



Recently the Bar Association arranged a photograph of the Bar taken on the steps of the Supreme Court, but it was at 1pm on a court day when any self-respecting busy barrister would be unable to attend given court commitments – is it actually just a photo of all those who do not, in fact, do much appearance work? And what is it with the separate photo taken of just the women?

When we heard the call out for barristers' bodies to adorn the steps of the Law Courts building, we were initially alarmed. Was the Bar Association aiming for high art? Was it organising something like a Spencer Tunick mass human installation where the requirement for wigs and gown required little else and a high degree of body confidence? If so, was the Bar Association aware of the risk that tomato soup, as a projectile, presently poses to such installations? The two possibilities combined were enough to turn us off taking part. (That, and the lengthy trial in which we were engaged at the time.) But when we came out, blinking into the sunshine that fateful lunchtime, we saw the (attired) barristers, we saw the bonhomie and we longed to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, something more significant than our quotidian existence, something less soul destroying than the post-lunch court shift of 2#pm to 4 pm which awaited us. In short, we wanted immortality and so, we confess, we photo bombed the shoot for a minute or two.

We still do not know if the photo chosen will contain us or not (and thus our identity shall forever remain a mystery since our absence or presence is conclusive of nothing), but it felt good to be a part of the moment and it felt right that the Bar Association had marked something. What it marked exactly, we remain unsure. The bar's resilience? As a profession we survived COVID-19, we met its challenges and some of us even thrived. Our diversity? Perhaps. Although we cannot help but think that people in years to come will decry how few women and people of colour were represented in the photo notwithstanding the selective highlighting of barristers identifying as female by their own photo shoot. Then again, the curator's plaque to any exhibition of the photo could just explain that it was taken at 1 pm on a court day when any self-respecting busy barrister was unable to attend given court commitments (photo bombers excepted). Perhaps then the viewer will look at the composition of the photo, pause and then nod knowingly before moving onto the soup splattered Whiteley.

The usual anxiety I feel about December increased exponentially when the listing judge decided to set a matter down for the week after the last week of court term. The matter was not urgent and the judge and my silk half joked about sitting on the 25th. While I can handle a hearing in the last week of term, I need that week before Christmas to organise everything: this year it is my turn to host the extended family! Help!

We feel your pain. Unless you have grown up in another faith entirely (and, trust us, as committed pantheists, we have not been spared), Christmas is a mandatory celebration if you have children or family with young children.

There is a touch of Scrooge in the lack of Christmas spirit exhibited by the judge and your silk. But we know that, unlike Scrooge, no change of heart will come to them at Christmas time and yet, they will sit at a table laden with carefully prepared food set amid a beautifully presented and decorated house surrounded by family and friends. They will be pleasantly surprised by the thoughtful presents handed to them and to their family, even where those presents are 'from' themselves.

We doubt they will give any thought to the time and effort devoted to making the festivities about them possible. However, if they did, they might wonder, how did this all come to pass?

Two possibilities present themselves. The first possibility is that little elves did everything. They wrote the present lists for the family, the extended family, the work colleagues and staff, the kids' teachers, their music teachers and the after-school carers. They dutifully sourced, ordered, bought, wrapped and distributed said presents. Other little elves organised menus and grocery lists for the entertaining and hosting. Then, they dutifully bought, organised, stored, cooked and presented the food. Still other little elves cleaned and decorated the house while their little friends sourced, ordered, bought and organised the transport of a live tree and then installed, watered and decorated said tree. The 'little elf' theory is a favourite of small children and toddlers. We assume most adults will discount this possibility almost immediately.

The second possibility is that Christmas 'happens' because actual people make it happen. Sometimes these people are barristers and they do it all while working during the busiest time in the court calendar. We assume most adults will accept that this is more likely than the 'little elf' theory. We also expect that most adults will appreciate that without these culturally significant times of coming together and reflection, society loses the capacity to cohere and reproduce itself and its traditions. This is so whether it is Christmas, Pesach, Eid al-Fitr or Chinese New Year.

So, if the silk and judge wish to work up to Christmas Day, so be it. But if they sneeringly condemn others for not doing the same, we just hope that the elves bring them the Christmas they truly deserve. **BN**