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# Letters from the Law Commission of Canada

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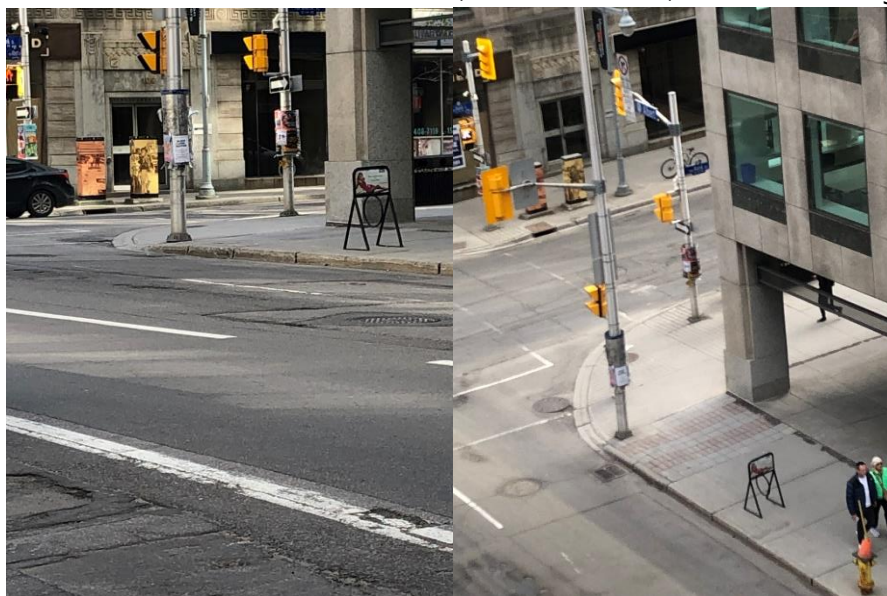
## Letter # 2

23 July 2023

On my walk to work early one morning, I passed a man sitting on a piece of sidewalk that had served as a place to sleep overnight. He was speaking with a woman who seemed to be checking on how he was doing. I overheard a little piece of the conversation. "I've read the law", he was saying. He repeated: "I know the law. I know the law."

On another morning a couple of weeks later, I chatted with the person behind the counter at the place I go for coffee when I take a little break from my overly air-conditioned office in downtown Ottawa. It turned out he was a student interested in law and in going to law school. He had looked up the Law Commission of Canada. There are so many important issues, he observed. "It's great that something's being done about them!"

What does it mean to know the law, to read the law, to do something with and about law? The questions are crucial but complicated. The answers are multi-faceted and complex. Reading rules isn't the same as knowing law. Identifying issues doesn't lead to straightforward problem-solving. At the same time, reading texts is often core to understanding law and listening to stories is fundamental to incorporating law into responsive frameworks for change.



*Intersection seen from outside (left) and inside (right) the LCC office in Ottawa, ON.*

One significant contribution the Law Commission of Canada might make is in generating, supporting, and contributing to the engagements we have within and about law. Who are the "we"? "We" might be holders of law degrees, doing all kinds of jobs associated with being lawyers or jurists. We might be policy-makers, tasked with addressing particular contemporary challenges or with anticipating challenges over the horizon. Alternatively, we might be individuals interested in embarking on the study of the shapes and forms and promises of law. We might be people who want - or indeed need - to be aware of how law intersects with our day-to-day lives.



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As I start to imagine the range and scope of potential conversations about the substance and nature of law in Canadian society, I reflect on law's weaving together of text, stories, and experience. Here I share two recent examples in my life as a law professor, an identity central to my new role of leadership of the Law Commission.

One month ago, I served as a jury member for a doctoral thesis produced by Kathy Bellefleur, a legal scholar now teaching at Laval University, keen to initiate fruitful dialogue across Innu and Quebec civil law traditions. Focused on notions of property, she demonstrates the ways in which stories of interactions and relationships create and sustain the law lived within Innu communities. She finds words to relate what does not exist in texts, while simultaneously working with words carefully selected and placed in the process of codification. At the same time, and extraordinarily, she integrates her own photography into the analysis, revealing her identity as artistic observer, powerful narrator, member of the Innu community, and versatile Quebec jurist.

Two weeks ago, I participated in a workshop that brought together the creativity of contemporary dance and the organized space of a law library. Situated in the Institute for Advanced Legal Studies in London, workshop leaders – dance artist and choreographer, Anna Macdonald, and doctoral student, Amy Preston-Samson - invited participants (legal academics at the very start of their teaching careers) to notice how we read and interact with law books. What do we hear, how do we feel, when and why do we move? Do we notice light and space, feel the heavy burden of work, allow ourselves to find joy? Do we give ourselves enough time to read, do we find a rhythm in reading, do we open ourselves to surprise? Participants moved through and with the books on the shelves; they focused on how, why, and where texts create and shape their engagement with law.

The examples are full of important lessons. Reading law can incorporate insights from dance. Writing about law can include stories and artistic photos. The multi-layered ways in which people think about and experience law in their lives are likely reflected in the multi-layered ways in which law develops and evolves. The homeless person on the sidewalk, the barista in the coffee shop, the photographer, and the dancer: all are potential partners in the work of reading, knowing, and re-forming law.