



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

MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

INTRO :

Member Name : Tonya Kent

Year of Call : 2016

Twitter Handle: @tonya_ck

LinkedIn Page: None – I never saw the appeal, but maybe I will soon

QUESTIONS :

1- How did you get into criminal law?

I have always been a people person, so I always wanted to practice law that involved real people and their lives – I walked into law school thinking that I would either get into family law or be.....a Crown (I know, I know, that thought was long gone by 2nd year) – I took a fair amount of criminal law related courses that had me set on practicing in the defence bar. One of the most memorable being “Prison Law and Human Rights” taught by Professor (now Senator) Kim Pate. I learned a lot through that course about criminal law, the people that stuck in this system and why

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

This sounds terrible, but I love the cases with juicy facts and complainants – there’s so many ways that the case could go, as complainants are unpredictable, but I like it and really feel like I

have to be on my A game at all times. I like being kept on my toes in this context.

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

I think that the practice has made me much more skeptical of the police. I always have been skeptical of police generally, but I think the practice has made me even more skeptical if that was possible

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 our system rely on more rehabilitative aspects – almost all of the time, people’s involvement in the system have to do with societal issues. If we fix those, we would have fewer people committing offences. The focus on imprisoning people is a lot of the times non-sensical because issues such as poverty, addiction, or abuse are never going to be rectified by putting someone in prison

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

No matter what, take the time to read all the new cases that come out of the Court of Appeal and the SCC every week – you will be a better lawyer for it

6- How do you deal with bad work days?

I have a WhatsApp group with some friends that I used to work with and we all vent to each other about bad days, so it’s therapeutic and allows me to speak to people who all get it – I also like to browse Tik Tok for mindless humour that allows me to forget about work – I also have an obsession with telenovelas and drug cartel shows, so I’ll watch those in my free time

7- What do you think of Zoom court?

I think it is useful for set dates and JPTS, however I am not a fan for prelims and trials – I think there’s too many things that can go wrong and frankly believe that matters, especially involving civilian complainants should be in person – not a popular opinion, I know, but I think as long as we have ZOOM for trials and prelims, we will always have pressure to “just agree” to ZOOM because it’s “easier”. A lot of the time, the “easier” is not in reference to our clients, who in my

view matter the most, since it is their liberty at stake.

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

HA! So, I remember, I was in my first few months of practice at my firm and I was assigned to "361". Please note, I had articulated in Brampton (never appeared in Toronto courts), so Superior Court was referred to as Superior court. So, a court being called "361" didn't indicate to me Superior Court. So, I was assigned to a set date at "361" and I went in my normal business attire. So, I'm walking around and notice all the lawyers are wearing their robes. In my mind, I was like, "that's weird, why is everyone in their robes for regular court?". I keep seeing more and more of these people and then I'm realizing that maybe what I'm doing doesn't make sense. So, finally, a lawyer that I had normally seen around Brampton was like, "where are your robes?". My face dropped. I don't think I even said anything, I just ran back to my office and ran around asking lawyers if they had extra robes. Thankfully, one of the more senior lawyers allowed me to borrow his robes and I dressed and ran back (because of course I didn't realize there was a changing room in the courthouse). Did I mention it was AUGUST, so by the time I have the robes on and get inside to the assignment court, I am SWEATING. Like, literally sweating bullets. The lawyer who had initially told me was just laughing and clearly I looked like I had just blown into the court, disshelved and sweaty. It was an embarrassing day and lesson learned that "361" is Toronto's Superior Court – where you need your robes.

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

I'm too embarrassed to name anyone – but they know who they are. These two people are mentors that I am able to literally call/text at any time to either vent or speak to about my goals in starting a practice – They're both amazing mentors and both people I look up to in regard to being an exceptional lawyer

10- What's your favourite song?

If you would believe it, I don't have Spotify, so I just listen to music I've had since high school that I have downloaded onto a USB in my car – so I don't really listen to recent music. I had a friend who was horrified that I was listening to music off of a USB tell me I need to get Spotify ASAP, so that's on my list of to-dos so I could get a favourite song

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

Sadly, I didn't really before, but now I'm much better at it and plan to do a lot of things with my newfound actual work life balance – such as re-start practicing Capoeira (Brazilian Martial Art), work out way more, and hone better cooking skills

12- What is your biggest legal inspiration?

See number 9

13- What do you do outside of the law?

I feel very strongly about reproductive rights and I am on the board of an abortion clinic located in Toronto for almost four years. I am also a mentor in a program for young Black women in Toronto.

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

I'm an extremely picky eater – almost like a child – I generally hide it well, but people who really know me are aware of just how bad it is – also, I have never eaten an egg before – EVER