

Lay Bencher's Address
May 2004
Call Ceremony

June is a social worker who graduated from the University of Calgary in 1972. Since 1978, she has been a co-ordinator of family education services at Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health in Victoria.

June last served on many local and national boards; and in 2002, she was the recipient of an international award for her work with adoptive families. She has also received the honour of Social Worker of the year.

Please join me in welcoming June Preston.

MS PRESTON: My lord, candidates to the call ceremony. It's a great pleasure to be here this morning, on this happy occasion, when you are being welcomed by the court into the Law Society of BC.

I would also like to acknowledge all family and friends that are here today, who are obviously so proud of all the candidates, knowing how hard they've worked towards this day.

But another thing I must acknowledge: We cannot underestimate the value of family and friends in the lives of candidates as they've faced their challenges with their studies.

However, this job is not over. In some ways, it's just beginning. All the candidates for entry into this profession who have family and friends here are going to need your on-going support and guidance, as they develop their careers in this challenging, competitive profession of the law.

I would like to thank the candidates for their hard work and for choosing this honourable profession. More than ever, we are going to need your skills and talents in our challenging and complex world.

As stated, this is the first time that a Lay Bencher has spoken at this ceremony here today, and I'm going to be setting a precedent, and I expect to give you some words of wisdom, as well.

But first, I'd like to make some observations about your Society that you're now joining as a member. For most of you, my remarks will be a review, but I hope it will be of interest to members of the public who are here.

The Law Society of BC is the governing body of all lawyers. Membership in good standing is most important to you, the candidates, to your family members and friends.

But to some extent, the work of the Law Society is done behind the scenes. We members of the public – I can only speak for myself, before I became a Lay Benchers – we really aren't that familiar with the work of the Law Society.

As Lay Benchers, the six of us, we have the opportunity to learn a great deal about the work of the Law Society. First of all, there's training of law students, the core values that are taught, how lawyers are regulated, and when necessary, how are they reprimanded and disciplined.

But also, the important thing that I've come to learn is that the law is the basis of our society. There's a lot of energy and effort the members of the Law Society put into assuring that we as individuals in the public have legal services that come from independent counsel, free of fear or favour, of influence from the government.

The Law Society is important to all of us in the general public. The primary responsibility under the laws of the *Legal Profession Act* is to protect the public's interest in the administration of justice and through the regulation of lawyers.

So an important place to start is with the governors of this Law Society, and they're called "Benchers". If you look inside your program today, you'll see a list of all the Benchers. And unfortunately, they're not all here today – they're busy people – but they also come from right across the province.

There are, as I said, six Lay Benchers. 25 elected Benchers, elected by their peers. These Benchers have worked hard to become lawyers. They respect and value their law profession, and take time from their private lives to give to the important work of the Law Society that you are now becoming a member of.

They're very knowledgeable and current about the law, and they represent a diverse practice of law. They have active practices, and they face the public every day, and have the responsibility of upholding the image and reputation of lawyers. This is clearly of great interest to them.

A Lay Benchers sees the importance that the elected Benchers play in addressing issues of the best interests of the public. Benchers are proud of their profession. They feel great concern if another lawyer is in conflict with the Law Society rules, or are found to be doing harm to the public.

The public image of lawyers is obviously of great concern to them. These 25 elected Benchers I present as models and mentors to you, and I hope that you will also see the six Lay Benchers as models of how members of the public, who are all volunteers, take time out of our lives to give to the Law Society.

So aside from the important responsibility of training, regulating and disciplining lawyers, the Law Society works to protect the public interest by providing its members, you, with the vast resources and services. I just want to cover a few of them.

The first is the important task of training law students through – I’m sure you’re still fresh from your PLTC training, and all the hard work there. However, they continue to offer to you professional development opportunities for continuing education.

In this day and age, it’s so important for all professionals to keep up-to-date, and keep refreshing their learning. They also provide issues of practice, ethical standards. You’ll find that in your *Benchers Bulletin*. And also the mentorship and guidance I’ve already mentioned, advice and assistance through the resources of the senior members, and the experienced staff of the Law Society are there for you as a member of the Law Society.

It is also an opportunity to start thinking about volunteering in the important role that you have for pro bono, Law Society committee work that so many wonderful members of the Law Society do through committees on the law. For your part, I hope you hold a vision that one day you may be a Bencher as well, and put yourself forward to give back to the Law Society.

One of the great resources of course, is right here in this building, which is the BC Courthouse Library. It’s part of what your membership goes to pay for. I’ve had a tour. I encourage all members of the public. It’s open and available. But of course, it’s also online. It’s a fabulous resource.

I would like to recommend that members of the public start to search online for the Law Society website. You now have a special connection with the Law Society: You have your own special member.

And I think that it’s important for you to take an interest in the work of the Law Society, and that you’re also well placed to help other members of the public know more about the Law Society and the important work they do towards protecting the interests of the public. I’d suggest you bookmark the Law Society web page. Put it as a “favourite”.

Now a few words of wisdom: On this day of celebration, you should have a vision of how to hold your new role as a lawyer, perhaps making promises to yourself on how you will also proceed.

In my observations of lawyers since I’ve been working with them over the few years, and observing, the ones who I’m seeing are really managing their lives pretty well. I’ve come to see three aspects that I would recommend you consider paying attention to.

The first one is taking care of yourself, your relationships with other people, and how you give back to your community. And the first one: Paying attention, and being mindful of how you’re managing your life in terms of balancing work and family, how you’re managing your stress. What are the appropriate ways to handle stress?

And make sure that you use your other talents. Your other talents, besides being an important lawyer. I know making money and developing a career is important, but so is taking care of your physical and mental health. So pay attention to your professional life.

I guess it's simple if you know the rules. It's easy to finesse the rules. There's a right way to do things and a wrong way to do things; and the members of the public and your fellows are counting on you to pay attention to how you do that responsibly.

Pay attention to how you can make a contribution to your community and the wider world. It's exciting to think where your career is going to take you. This multilevel profession that you're entering into gives all kinds of opportunities to make a difference.

You will increase the faith of the public in the law profession if you keep the public interest in front of all issues that you're involved in.

And in increasing the public interest in lawyers assists the public confidence when they seek legal advice. So I guess I'm saying it's all about how you take care of yourself, and how you treat other people.

In your relationship with a client they may not remember how hard you worked for them. They may not remember how smart you were in solving their problems. But they will remember how they felt about the relationship. Never doubt the difference kindness can make.

I honour the greatness in you, your knowledge, your courage, hope, love and dreams. And my very best wishes to you for an honourable career.