



Profile of Tom Goudkamp

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As a bewildered law student grappling with first year torts, it would have been great comfort to know that the solicitor acting for Mrs Whittaker – of *Rogers v Whittaker* – had once felt a little bewildered himself.

“My gut reaction was that she [Whittaker] had a very strong failure to warn case. I remember telling her ‘I think we can pin this doctor to the wall,’” says Tom.

“But at that stage I actually had no idea about the law as it applied in England and it wasn’t until I read the relevant cases that I realised I had been a bit cavalier in my advice,” he says.

Luckily for Mrs Whittaker they “ploughed on despite the unfavourable law in England”.

‘Ploughing on’ is something Tom Goudkamp is good at. And his commitment to victims of personal injury has driven him to such lengths as donating a Hawaiian shirt and going ‘undercover’.

“I acted for this 21 year old guy who fell off a balcony while staying at this under 35’s ‘club’ at Kuta Beach,” says Goudkamp.

“So Counsel and I decided to go to Bali to get a feel for the place. We had seen promotional material indicating the whole thrust of the place was to get as drunk as you possibly could and we were concerned because the railing on the balcony our client had been standing on was only up to his shin - more like a tripping device than a railing.

“We wanted to see that for ourselves,” he says, “so we went over there, to this ‘club’ in our beach gear and were coerced into a sculling competition, where we had to scull a whole lot of cocktails. There was this board up on the wall giving details of previous drinking feats. I remember one which, next to somebody’s name, read ‘300 cocktails, 2 spews’- so you can see it was a really choice place,” he jokes.

So while we kept the bar staff occupied we had an engineer go up to the balcony and do a slip test.”

Reportedly the only close call was when the barrister who accompanied Tom almost blew his cover.

“We were incognito, so I was ordering cocktails, but he asked for an English breakfast tea!” says Tom.

Such anecdotes may sound unusual, but then Tom has an unusual back-

ground.

“If my school marks had been better I would have been a teacher,” he explains, “But I couldn’t even get a teacher’s scholarship. So I applied for something different at every university and ANU was the place I got accepted.”

“In those days anyone could go to law school. There were no quotas because they weeded out most people after first year,” he said.

As it turned out, Tom enjoyed studying law and went to extremes to complete the degree.

“My father could only afford to pay my uni fees for first year. So in my holidays I had to go and work on an oil rig just off the coast of Timor as a roustabout,” says Tom, who lists erecting shelves at the National Library, landscape gardening, chipping weeds and guarding political prisoners among the other jobs that financed his law degree.

Today, with his own practice and this array of odd jobs behind him, APLAs NSW President spends his spare time somewhat differently.

“I like to play golf and to spend time with my kids,” he says. Although travelling to exotic or unusual locations for work is not confined to the past.

“Lawyers should not be office dwellers,” says Tom, “It’s best to get out and see people and that often means travelling far and wide.” **PL**