

So you want to be a lawyer?

"So you want to be a lawyer?" a question that I have been asked many times.

From the day I finished reading Nelson Mandela's autobiography, "*Long walk to freedom*" whilst I was still in primary school, I decided that I wanted to follow in his footsteps and also become a lawyer. If great men like Nelson Mandela, George Bizos and Oliver Tambo were lawyers, then my 11-year old brain figured out that lawyers are great men, and all those who aspire to be great should pursue a career in law.

The question was frequently asked by my friends and my family, and I always had my standard response. But when the Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Limpopo where I had applied asked "Why do you want to become a lawyer?", for the first time I really had to apply my mind in a broader context. Whatever my answer, I clearly impressed the Dean sufficiently to secure myself a place in the Law Faculty.

And, although I had always relied on Nelson Mandela as my reason to study law I cannot deny that when a lawyer came to the lecture hall and told the first year law students that many of us were there because we drew inspiration from American TV shows about lawyers, specifically Boston Legal and Law and Order that resonated with me too. And he quickly got rid of any illusions we might have had that a career in law is constantly dramatic and exciting.

I have found that the law, justice and freedom is much more complex than I envisioned. The South African legal system is a complex one drawing on our Roman Dutch and English law heritage and taking into consideration our African Customary Law. Law students are rarely exposed to the day-to-day life of lawyers and our view of what lawyers do and what they actually do differ immensely.

We are defenders of a proud profession when we are asked why we want to become lawyers and it is up to us as to what kind of a lawyer we want to become.

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