



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

### MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

#### INTRO :

**Member Name :** Shira Brass

**Year of Call :** 2016

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#### QUESTIONS :

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

I was quite fortunate that I was exposed to criminal law from a young age. My father is a defence counsel so I grew up with criminal “shop talk” around me. Some of the earliest words I probably heard my father say were, “Only give your name, address and date of birth to police. Otherwise, give no statement.” Naturally, after all of that, I had my head set on going into corporate law. However, after my first year of law school, I worked with my father at Brass law Office and knew it was the right fit for me. I’ve been in criminal law ever since.

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

My favourite cases are identity cases. Those require holding the Crown to account for strict proof. They are often quite straightforward: if the Crown cannot prove the identity of the suspect, an accused should be acquitted. They resonate with me in how they relate to our

duties as criminal lawyers, to defend our clients vigorously and avoid miscarriages of justice from wrongful convictions involving mistaken identity.

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

Through practicing criminal law, I've become exposed to the breadth of human emotion, working with people at their highest and lowest points. We are often the main support system for vulnerable people who have faced unimaginable trauma. It has made me more compassionate, patient, and empathetic.

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

A more restorative justice approach and better access to rehabilitative resources through the justice system.

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

Don't be afraid to ask for help! You are not expected to know everything. Though the imposter syndrome may never fully go away, the more experience you get, the more your confidence will grow.

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

When I've had a bad day, I often get fixated on the negative. If results don't go my way, I can get into the habit of blaming myself or negative self-talk. I work through mindfulness strategies to reframe my mindset and practice positive thinking. I also lean on my wonderful support system to help me. They are there for me when I need to vent and have a listening ear or to give me the kick in the butt I need to shift my thinking.

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

Zoom Court is much better than I originally thought it would be, especially for remand Court. From a practical perspective, it's great to be able to appear in remand courts in multiple cities from my desk in Ottawa. It also translates to cost savings for the client, by avoiding the additional travel or agency fees. That said, with zoom remand court, we no

longer have the natural collegial setting of the courthouse to build connections with other lawyers. As well, for certain trials, particularly where credibility is in issue, it is important to retain in-person hearings.

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

When I was a child, I went to Court with my father. He emphasized to me that I had to bow to the judge when I left the courtroom. At the time, I was doing ballet and was taught that men bow and women curtsy. When I left the room, I turned to the judge, crossed one leg behind the other, and gave a nice deep curtsy (my ballet teacher would have been proud!). ...Years later when I returned to the Courthouse after my first year of law school, I was reminded of my curtsy by the clerk who was in the courtroom that day. I've bowed ever since!

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

All the trailblazing female lawyers who paved the way for my generation of female criminal lawyers. These women have shown grit and tenacity, breaking down barriers while skillfully defending their clients. I have benefitted greatly from the mentorship of strong female counsel and continue to be inspired by them.

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

It can be hard sometimes! To maintain a work-life balance, I try working longer hours during the week so I can keep my weekends to myself. Exercising regularly helps me manage my stress. There are times that I have to drag myself to work out, but it is therapeutic, and I feel so much better after. I also make sure to take time to unwind with my loved ones and share at least one laugh a day with them.

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

My clients! They motivate me to work harder and do my best for them.

**12- What do you do outside of the law?**

Outside of law, my favourite thing to do is spend time with my husband, my family, and friends. I also enjoy doing anything outdoors, working out, cooking, baking or just relaxing and watching TV (how many is too many times to re-watch Friends?).

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

- I can solve a Rubik's cube.
- I still haven't seen The Matrix.
- I'm allergic to the cold – literally. I get hives when I'm cold.
- I don't know how to roll my R's