

Damian Beaufls

by Anthony Cheshire SC

Damian Beaufls' surname derives from his New Caledonian French ancestors. He attended a local Catholic school in the south of Sydney and before embarking on a career in law studied an environmental engineering degree at the University of Wollongong.

He only found out that he was a descendent of the Gundungurra people from the Pejar area after he had left school and sometime after his grandmother had passed away:

Initially I found it hard to understand why I had not been told before and it was difficult to connect, or rather reconnect, with my First Nations ancestry. Gradually, however, I came to understand and I am now proud of the journey my family has taken.

He had gone to Wollongong at the suggestion of its engineering faculty and its rugby coach. Following a knee injury, he decided to move to Sydney to support his younger brother with his transition out of home and concentrate on life after rugby. He also became a supporter of the Lloyd McDermott Indigenous Rugby Development Team, participating in coaching camps when he could. He enrolled at the University of Sydney and completed his Bachelor of Laws degree. He received a scholarship from the Bruce Miles Foundation and was a Victoria Gollan Prize winner, awards which were set up to encourage, support and reward excellence in First Nations law students.

It was during that time that he realised that he wanted a legal career and to work in criminal law. In 2009 as a university student he was assisted by the Indigenous Barristers' Trust – The Mum Shirl Fund to attend the National Indigenous Lawyers Conference in Adelaide:

There was only one other First Nations students studying law at Sydney University at the time, but there were many at the conference from all over Australia. I was exposed to different networks of students, many of whom subsequently became lawyers or academics. The talks were informative, but the main benefit was getting out there and meeting people. I was lucky

that I met someone on the plane to Adelaide who was in a similar position to me: it made me feel a little less nervous and self-conscious about attending the conference on my own; and a little bit more comfortable about going. I have



now been back to the conference several times in a number of different parts of Australia and I still have as friends many of the people that I met.

After graduating from the University of Sydney he then obtained a job with Legal Aid NSW:

I was attracted by the social justice of the work and I wanted to work with people from all backgrounds, not just First Nations people.

Whilst working as a solicitor with Legal Aid NSW he also completed a Masters of Law in Criminal Prosecutions at the University of Wollongong.

He participated in the Bar Association mentoring programme, which he found helpful as part of his support network:

A support network is vital. It is having people, not just from a First Nations background, but people you know will help you and upon whom you can rely. It is people who are not necessarily going to be sources of work or people you work with, but someone who you can go to at the end of a bad day, close the door

and sit down and chat to. Even if people don't need to see their mentor very often, the fact that they are there, available and supportive is reassuring and helpful.

About four years ago, having decided that he wanted to explore the idea of going to the Bar, he made contact with Chris Ronalds AO SC:

My biggest fear was that because I did not know many people at the Bar I would end up a bit lost and I wasn't really sure how I was going to make this happen. Chris helped me set up a pathway that would lead to the Bar. She has helped me get here and then survive, at least so far. It is not about feeding work, but about teaching and encouraging. If you give someone a fish, they will eat that night; but if you teach someone to fish, then they will eat every night.

Damian feels that he is now making his way as a barrister. He does criminal defence and

prosecution work and is using his environmental engineering background to specialise in the area of environmental crime. He has also joined the Bar Association First Nations Committee. He is excited by the possibilities that being a member of the Bar presents, not only for himself, but also for the future of First Nations people.

The goal is to get more First Nations people to the Bar. It is going to take a little bit of time to achieve that goal but that I know it is going to happen. If the Bar is to be a representation of the community there needs to be more First Nations barristers here. There are a number hurdles going through school and university even before getting to set up as a barrister and it is a long journey. I do get the feeling though that we are building up some momentum and I hope to continue to be a part of this journey. I want to build upon the great work that has already been done and I'm sure it won't be long before we add a few female First Nations barrister's to our ranks.