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THE **CRIMINAL**
DEFENCE BAR

MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

INTRO :

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Year of Call : 2021

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QUESTIONS :

1- How did you get into criminal law?

When I started law school, I wasn't quite sure which area of law I wanted to pursue. I knew I wanted to pursue some form of litigation, particularly in an area that was social justice and people centred. I really enjoyed my 1L Criminal Law class. One day, a guest speaker, Amy Ohler, attended our class to discuss her practice. Amy's presentation planted the criminal law seed and the rest is history...



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

I have a mixed trial and appellate practice. Trial wise, probably anything with a juicy Charter issue. Appeal wise, just about anything – the vast majority of defence appeals are dismissed, so to maintain an appellate practice you have to enjoy the process itself [that is largely an uphill, losing battle]: sifting through transcripts, identifying potential legal errors and formulating them in a way that is compelling to the panel.

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

In the first year of practice alone, I think I've certainly become more jaded. It's hard not to be a little jaded when you work with clients day in day out that are largely before the court due to things outside of their control: their race, their socioeconomic status, the lack of mental health and addiction resources, the lack of affordable housing, etc. It has also made me even more aware of the immense privilege I hold as a white, straight, cis- female who grew up upper/middle class.

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

Less pre-trial detention. When someone is in custody, who at that time is purportedly presumed innocent, and they receive a resolution offer that would result in their release, the system has created an incentive for that person to plead guilty simply to be released. I have no doubt that the current state of our bail system is the root cause of the majority of "false" guilty pleas.



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

Maybe ask me in a couple of years... but for now I'm trying to remind myself that every day is a learning opportunity.

6- How do you deal with bad work days?

I am a huge proponent of "treat yourself"! Won a motion? Charges withdrawn? Client released on bail? Treat yourself! Had a bad day? A tough day? A frustrating day? Treat yourself! All jokes aside, if I have a particularly bad work day I try to remind myself tomorrow is a new day but in the meantime I do things that make me happy: go for a walk, listen to music, order my favourite foods for dinner, go to bed early.

7- What do you think of Zoom court?

Like many, I think Zoom court is great for some things and not so great for others. As someone who summered in the pre-covid era, I certainly do not miss driving from Brampton to Milton to Newmarket and ending my appearances at Old City Hall. Zoom allows for counsel, and self-represented accused with multiple charges in multiple jurisdictions, to "attend" multiple jurisdictions in a matter of minutes. I think the increased efficiency and flexibility Zoom court affords is very helpful for set date appearance, Judicial Pre-Trials, bail court (which is by its very nature last minute and unpredictable) and other appearances of that nature.



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For more substantive matters, however, like pre-trial motions, trials and appeals, there are benefits to being in-person. There is no better feeling than being in a courtroom, face-to-face with the judge, a jury, the panel, a witness – whatever the case may be.

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

Not sure it counts as embarrassing, but certainly a weird story. I was reviewing transcripts for an 11(b) application I was drafting. A number of the transcripts were set date appearances I had done as a summer and/or articling student. Despite spelling my name on the record ("L-I-T-T-L-E, first initial "S"), my name was initially transcribed as "Jeannette Law". This happened on more than one transcript. If you ask me, Jeannette Law sounds like the name of a quirky protagonist on a crappy TV law drama. Anyways, now my colleagues and I joke that "Jeannette Law" is my courtroom alter ego haha.

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

Deciding where to start my career was an easy choice, working with Michael Lacy.

10- What's your favourite song?

It's impossible to pick just one. My favourite song changes almost daily based on the mood I'm in and what I'm doing... but my favourite artist is probably Taylor Swift. Whether she's your personal cup of tea or not, it is hard to disagree that she has had the most staying power in the music industry, across 5+ genres, in my generation. My current "get pumped" for court song is "Work Out" by J. Cole though.



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

This is certainly a work in progress and a tough balance to strike. I am a firm believer in taking care of your physical and mental health but this job, particularly in the early stages of your career, is very demanding. I think it's important to work hard and put the time in to do what's best for your clients, but it's also important to set boundaries for your own mental health. If you don't prioritize taking breaks and protecting yourself, your body (and/or mind) will do it for you. I'm still figuring out where those boundaries are...

12- What is your biggest legal inspiration?

My colleagues. Particularly women in criminal defence; they've risen through the ranks at a time that the defence bar was mostly male dominated. They've paved the way for junior female defence lawyers and I'm grateful for the community they've fostered. I'm also in constant awe of women in criminal defence who are also mothers; I'm sure it isn't easy but they're inspiring for doing it anyways. I can hardly take care of my house plants, let alone other human beings.



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13- What do you do outside of the law?

Outside of law I enjoy cooking for my friends and family. I love trying new recipes and pairing them with fun new cocktails. I also enjoy reading all things fiction: thriller, mystery, romance, historical fiction, etc.

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

I don't drink coffee! The last time I had coffee was about 10 years ago – I started having heart palpitations and was sent home from work. Haven't bothered to try it since. You will, however, catch me drinking a London Fog with oat milk on particularly sleepy days.