LCC | CDC
Living Law | Pursuing Justice | Renewing Hope

Letters from the LCC President

by Shauna Van Praagh

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Mid-February in Ottawa marks the end of the National Capital Region's Winterlude festivities. This has been a winter of extended stretches of very cold temperatures, consistently solid ice on the Rideau Canal, and impressive banks of accumulated snow. For some, the bitter wind and the slippery sidewalks have reinforced a sense of hibernation and disconnection. For others, the weather has invited an enthusiastic and determined embrace of winter activity, inspired by our impressive Canadian athletes at the Winter Olympics. While winter can be experienced as a period of severe and sometimes dangerous solitude, it can also hold out an invitation for taking on new challenges and contributing to the building of community.

There are many ways in which we can support each other as we look ahead to the emergence of spring. For the Law Commission of Canada, recent weeks have been dedicated to making meaningful connections within and across communities to which we belong. Like all individuals and institutions, our identity is shaped through interactions and relationships with others. This winter, we have been happy and fortunate to spend time with actors and leaders in law reform, public legal education, research universities, and charitable organizations.

The Law Commission of England and Wales paid a visit to our office at the end of January. Together, the Chair of the Commission, the Right Honourable Lord Justice Peter Fraser, and the Criminal Law Commissioner, Professor Penney Lewis, shared with us the structures and parameters within which their law reform agency works. They noted with admiration the experimentation and creativity associated with restarting the Canadian Commission after 17 years of non-existence; we noted, also with admiration, the stability and confident presence associated with 60 years of uninterrupted operations. There are opportunities and challenges to be found in both histories, and much to learn from open and curious exchange.

In February, the Public Legal Education Association of Canada held its annual conference in Ottawa. Bringing together public legal educators, legal clinic lawyers, people who work to support community organizations and courts, and representatives from different levels of government, the conference focused on exploration and innovation in a time of change. Honoured to be asked to

deliver the opening address, I drew connections between public legal education and responsive law reform, both of which invest in literacy, confidence, and participation related to rule of law. I included in my address the words of one of our Law Commission Fellows, Amélia Souffrant, reflecting on an important lesson learned from her Haitian grandmother: "My grandmother never studied law. She never learned how to read or write. Yet her lived experiences taught her very stark lessons about the rule of law. In what she would refer to as "stable societies", the rule of law is often taken for granted. It is invisible to those who live under it. Only by living through its absence was she able to grasp its value and importance."

Strong links between educators and the Law Commission of Canada, going well beyond formal inclusion at a conference, have been strikingly evident over the past days and weeks. Our "Obiter" podcast released two new episodes, one featuring Duncan McCue's teaching and mentorship of Indigenous journalists, and the second highlighting the leadership of Daniel Jutras, Rector of the University of Montreal, in nourishing the vitality of postsecondary education in Canadian democracy. As the Law Commission visited UQO (Université du Quebec en Outaouais) for our most recent Listen and Learn roundtable, we were inspired by the dynamic and energy-filled projects of members of Canada's youngest university program of legal education. Indeed, Law at UQO started up in 2023, so it will celebrate its third birthday along with the LCC later this year!

Finally, the Law Commission's ongoing project dedicated to Charity in Canadian Law continued to connect us to extraordinary individuals who support communities in a wonderfully diverse range of ways. In a "Charity Discussion Circle' held in Montreal, we met with leaders of Équiterre, Chez Doris, Old Brewery Mission, and Montreal Community Cares Foundation. Throughout an inspiring and intimate roundtable conversation, they shared a truly infectious commitment to positive change – whether by encouraging young people through basketball, providing shelter for individuals and families, or influencing directions in social justice. There are real successes day after day, they told us. At the same time, significant hurdles underscore the need for constant flexibility and resilient collaboration.

These are all ways in which community building has characterized recent weeks for the Law Commission. But the events of one day in Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia, overshadow everything else that has happened in Canada this winter. In the time following the horrific and heart-breaking loss of life at a school where young people should feel safe as they learn and grow,

we have seen and felt remarkable solidarity and support. People have joined together – both in and beyond a small community whose name is now intertwined with tragedy – to remember, mourn, listen, and lean on each other.

The raison d'être of the Law Commission is expressed in three parts: living law, pursuing justice, renewing hope. Tumbler Ridge suggests a reversal of the order. Right now, it seems, renewal of hope belongs right up front. Law will continue to operate in many ways, some of which will be questioned in the months to come, in everyday lives. The pursuit of justice will be woven into ongoing investigation and future action. But it is hope that comes first, hope that feels most important, expressed through pathways for healing, the sharing of stories, and the showing of compassion.

Winter is starting to feel like it is coming to an end. In the Law Commission's hometown of Ottawa, there is an occasional "almost spring" feel to the sunshine. As is the case every year, of course, Canadian crocuses and daffodils will pop up first in British Columbia. As we hold the people of Tumbler Ridge in our hearts, the renewal of spring in the form of tiny bright flowers may offer a fitting way to treasure the warmth associated with coming together, offering support, strengthening community, and embodying hope.