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DEFENCE BAR

MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

INTRO :

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Year of Call : 2015

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QUESTIONS :

1- How did you get into criminal law?

I went to law school because I wanted to develop tools to fight the injustices I saw perpetrated by inequality and racism in our society. I thought I would become a civil lawyer, suing government or big corporations on behalf of the little guy. In my second year, I became a caseworker at the student law clinic at the University of Windsor. My first client was a young Black man who had been beaten by the police and then charged with assaulting them and resisting arrest. Through the clinic, I was able to consult experts, interview witnesses, gather evidence, and ultimately win his trial—all while still a law student. After that, I was hooked. I will never forget the feeling of walking out of that



courtroom with my client and his family. Criminal lawyering is one of the most powerful ways that we can use the system to help people.

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

Today, my practice focuses on appeals from conviction and sentence to the Court of Appeal for Ontario. Appellate litigation is magnificent. The judges are brilliant; the Crowns are formidable; and the stakes couldn't be higher. Winning a case can mean more than just victory for your client. It can mean that the system as a whole changes for the better. Spending hours poring over transcripts and researching finer points of law might be boring to some, but I couldn't imagine a more fulfilling career.

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

I've become a lot more practical. I still believe in the ideals I held as a law student, but I understand that not everyone will be persuaded by those same values. I have come to learn the language of law, and in speaking that language to deliver results for my clients.



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

I would abolish prisons. They are cruel and monstrous institutions. They do not protect us and do not deter crime. I hope that future generations look back on the institution of the prison with the same disgust and shame as we now look at slavery.

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

Learn to set boundaries now. As a junior lawyer, you feel as though you need to say “yes” to everything and everyone. Senior criminal lawyers, Crowns, judges, clients – the pressure is to make what they want happen. Learning when and how to say “no” is crucial to preserving your mental health and well-being as you make your way through this very challenging area of practice.

6- How do you deal with bad work days?

I unwind through exercise, social time, and video games. Exercise helps me let off steam and build physical resilience. Sharing a bite or a drink with friends helps restore my sense of normalcy after the bizarro-world of criminal litigation. And video games draw



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me into an alternate world where I can escape for a few hours. I am currently obsessed with Baldur's Gate 3 – a fantasy role-playing game where I can protect the innocent and vanquish evil!

7- What do you think of Zoom court?

Depends on the Zoom court. Bail court with dozens of competing unmuted calls and interruptions from unscheduled in-custody defendants is my idea of Hell on earth. A scheduled hearing where the only speakers are counsel and the judge is much more pleasant. Part of why I like litigating at the Court of Appeal!

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

In my very first trial, the one I talked about above, I had these big submissions planned. I walked through mens rea, the reflex reaction defence, and the elements of self-defence in the newly-codified s. 34 of the Criminal Code. The judge patiently allowed me to go through these submissions at length. The Crown then stood up and said "that was all very helpful, but really this case involves a simple application of the rule in W(D)". I remember scribbling on my legal pad – "What is WD???".

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

I find daily inspiration in my two associates, Theresa Donkor and Krisna Saravanamuttu. Theresa is a brilliant researcher and a leading racial justice advocate. Krisna has decades of experience in activism and organizing and relies on that to tirelessly advance



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our clients' interests. Each of them is deeply passionate about criminal defence as a means of helping improve the material conditions of our clients' lives. When I get tired or frustrated, a short conversation with either of them about a case we are working on is enough to re-invigorate me. I am deeply grateful they chose to start their criminal law careers at Rudnicki & Company.