

ANDREW ROW

LEGAL  
DUCKS  
IN A ROW

Twenty-four-year-old Andrew Row talks to Sasha Borissenko about his journey from scraping through high school English to tackling all things law-related

**SINCE REGULARLY** topping law school at university, Andrew Row has clerked for Russell McVeagh and the Supreme Court, he’s volunteered on death row, and now he’s off to Harvard Law School - all of which is a very far cry from the 16-year-old who failed Sixth Form English.

“Other than the fact that my oratory skills were significantly hindered due to a significant stutter/stammer (which still occasionally rears its ugly head in group situations, over the phone, or, more disconcertingly, in moots), I had a rather uneventful childhood growing up in the

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“I went through school as an average student. I was more inclined to the sciences (biology) and social sciences at school (geography and business). Law school was never even on my radar. In fact, it was the opposite of what I thought I wanted to do.

United States and New Zealand.”  
But thanks to a spare slot in his timetable while studying a Bachelor of Commerce at Otago University, he decided to take LAWS101.  
“Despite my English track record at



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school, and to the disbelief of my parents, I signed up. With that, I stumbled into law school.”

It was while residing at the [AR3] hall of residence, Knox College, where he developed an appetite for hard work.

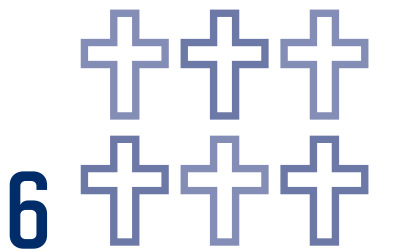
“All the ugly issues with the American criminal justice system rear their head in the context of the imposition of the death penalty - systemic racism, issues with indigent defence, wrongful convictions...”

“Knox was quite a shock. Here I was surrounded by large numbers of head prefects and duxes. As a student with average high school grades and almost failing Year 13 English, I felt like an imposter. This, in turn, led me to knuckle down in my law studies.”

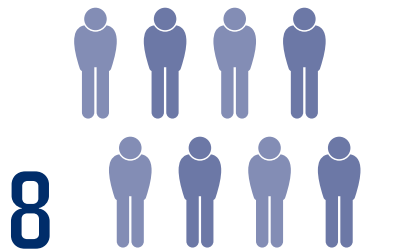
And so it was. He found his niche with the Otago Law Faculty, the law library in particular, which “ended up being [his] second, and sometimes primary, home”.

His hard work culminated in him coming top of his class in first year law. Andrew would go on to gain 12 academic awards, eight for coming top or top equal in a course, and would receive the Otago District Law Society Prize, a prize reserved for the top two students in the graduating class.

## DEATH ROW NUMBERS



6 people have been executed this year already



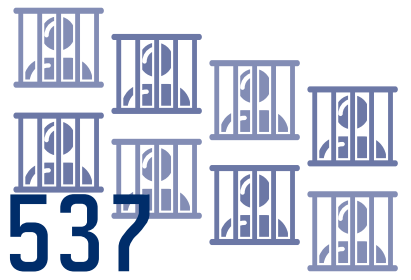
Another 8 scheduled are for this year



1435 people have been executed since 1976



Since 1976, 156 people have been exonerated from death row



While Texas has less inmates on death row than California and Florida, it is by far the leader in executing people. Since 1976, it has killed 537 people. Coming up a far second behind is Oklahoma at 112.



In Texas, executing an individual costs an average of \$2.3 million in legal fees, about three times the cost of imprisoning someone in a single cell at the highest security level for 40 years.

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### Golden notes

But he didn’t keep his hard work to himself. Years later, hoards of random students from various universities continue to message him over social media asking for his notes.

“I often gave them to my closest friends who would then give them to others. They eventually diffused throughout the law school.

“With notes, the true value is in the process, rather than the product. However, if they are helpful to others, then so be it. Given I benefitted from earlier people’s notes, it was only fair I gave mine to other people.”

With their distinctive colourful cartoon characters and bold quotes on the front, Andrew recalls seeing around 30 people in his property exam using them, he jokes.

### Young professional

Andrew set off to work at Russell McVeagh as part of the scholarship programme one summer, before completing his honours year, which focussed on search engine liability for defamatory web pages.

Following university, an opportunity came up to clerk with Supreme Court Judge Hon. Justice Dame Susan Glazebrook, and being his dream job he couldn’t refuse.

“While it was extremely intimidating initially, working one-on-one with one of the pre-eminent legal minds was an absolutely fascinating and rewarding experience,” he

says.

It was the high-level, and often cross-jurisdictional, legal research that spiked an interest in working and studying overseas.

### Across borders

But having a six-month gap between finishing his tenure at the Supreme Court and starting his postgraduate study at Harvard, Andrew thought this would be a perfect opportunity to do something entirely different.

“[After two years] I wanted to contrast my high-level academic research and work at the Supreme Court with legal work at the ground level/coalface.”

He was drawn to volunteering for University of Houston Professor David Dow, founder of the Texas Innocence Network, which campaigns to spare lives of prisoners on death row.

“All the ugly issues with the American criminal justice system rear their head in the context of the imposition of the death penalty - systemic racism, issues with indigent defence, wrongful convictions, mental health issues of defendants, and elected judges who often get elected on their promise of being extremely tough or merciless on crime.

“From the imposition of extremely punitive drug laws to the fact that the death penalty still exists, the United States criminal justice systems illustrates a system that, for the most part, ignores the human ability for

redemption, lacks forgiveness, and is hell-bent on punishing individuals.”

Andrew is aware that the unequal treatment of people in the United States criminal justice system is a serious issue.

“One area where this issue is particularly prevalent is the US death penalty. Among other egregious issues, it is disproportionately meted out against racial and ethnic minorities.

“As one United States Law Professor said to me, the United States is currently undergoing a second civil rights movement whereby harms against minorities that are often latent, committed under the guise of “neutral” laws, and sometimes perpetuated through unconscious behaviour, are rightly being confronted and challenged.”

Coming to the end of his volunteering, Andrew has come away from Texas “truly believing, to use the words of Bryan Stevenson, that “[e]ach of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done”.

### Harvard

Now, he’s set to begin studying towards a LL.M. at Harvard Law School in August.

“Harvard Law School is a crucible of legal thought and I’m looking forward to getting involved with everything it has to offer.”

With an aim to focus on constitutional law, criminal law, and legal theory classes, he hopes that his experiences in both the United States and New Zealand legal system will give him a unique perspective in analysing the constitutional structures and criminal justice systems of both countries.

“I’m also looking forward to experiencing the US college experience. Given Harvard Law School has done away with traditional grades in the hope of reducing competitiveness and stress, I’m to make the most of this and explore New England and the East Coast of the United States.” **NZL**