

The Not-So Secret Barrister

Waiting inside the Central Family Court on a Tuesday morning at around 9am, my barrister mentor turns to me and simply asks: "so, why do you want to become a barrister?". A million scenarios and different options offer themselves in my brain, but I stay silent. Because, to be frank, I am not certain of it. And, in many respects, it is one of the reasons why I am here, why I want to discover and indulge in the great area that is the law, by seeing it first-hand, without any blinds, hidden facts or closed doors.

Being in a court is a different experience than just reading about individual experiences. From here, you see everything. It fills you with anxiety, as you ask yourself: "is this really what I want to do?", "will I be strong enough to do this?", "will I make it a week without crying about the cases I come across every night?". From here, the screams of parents, children, or lawyers seem much more real, the floating in between hearings seem interminable.

The smell of fresh coffee, tea, sweat, boiled eggs that a social worker just grabbed out of her bag and paper fill the air, and I look around the court. Individuals come in and out of rooms, on the phone, laughing, crying, looking anxious or just perplexed.

The simplicity in which I was simply observing individuals whose lives may change at any moment, whilst having no real impact, was fascinating. And whilst I was waiting patiently for our parties to show, I learned. I learned that the couple sitting next to me were waiting to adopt a child, and that maybe tonight, they would have dinner for the first time as a family. On my left, a father had just lost custody of his four children due to his ever-growing drinking problem. His hands were shaking, and his voice was monotone, as to say, "I knew this would happen and there is nothing I can do now". In the back of the corridor, an elderly woman was inquiring about her late husband's house, and whether or not his will was legitimate. The suits and ties blended into this sea of people who were here for many different reasons, but whose lives would be affected by this very day.

The legal jargon also filled the space: "wills, assets", whilst other, less pleasant terms were present "abuse, rehab, addiction, sex exploitation, death, rape, domestic violence". And in this simple, yet odd moment, I finally found the answer to the question I was asked the previous day. I do not really know why, or whether there's a right or wrong answer, but the reason I want to be a barrister is this: the feeling of being able to guide people through what will probably be the highest highs of their lives, or their lowest lows. Having the opportunity to convey not only my love for the law, but my love for people too.

And if there's anything that this week has taught me, it's that not only I want to be a barrister, but also, that I would be a great one too.

Chloe Ranfaing, winner of the Bar Council's Bar Placement Week 2019 Essay competition (the above text is her winning essay entry)