

5 QUESTIONS WITH KEITH BRUNO

The following is from a recent interview of Keith Bruno for Careers in the Law:

1) What are your responsibilities as a Criminal Law Attorney?

Vigorously defend and protect the rights of my accused clients. There is an inequality of power and material resources in this system. The government has a large staff of lawyers, police and agents, sophisticated crime labs and experts, and a huge budget provided by the taxpayers. This gives them a huge advantage because the legal system is based on the premise that "the whole truth" is presented at the trial. If the defendant doesn't challenge the government's case, or submit its own witnesses, then the jury by default will accept whatever the prosecutor produces. It is my job to challenge all evidence presented and go out and get my own favorable evidence. Then, after all that, convince a skeptical jury that my client, the guy with the tattoos on the side of his head and all over his neck, is not guilty.

1a) in your own practice?

Really the same as the above as I am a criminal lawyer. Still, because I own the practice, my responsibilities are also to make an honest wage so I can feed my wife and two kids, keep a roof over their heads, keep them in school, keep them happy and healthy, etc. I have a further responsibility to my employees and to my reputation. I intend to practice criminal law in Orange County for quite a long time so my responsibilities also include giving back to legal community, and the community at large and in that regard I'm very active in local bar events.

2) What is your work and educational experience?

I've been a practicing lawyer for over six years. I have practiced civil law and criminal law, but I now focus exclusively on criminal law. I've tried over 50 cases to verdict, argued countless motions, filed appeals, etc. I graduated from the University of Maryland and, after that, from the University of San Diego school of law. Took and passed the bar on my first attempt. But perhaps most importantly, the education continues on a daily basis. Attend seminars, lectures, and attend topical discussions with other lawyers to state the cutting edge of my field. This is invaluable and a lifelong commitment.

3) What were the alternative experiences that you had that prepared you for this career path?

I don't know what this means. I suppose that every experience that I have had was an alternative to another experience that I could have had. I have experienced that which I have done and I would not change much. I have known I wanted to be a lawyer since I was six years old and my constant carrying-on disturbed my parents and everyone around me so that I would constantly hear "you're going to be a lawyer."

4) What are your biggest challenges, and what skills and knowledge have helped you the most in your Criminal Law career?

My biggest challenge is fighting the government every day. Fighting the government is as difficult as you probably expect it to be. It is an unmerciful machine. The skills and knowledge that I've developed that have helped me is primarily understanding the human condition and expressing empathy for others. I now understand that alternative explanations exist for the conduct of people and that to understand the conduct helps to understand the person and vice-versa. I relate much better to my fellow man that I did before becoming a criminal defense lawyer. I can identify much more easily with minority groups, the oppressed, or people that the mainstream has cast aside. The practice is allowed me to interact with these people, to shake their hands, to watch them cry in my office or behind bars. I've learned that in the final analysis they have the same hopes and dreams as I do but perhaps they made a tragic mistake or continue to make a tragic series of mistakes that affect other people and themselves. I've also learned that the government to accuse anyone of a crime. Oftentimes, the accused are in fact not guilty of the crime for which they've been charged.

5) Why do you see yourself continuing in this field?

My course of study on a daily basis is drugs, sex, and violence. These are the topics that interesting novels are made of. My job is a novel. I read it, I'm involved in it, but I always go home from it. I view it from a distance. At the end of the day, it can wash off like rain cascading down a mountainside. Although in truth, I carry my client's burdens wherever I go. It is a constant struggle to let go every once in a while. I see myself continuing this field current least 10 years, but who knows? I am always open to change.