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DEFENCE BAR

MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

INTRO :

Member Name : Marcela Ahumada

Year of Call : 2020

Region- City: Toronto (practicing in GTA and the Northeast region)

Board position : n/a

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QUESTIONS :

1- How did you get into criminal law?

My parents suggested at a young age I would be a great lawyer because ~allegedly~ I would try to talk my way out of everything. In grade school I developed a Law & Order (SVU) obsession and thought criminal lawyers were the only type of lawyers that existed. By the time I got to law school and learned about the diverse types of law, I was too far gone.



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

They are rare but I particularly enjoy defending cases with co-accused because they can be an opportunity to collaborate with other defence lawyers outside of your firm. Working closely with another lawyer throughout a difficult trial – developing strategy, dividing issues, and seeing a different approach – makes you a better lawyer.

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

Practising criminal law brought me closer to my roots in a way I did not expect. I speak Spanish and regularly represent accused persons who are immigrants, do not speak English fluently, have little support in Canada, and are completely overwhelmed by the criminal justice system. Through those clients, I've developed a much deeper understanding of the immigrant experience – including many of the same fears, barriers, and vulnerabilities that families (like my own) face coming to this country.

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

Ontario's continued over-reliance on sureties as a default requirement for release on bail. In practice, the system often places disproportionate weight on whether an accused person has access to stable, financially secure, and socially "acceptable" individuals who are willing to supervise them, rather than on whether detention is actually



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necessary. The result is that release can become less about risk and more about privilege, family structure, or social capital.

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

You are a lawyer, not a magician. You cannot control every outcome, fix every problem in a client's life, or carry the emotional weight of every case personally. Criminal defence requires empathy and commitment but also requires perspective and boundaries to be sustainable over the long term.

6- How do you deal with bad work days?

I try to give myself permission to step away from the law for the evening, if I can. Criminal law can be heavy and I've learned that not every difficult day is made better by continuing to replay it at home. Whether it is spending time with family and friends, exercising, wine or doing something completely unrelated to work, I would rather reset and come back the next morning with a clearer mind.

7- What's your favourite song?

Anything Bad Bunny.



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

I do not think work life balance is something you perfectly achieve every single day, especially in criminal law. For me, it is something you develop over time by learning how to manage stress better, set boundaries where you can, and recognize when you need to step away and reset. The job can be intense, so “balance” becomes less about eliminating stress and more about learning how to carry it in a sustainable way.

9- What do you do outside of the law?

I spend a lot of time with family, friends and my dog, Oscar. I try to do something active every day. Sometimes that's Pilates or weightlifting, other times its walking on the treadmill while watching an episode of trashy reality TV.