

legal leaders

A childhood in Africa not only provided Kim Lovegrove with myriad adventures, but also the building blocks for a law firm that gives beyond borders. The principal of Lovegrove Solicitors speaks to **Claire Chaffey**

FOR THE LOVE OF AFRICA

Kim Lovegrove has led what many would consider to be a fascinating life. As the son of a professor based at London University in Zambia, the grandson of an United Nations delegate, and the nephew of an esteemed New Zealand judge who was once a lawyer with the International Labour Organization, it is no wonder that Lovegrove has chosen the path he has.

The principal of boutique firm Lovegrove Solicitors, based in Melbourne on the east coast of Australia, Lovegrove grew up in the midst of family obligations which placed him from his native New Zealand to spend an adventurous childhood in the heat of Zambia, Malawi, Swaziland and Ethiopia. Popped with siblings at schools in England and Australia, Lovegrove's unusual childhood is something which has, to this day, stayed with him in a profound way and shaped the way he now lives and works.

And there is one particular chapter of Lovegrove's childhood which has influenced him more than any other: Ethiopia.

"I developed a particular attachment to Ethiopia because my grandfather had been there as part of UNESCO for 10 years," says Lovegrove.

"This was a pioneer in the sense that when he was in UNESCO he set up a mobile VW Kombi education facility for rural regions. When he left [the country], he was given an official farewell from the last emperor... some-

thing about the place resonated with me more than the other countries."

Lovegrove is now married to an Ethiopian woman and has an 11-year-old Ethiopian son. His firm has recently taken the unique step of forming an affiliation with an Ethiopian firm, and Lovegrove also sponsors an Ethiopian lawyer, Rabele Bahena, to conduct the legal affairs of Hope for the Orphan (HFO), an NGO which cares for children affected by HIV/AIDS.

"Ethiopia... looks after all the legal needs of HFO. These could range from ensuring that a child's inheritance is protected... [to] representing children... who might have been subjected to serious physical, psychological and/or sexual abuse. She deals with all of the manifestations of the legal issues that visit themselves upon orphaned children from an HIV-positive," says Lovegrove.

Lovegrove also has an interest in a company named Cordex, which assists Australian and off-shore contractors and joint venture firms in exploring and developing mining resources in Africa.

But Lovegrove has also achieved great success in Australia, and is undoubtedly one of Australia's leading authorities when it comes to building regulations.

Having initially chosen to become a teacher, Lovegrove completed his law degree while working at a primary school and, once he was

qualified, he landed a job with Lander & Rogers in Melbourne. He quickly worked for so long in which he could develop a niche for himself, and this led to the Master Builders Association where he developed an expertise in construction law.

After stints at several other firms, Lovegrove eventually decided to branch out and open his own firm – a decision which happened to coincide with what he says were "the depths of the early 80s recession".

Despite the economy, Lovegrove's decision appears to have been a good one. The firm is still going strong, with a recognized market expertise in the building and construction space.

This is due in no small way to Lovegrove's long list of credentials in the area, including being the principal legal adviser to the Victorian Government on the development and implementation of the Building Act 1983, heading up the team that developed the National Model Building Act, being first in line as chairman of the Building Practitioners Board (Victoria) and president of the Australian Institute of Building (Victoria Chapter), authored or co-authored some 14 books on construction law, and recently being appointed as Concord Professor, Building Certification and Regulation, at the school of Architecture and Built Environment at the University of New South Wales.

And it is this background in law reform which Lovegrove says has shaped the firm into what it is today, and has given him great professional satisfaction.

"The greatest joy I've had has, without a doubt, been law reform. I have been blessed with the opportunity to contribute to developing the legislative fabric of jurisdictions across the country, with some exceptional results," he says.

"That main policy role is really fascinating and I have been blessed in the sense that lawyers are not often afforded [the opportunity to be able to contribute at the macro level]."

Despite Lovegrove's obvious expertise, he says that the extremely





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legalleaders

High quality of legal services in Australia means he can never get too comfortable.

"We're a boutique, and although we operate in the small to medium to large-end space, we are often perceived above our weight," he says.

"The only way we can compete with the very formidable, large, household name firms is at least by being very, very good. You can never be a third or fourth gear, because if you drop a gear or two, there are two or three firms that are going to be hurtling past in fifth gear."

And in order to retain the firm's relevancy amongst such formidable competitors, Longrove stresses that only the best people work with him. That means finding talent that extends beyond raw technical excellence.

"The only sound naive, but the most important thing is employing good human beings, fine people, with a highly developed sense of doing right," he says.

In addition to that, people (not) have a tremendous pride in the quality of their legal product. So I suppose they've got an obsession with the sense of excellence."

And while Longrove is confident that his team of part-wear and bar-wearers are more than capable of doing the job, Longrove is unlikely to be seeing on his lawn anytime soon.

"The greatest challenge is to continue to stay in fifth gear and ensure that everybody else stays in fifth gear," he says.

"I doesn't matter how good you are, it doesn't matter how good your track record is, or what you've achieved, unless you keep on doggedly working very hard and honing your legal product, perfecting it all the time, you will indeed be overtake in this competitive fabric and the quality of legal product in this country."



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