



THE **VOICE** OF
THE **CRIMINAL**
DEFENCE BAR

MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

INTRO :

Member Name : Naomi Sayers

Year of Call : 2018 (ON); 2020 (AB)

Twitter Handle: @kwetoday

LinkedIn Page: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/naomisayers/>

Photo (credit to fellow lawyer, Anna Toth)

QUESTIONS :

1- How did you get into criminal law?

I studied criminology in undergrad and enjoyed my classes. I also had been doing law reform in criminal law and policy prior to law school. I also did an internship with Michael Spratt; I was still on the fence about criminal law at that time though. During my articles at Hydro One, some of the files did have a criminal law element. This was mostly around seizure of assets from the proceeds of crime as sometimes people steal electricity to facilitate their underground escapades. That is the context and I enjoyed working on files with criminal law element. I left Hydro One in 2019 and moved back home and empaneled by the LAO in March 2020. I have since advised individuals under

investigation, charged/arrested or seeking information about their rights as a complainant. No special story – I just left the big city and I started my own practice.

2- What type of cases do you enjoy defending the most and why?

The files I enjoy the most are ones where I can help the client receive an outcome that also positively impacts their own journey, whatever that means or looks like to them.

3- How did the practice of criminal law change you?

Being an Indigenous woman with sex trade experience, I am already well aware how police target and surveil certain groups (I've been on the receiving end of such surveillance as a sex worker). I have also been bullied and targeted by police including as a professional woman. When clients come to me and tell me that they are experiencing something similar, I believe them. Often times, their defence is their only chance to humanize their story. I am not sure if the practice of criminal law has changed me; having sex trade experience and being in the situations I have been, I have seen and heard a lot of things.

4- If there is one thing only you would like to see change in criminal law, what would it be?

There could be better public education about the role of defence lawyers (and prosecution) in the criminal law context. The public is confused about the role of each.

5- What advice would you give to your younger self when you first started practising criminal law?

Start earlier and as always, charge more ;)

6- How do you deal with bad work days?

I run. I also quit drinking because when I looked around at the people I looked up to, they always talked about their day and how they unwind. They didn't drink. I was also inspired by dad who passed away and quit drinking for us (me and my three sisters) as well as my younger sister who also quit drinking. I don't judge others who drink; it's just not for me. I usually call fellow lawyer-friends too.

7- What do you think of Zoom court?

For many, court is quite a distance away. Clients can now complete some matters over zoom. I think this is huge: Courts being able to accommodate the public that they serve in a way that provides dignity to people who otherwise would be told to figure it out on their own. I believe, however, if someone wants to come in-person, that the options should be made available.

8- Any embarrassing court story you're willing to share?

Zoom court is so awkward. It's always awkward for me and I am sure I am just internalizing my own insecurities. I don't have any particular embarrassing story; I am always awkward.

9- Who is your role model/inspiration in criminal law?

All my former lawyers: a current Justice, Chris Dobson, Ian Smith and Amy Ohler. Also, Shaunna Kelly, Neha Chugh, Anita Szigeti and Jennifer Tremblay-Hall. So many inspiring women!

10- What's your favourite song?

Quiet Storm - Mobb Deep

11- How do you maintain work life balance and how do you deal with the stress of the job?

I run and I don't drink anymore. Drinking messed up my sleep and anxiety. Running also saved my life - I was hit by a car and almost died when I was younger and as a result, could no longer do boxing or the archery that I was doing (because of my injuries) at that time. The only thing I could do was running to navigate my new life with a brain injury.

12- What is your biggest legal inspiration?

My mom and my dad (RIP to my dad). They don't / didn't put up with BS and they raised me and my sisters, who also work in other regulated professions or industries. My mom also filed a complaint against our elementary school because one of the teachers called another student a "Stupid Indian." As Justice Jessica Wolfe said, "There is strong. Then, there is Indigenous woman strong."

13- What do you do outside of the law?

I love the summer months - going swimming, jumping off cliffs, kayaking, camping (I can start a fire without a match/lighter! lol), and fishing.