

Tom Percy QC



Dolly and Tom (he's the one on the right!)

Born in Kalgoorlie, Tom Percy graduated in law at the University of Western Australia in 1977. His parents owned and ran a pub and he started his studies in French literature, only switching to law to keep his mates company.

For the first ten years of his legal career he practised law in Kalgoorlie. "I wanted to be in the hurly burly where you represented two-up players, crooked horse trainers and brothel madams."

In 1988 he moved to Perth and joined the Bar. Things started slowly at the Bar for Tom – hard to believe with the profile and list of famous cases associated with his name now.

The Beamish and Button appeal cases are perhaps two of the matters for which he's best known. More recently, his work on Schapelle Corby's appeal also saw his name in lights. All three of these cases, like so many in his career, he did pro bono.

In 2002 Tom managed to overturn the 1963 manslaughter conviction of John Button who served time for his girlfriend's hit and run death. In 2005 he managed to have the 1959 conviction of Darryl Beamish quashed. Darryl had been sentenced to death (but was reprieved from hanging) for the brutal murder of Melbourne socialite, Jillian Brewer. Both Button and Beamish served time for crimes they didn't commit and, ironically, both crimes were proved to have been committed by serial killer, Eric Edgar Cooke. These cases shaped Tom's opposition to the death penalty, a matter all Australians found themselves considering with last year's

sentencing to death by the Singaporean court of Australia's Nguyen Tuong Van.

Tom admits he has a passion for justice. "What really terrifies me is an innocent person going to jail. That really is something I lose sleep over. I would think if there was ever such a thing as a guilty person getting off, and I suppose they might have, I've never been able to say definitely that I've ever seen it. But I certainly have seen some innocent people go to jail and that haunts me and that's what keeps me going."

Together with Mark Trowell QC, Tom founded Albert Wolff Chambers in Perth. Tom took silk in 1997 and joined the Australian Lawyers Alliance in 2004. He joined the Alliance because he feels that criminal lawyers should keep pace with the rest of the profession. "We now have so many problems in common with the rest of the profession, particularly with personal injury lawyers. We need to move in a common direction if we are going to fix the complex issues that confront us."

Tom is a lover of cats and horses, grows his own vegetables, and enjoys a good bottle of red. He is also the front man for an Irish band, Gang of Three, writing all the original music for the two critically acclaimed CDs the band has produced. He is also a big fan of football. He has been a director of the East Perth Football Club since 1993, is a member of the WATC, WACA and the Fremantle Football Club.

Tom also has a regular weekly radio spot and has been named one of Perth's most eligible bachelors. ■