel in New York, Pesci actually used the phrase “these two youtes” in the conversation. Lynn recalls that he and Pesci had a back and forth about “What’s a ‘youte’?” Lynn instantly realized their conversation had to go in the movie.
4. There was almost a sequel. Depending upon whom you ask, the sequel was vetoed by Pesci, Tomei, or the studio. Probably just as well—I have the feeling no sequel could have come close to the original.
5. The prison scenes were shot inside an actual prison in Gainesville, Georgia, complete with its own death row wing. Real prisoners played the extras.
6. Lines from the movie continue to pop in popular culture. At a 2015 news conference to defend his players accused in NFL’s “deflate-gate” scandal, to explain that he knew little about football air pressure, New England Patriot’s Coach Bill Belichick suggested: “I am not the Mona Lisa Vito of the football world.”

Footnote:

The author has been a federal trial judge in South Carolina for 30 years and is the owner of the world’s largest collection of Vinny memorabilia, including the sign above the Sac-O-Suds gas pumps and Judge Chamberlin Howell’s gavel.