



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

### MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

#### **INTRO :**

**Member Name :** Stephanie DiGiuseppe

**Year of Call :** 2011

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#### **QUESTIONS :**

##### **1- How did you get into criminal law?**

I won an award in my high school law class and the prize was a set of books. The books covered a variety of areas of law, but it was the ones about Canadians who had been wrongfully convicted of serious crimes, like *Until You Are Dead* (Steven Truscott) and *Redrum the Innocent* (Guy Paul Morin), that really peaked my interest.

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

My favourite types of cases to defend are ones that raise a novel legal issue or otherwise provide an opportunity to get creative. Ironically, I think that means I enjoy the tough cases the most – the ones where the law is against you but the equities are on your side, so you have to try to change the law.

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

That's an interesting question, because I want to answer "in many ways, and not at all." Being a criminal lawyer is an important part of my identity. At the same time, I have always believed that the best way to practice is by being yourself, within the context of the work you are doing. I hope that throughout my practice, I have maintained the fundamental aspects of my personality, my belief system, my sense of humour, and all the things that make me, me.

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

I would like to see the criminal law used much more sparingly and for our government to develop alternative systems to deal with social problems. So I suppose what I wish the most is that my own industry would shrink dramatically? Defence lawyers are strange creatures, we are constantly advocating for reforms that are diametrically opposed to our financial self-interest.

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

Learn the business side. It's the key to independence.

## **6- How do you deal with bad work days?**

I complain about it to the people in my support system, and then I move on. It must be my Catholic upbringing, but my process for coping when things go wrong is very confessional in nature.

## **7- What do you think of Zoom court?**

Meh. Though the “dress-pants optional” part is kind of nice ;)

## **8- Any embarrassing court story you’re willing to share?**

Sure. A few years ago I was arguing an appeal before the Court of Appeal. It was a significant appeal with many counsel and a packed gallery. Half way through my submissions, I realized that I could not pronounce the word “contemporaneity.” I could hear it in my head, but I just couldn’t get it through my lips. In my own – rather colloquial – way, I took a pause in my submissions to explain to the panel what was happening and we all laughed. Justice Watt, quite kindly, suggested that everyone call it “same timedness” from that point forward. So it was horrible for about thirty seconds – and those seconds felt like forever – but, once again, that confessional inclination kicked in and made it better.

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

There are so many lawyers I look up to and admire. I’ve been fortunate to get to work closely with two of them and have learned a great deal through those experiences. The first is Dirk Derstine, who taught me more about evidence, advocacy, strategy and professionalism than I can ever hope to remember. The

second is Clayton Ruby. Clay's skill, diligence, ingenuity, integrity and kindness inspire me every day.

#### **10- What's your favourite song?**

Anything Taylor Swift.

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

I use a variety of time management systems that are very boring. But the most important aspect of maintaining work life balance and managing stress, in my experience, is learning how to "turn off mentally" when you are not working. I speak to a lot of law students who tell me that they are interested in criminal law, but are concerned that they wouldn't be able to separate their work from their life. It's important for young lawyers to understand that this is actually a skill you build over time. You should not expect to have it on day 1.

#### **12- What is your biggest legal inspiration?**

Again, it's difficult to choose one. I am perpetually inspired by advocates who ignore established ways of doing things to chart their own course. I love to think about the way Clarence Darrow modernized the jury address to focus on the humanity of accused persons and the larger philosophical underpinnings of the justice system. I am in awe of the way Johnny Cochrane flipped the script at the O.J. Simpson trial. My style is nothing like Cochrane's, but I look to it as a masterful example of a defence lawyer taking control over the narrative of a trial – taking that power away from the prosecution – and then reshaping the narrative to serve his client's interests.

### **13- What do you do outside of the law?**

These days? Play with dolls, construct elaborate forts, complete art projects, go on bike rides, and play with toys. We're really into Playmobil right now.

But seriously, family, friends, cooking, travel (in the before-times), reading, and creative writing are all large parts of my life. Oh - and along with my legal partner Annamaria Enenajor, I run a not-for-profit organization called Cannabis Amnesty.

### **14- What would your defence bar colleagues be surprised to learn about you?**

In my alter ego as a Director at Cannabis Amnesty, I am responsible for running our advocacy-based corporate partnerships. I have been a part of creating a t-shirt capsule collection in collaboration with a fashion designer, creating branded product lines, and even driving a truck across Canada to get signatures on our pardon petition (on a macro level, I did not actually drive the truck). So, I have this random second "job" - essentially in marketing and advertising. And I actually really enjoy it.