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Letters from the LCC President

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The “Masks of Love”, by New Brunswick poet Alden Nowlan, is a short and striking poem:

I come in from a walk

with you

and they ask me

if it is raining.

I didn't notice

but I'll have to give them

the right answer

or they'll think I'm crazy.

The “I” in the poem is so focused on “you” that obvious things like the weather just don’t register. “I’ll have to give them the right answer”, the poet thinks, to avoid being dismissed as “crazy”. Perhaps even worse than being judged in this way, the inability to answer a simple question might reveal much more than the speaker wants to share. It might be just too difficult for many reasons to acknowledge and articulate the nature of the relationship. The title of the poem directs readers to reflect on the intensity of love. But the month of April can be intense in other ways that demand our attention and curtail our awareness of, let alone interest in, spring showers.

For post-secondary students, the days and weeks of April demand focused study, critical synthesis, and consolidation. This is the time to demonstrate the learning they have done throughout the semester, to show their relationship to the materials with which they have grappled, to share their freshly developed understanding and knowledge. For individuals and families celebrating faith-based holidays in April, the season offers opportunities to reflect on compassion and commitment, freedom and renewal, connection to community and collective movement forward. For Vietnamese Canadians, the month ends with our country’s “Journey to Freedom Day” and its invitation to pause and commemorate the exodus from Vietnam and the welcome of refugees by Canada.

For voters across Canada, April 2025 has been marked by the run-up to federal elections: a period in which to listen and ask questions, to compare party platforms, to watch leaders in action, to imagine the future. In a moment of global uncertainty and turmoil, the election process invites us to contemplate the precious and fragile nature of this and other trustworthy institutions of our democracy. Valuing and securing our relationship to those institutions might help us avoid getting



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damp, soaked, or even drenched in what can feel this spring like a torrential downpour of relentless news items and announcements.

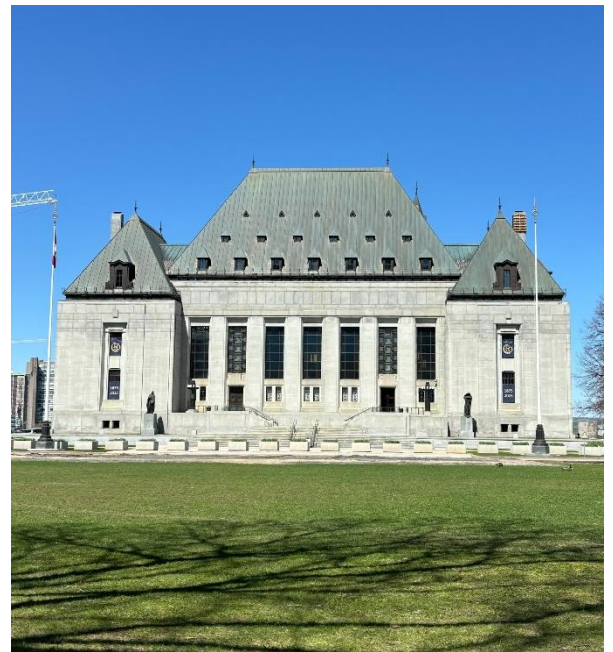
For the Law Commission of Canada, this is annual report preparation time. It has been an intense period of review, reflection, and taking stock of our activities over the fiscal year of April 1st 2024 to March 31st 2025. An effective annual report should be an accessible and comprehensive portrait of how we have developed and flourished, of where we have traveled, and in what projects we have immersed ourselves at this moment in time. Like the “I” in the poem, we are focused on the walk, on the people with whom we have formed relationships and are engaged in constructive conversations, and on our plans for the future. Any rain showers should be temporary distractions; even if we notice them, we’re well equipped with raincoats, umbrellas and windshield wipers.

While Alden Nowlan might not have turned his mind to the possibility, this range of examples shows that many kinds of relationship can have much the same effect as that captured by his “masks of love”. The relationship of students to new knowledge, the relationship of communities to hope for a better future, the relationship of citizens to participatory electoral process, the relationship of the Law Commission to the people of Canada for whom a report is required on an annual basis: all demand attention, commitment, and trust.

It should be obvious that the Law Commission did not pursue a busy travel agenda outside Ottawa this month. But on the 11th of April, I did walk the few blocks from the Law Commission office to the Supreme Court of Canada, where I was honoured to moderate a panel discussion as part of a Symposium celebrating the Court’s 150th birthday. The actual walk was not particularly noteworthy. But the program of the Symposium - a metaphorical “walk” through themes and challenges that tied together the past, present and future of the Supreme Court – provided extraordinary inspiration.

Two speakers in particular, invited to share experience and reflections from their respective countries and courts, offered compelling illustrations of relationships forged through, and supported by, law. Together, these generous guests from far away remind us why and how the “masks of law” can provide timeless enduring support for justice, dignity and humanity.

First, Albie Sachs - famous freedom fighter, anti-apartheid activist, and Judge of the South African Constitutional Court – offered a birthday gift to the Supreme Court of Canada in the form of his dreams of a better world. He spoke with clarity and passion of the crucial duty of judges to feel the hope and eagerness of the people who claim justice, of the possibilities as opposed to pretensions of law, of the imperative not to confuse rule by law with the rule of law, and of the





appropriate embrace of modesty in designing and building the Constitutional Court on the site of the old fort prison. Second, The Honourable Sir Joe Williams, Māori member of the New Zealand Court of Appeal, spoke about the organic processes by which Māori law and language sustain fresh vocabulary and renewed energy for the common law of the Pacific. His gift to the Canadians gathered for the Symposium came in the form of a Māori song of resistance and struggle. As he sang loud and clear, Māori music filled Supreme Court of Canada space with determination and hope. If the rain was falling, no one noticed.