



ON THE FRONT COVER

GERALD J. LECOVIN, Q.C.,
CHAPLIN (*sic*), s.m.a.l.l.

By Hamish C. Cameron, Q.C.

Gerald J. Lecovin is well known to readers of this magazine as an inveterate writer over the last 30 years of letters to the editor and as the public voice of Société Midgetté/Alliance of Little Lawyers, or s.m.a.l.l. The first 15 years of that period are splendidly encapsulated in a brilliant preface to Volume I of the *Collected Works of Gerald J. Lecovin, The Advocate Letters 1969-1983*, published by Pippick Press:

When Gerald J. Lecovin was awarded second prize in the 1968 Christmas Competition of the *Advocate*, the bi-monthly magazine published by the Vancouver Bar Association, he responded in July 1969 with his first letter to the editor of that magazine. Since that time Gerald J. Lecovin has written 27 letters to the editor of the *Advocate* as well as two articles and several "Grumbles", all of which are collected in this slender volume.

David Roberts, the irrepressible and completely "English" editor to whom all these letters were addressed, vowed in his first editorial that no article or letter would be rejected "unless it be dull, irresponsible or have no literary merit." Lecovin's letters are never dull, almost never without literary merit and seldom responsible in the sense of being serious. They are humorous essays founded on an imaginary personage who signs himself "G.J. Lecovin" and writes with indignation and outrage in the stilted and stuffy Victorian prose of two or three generations ago and whose letters are larded with malapropisms, unconscious puns and other Joycean word-play. The other source of humour in these letters and articles is an invented society of lawyers of small stature (s.m.a.l.l.) of which the letter writer is chief spokesperson and which gives much scope for a word-play conceit based on a reversal of all language relating to size.

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We may say of Lecovin, as the First Earl of Birkenhead did of Lord Curzon, that no man subscribes more heartily to the dictum of Locke in a delicate allusion to Mr. William Temple: "The writing of letters enters so much into all occasions of life that no gentleman can avoid showing himself in composition of this kind. Occurrences will daily force him to make this use of his pen, which lays open his breeding, his sense, and his abilities, to a severer examination than any oral discourse."

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Gerald J. Lecovin, it gives me great pleasure to lay open to the reader such breeding, sense and abilities as she or he may discover in these gay epistles.

The first mention of s.m.a.l.l. in the pages of this magazine occurred in 1971, when Lecovin reported on the establishment, one year earlier, of "the only effective organization presently within the B.C. bar". This "small group of small men" was reported to have embarked upon a programme of law reform, which famously included the shortening of the lectern in the Court of Appeal and the installation of raised footrests in the men's lavatory in the courthouse. The late Robert Guile, Q.C., and Anthony Pantages were reported to be the co-founders and president and vice-president respectively and Lecovin signed himself as "G.J. Lecovin, Chaplin". This title would have been understandable to anyone who knew of Lecovin's theatrical accomplishments and aspirations (of which more later), but when no one got the joke, in 1974 he reverted temporarily to the conventional spelling.

The initial piece was followed over the years by a steady stream of letters to the editor and "Grumbles" in the *Advocate* reporting meetings, applications for membership by lawyers too tall to qualify and the position taken by s.m.a.l.l. on a variety of issues. Many readers, including the writer of the preface quoted above, believed that s.m.a.l.l. was a legal fiction, an invention that existed only in the mind of Gerald J. Lecovin. The truth, uncovered in the course of an extensive interview with Lecovin during the preparation of this article (which would have been recorded but for a technological lapse on the part of your reporter), is very different: In 1970, Guile and Pantages convened a meeting to found an association of short lawyers and invited Lecovin, Ray Paris (as he then was), the late Patsy Byrne and perhaps another short lawyer to attend. According to Lecovin, the founding meeting was a dinner held at a table set up in the middle of an otherwise empty ballroom at the Bayshore Hotel on Coal Harbour in Vancouver. The only non-lawyer in attendance was Allan Fotheringham, a short, chubby, former high-school sprinter from Chilliwack, who is said to have sung for his supper by reporting this founding meeting in the daily press with pictures. The disappearance of newspapers in Vancouver, coupled with the unreasonably early deadline given by the current editor of this magazine, has made it impossible to corroborate this story. Lecovin concedes that, as far as he knows, there have been no further gatherings that could be called meetings of the association, although the leaders did come together from time to time at other legal gatherings, such as the KPMG Christmas party.

But Gerald J. Lecovin did much more to amuse and entertain the legal community than write letters to the editor of this magazine. For example, he wrote

and performed "Good Old Reliable Nathan" at the extravaganza honouring the retirement of the late Chief Justice Nathan Nemetz, where s.m.a.l.l. emerged from the pages of this magazine to present the honouree with a step stool. But his shining achievement, his *magnum opus*, was his great song "If I Were a Q.C.", which literally stopped the show when it was performed before an audience of a thousand or more in the quadrangle at Simon Fraser University for the Canadian Bar Association's annual convention in 1972.

He also performed for the larger community on many different stages. He was in the Mussoc productions every year that he was at UBC, and some of the highlights of his later theatrical career were *Three Men in a Boat* and *Come Blow Your Horn* at the Metro Theatre, *God's Favourites* and *Lies My Father Told Me* for Heritage Theatre, and the *Stories of Chelm* by Sholem Aleichem at the Jewish Community Centre. In addition, he had gigs with the Emerald Players, Vancouver Little Theatre and a production of *Brigadoon*. But the high point of his theatrical life was his role in the longest-running Vancouver show of all time—*The Drunkard*. This revival, rewritten by Raymond Hull and produced, directed and starring infamous local theatre publicist the late Fred Hill, was performed in church basements, prisons, legion halls, nightclubs, strip joints and theatre green rooms all over the Lower Mainland and in Kelowna and Victoria. It has been said (mostly by Lecovin) that the dynamic theatre scene in Vancouver today owes a great deal to the 1960s work of Lecovin and others in *The Drunkard*.

Even less well known about Gerry Lecovin is the extent of his community service. He has been a director and president or chair of the B.C. Epilepsy Society, the B.C. Neurological Society, Sunflower Crisis Centre, the Jewish Family Service Agency, the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts and Interlock Employee Assistance Society of British Columbia and has been a director of the Mediation Development Association of British Columbia, Vancouver Association for Retarded Children, the Vancouver Jewish Community Centre, the Jewish Festival of the Arts Society and the Richmond Society for Community Living.

Gerry also served as a volunteer in the legal world as chair of the Family Law Subsection of the Canadian Bar Association B.C. Branch, and as a bencher of the Law Society since he was first elected in 1995.


A final little-known fact about Gerry is that in the McCarthyite Cold War era following World War II he was a member of a large crypto-fascist military organization, which was known by the code name "cote" and had cells in every major centre in Canada. The Point Grey cell to which Gerry belonged included Robert Mundell, the most recent Nobel laureate in economics, who played his role in the grand scheme by inventing supply-side economics to finance Ronald Reagan's Star Wars Strategic Defence Initiative. Another member was John Fraser, who has, over the years, insinuated himself into positions of influence in our democratically elected federal government and has recently written a report for the government recommending the re-arming of Canada's reserve army, the tattered remnant of which is, of course, riddled with former cote members and their fellow travellers. Gerry continued his militaristic training at the Westminster Reg-

iment until he graduated from UBC with his B.Comm. and LL.B. in 1957. He then went underground in articles at Lawrence & Shaw (as they then were) and an 18-month around-the-world tour. When he returned to British Columbia he continued his paramilitary ways by joining Bill Stirling's prosecutorial storm troopers in New Westminster, but two years later he adopted the cover of a private practitioner in family law and went underground for good.

Some time later—it may have been during the Vietnam war, while he was holding his breath but not inhaling—Gerry came to the realization that world domination through large military forces was not the way of the future, and he seized on the notion that small is beautiful. The rest is history. Earlier this year he was appointed Queen's Counsel, much to the joy of his friends and admirers, including his two lawyer sons who practise in Vancouver, and his third son, who practises naturopathy in Kirkland, Washington. It remains to be seen whether he will fulfill the prediction in his song:

If I were a Q.C., ya, da, da, da, da, da,
da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da,
All day long I'd diddy, diddy boom,
If I had a little silk.

There are predictions in the song about building "a great big firm of lawyers", which, judging by Gerry's previous writings, would probably be called Farris & Co., but nevertheless we all wish Gerry many days full of diddy, diddy booms!



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