



ON THE FRONT COVER

RICHARD MARGETTS, Q.C.,
NEW PRESIDENT OF THE LAW
SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

By John Waddell, Q.C., and Jerry McHale

July is a cold, wintry month in Melbourne, Australia. That is when, and where, approximately 46 years ago, Richard S. Margetts, president of the Law Society of British Columbia, was introduced to the world. A contrarian by both inclination and genetics, it is fitting that Richard should now thrive in a land on the opposite side of the globe, where July is part of a warmer and more hospitable season.

News of Richard's origins may surprise those who have puzzled over his unique and idiosyncratic version of the mother tongue. The evolution of his accent is the understandable result of transplanting a *pure laine* Australian in Canadian soil for nearly 25 years. The warping of Richard's antipodean dialect was a transformation that had its beginnings in 1976 when Richard first met Diane (*née* Evans). She was a bold, beautiful and entrancing Canadian nurse on a mercy mission to eradicate drunkenness and loutish behaviour on the Australian continent. Margetts was her first failure in the context of treatment but a rousing success as a conquest. Richard was utterly smitten, and by 1977 our wedded subject found himself retracing the route of his forebears (all political prisoners, no doubt), consigned to his own transportation to another, more northerly frontier. Locked safely in his trunk upon arrival in Vancouver was an arts degree (hons.) from Melbourne's Monash University and some questionable first-year credentials bearing the letterhead of the University of Victoria Law School (Melbourne again).

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Understandably, these latter documents were met with haughty disdain by the elders at the University of British Columbia Faculty of Law. As a consequence, Richard spent an extended time there as student—time that allowed him to learn a few of the local rules and regulations while orienting himself to his new country. By 1980, despite almost insurmountable linguistic and cultural obstacles, Margetts emerged from UBC with law degree in hand.

He and Diane remained restless, however, and were soon off to Victoria, where Richard commenced articles with Achtem Alexander and Diane took up her post with the Royal Jubilee Hospital as an obstetrics nurse. An extrovert who loves to talk and to debate, Richard elected early for the courtroom and work as a barrister. (At this juncture, it is incumbent on the writers to note that the Alexander of said Achtem Alexander is the very same Ralston Alexander, Q.C., who now sits at the benchers' table with his former articling student, the subject of this profile.) Richard was well nurtured in his articling post, and his skills began to flourish.

As good as life has been for Richard in Canada, he left behind a close and loving family, and the physical distance that separated them must have been, at times and particularly early on, difficult for him. This was never more true than during his articling year, when Richard returned home to say goodbye to his dying father, John, knowing that he would not see him again. Richard's mother, Barb, and his brother, Tim, a very successful barrister, remain in Melbourne today. Fortunately, Barb and Tim both manage periodic visits to Canada and the entire family does congregate from time to time in Australia.

After completing his articles Richard moved over to Sweeney, Hatter & Fahlman in Victoria. There both his career as a trial lawyer and that of servant of the organized bar found its inspiration. With Diane working variable shifts, and daughter Jill (now 17) and son Simon (now 15) gleefully destroying the interior of the family home (now both are better behaved), Richard needed something to fill his free time and to assist him in finding a niche of his own in the heart of the Victoria legal scene. He suspected that his greatest talents and best opportunity lay in the direction of partying, albeit perhaps partying with professional overtones. Thus, with the assistance of a coterie of willing lackeys, Margetts rejuvenated the young lawyers' section of the B.C. Branch of the CBA. That section's first social event is now the stuff of legend.

He organized a dinner for other young and marginalized Victoria lawyers at an unnamed (for the sake of discretion) down-and-out hotel on Government Street, chosen because of its obvious dissimilarity to the Victoria Golf & Country Club. The evening was a smashing success and evidenced Margetts's penchant for touching the right nerve at the right time. It was there, all those years ago, that the Ritual of the Holy Spork was inaugurated. The ritual remains to this day one of the most revered practices of right-thinking lawyers throughout the County of Victoria and was a feature of Richard's first meeting as a bencher in 1996—an experience that prompted perennial bencher Russell Tretiak, Q.C., to opine: "That was pretty weird."

In 1985, Richard joined with Johns Southward Glazier Walton & (after a time) Margetts, where he remains to this day. The term "multi-tasking" was coined for Richard. He sets a gruelling pace at the office and personally accounts for half of the e-mails sent in B.C. between midnight and 3:00 a.m. weekdays and before 8:00 a.m. Sundays. He is an extremely proud and involved father of three delightful children (Molly rounded out the trio in 1987). He is a completely fearless jack of all trades, and will take on any and every home renovation or complex repair job regardless of whether he has the skill or the time to complete it. He is a dedicated distance runner, an organizer of races, a lecturer and a member of diverse community boards and professional committees. Thus he has progressed over the decades, gathering esteem all the while and, with a modicum of grace, aging. We, among the many who call him friend, have watched his evolution from a young interloper to a senior, and much respected, member of his profession and his community.

It is also important to convey a sense of what kind of character Richard will bring to the position of president of the Law Society. He has the experience, dedication, judgment, stature and integrity necessary for the job. Above all else, however, he is principled and devoid of arrogance. He has an honest passion for the protection of the public interest and a deep-seated respect for his colleagues at the bar. He fulfills his duties without the pursuit of secondary gain. He treats all who meet him with sanguinity and when he fights he fights hard and fair.

Further on the matter of character, we observe that, for some, Richard's easy affability may initially disguise the fact that he is a very tough character. There is some truth to the rumour that he is indifferent to pain. Like many people from the Antipodes, he is, as noted, a runner; and it appears that the worse he feels the faster he goes. By way of evidence: Richard has, for about a decade, run early on Saturday mornings with the writers and the endearingly surly Stewart brothers, Richard and Andrew. One dark morning recently the group set out and Margetts, in his exuberance, failed to notice a plastic ring, used to bundle together newspapers, lying empty on the sidewalk ahead. Somehow, he managed, while on the fly, to insert both of his feet in the ring. He hit the ground like a beaver slapping its tail and lay there, inert. Instinctively, we knew what to do. We stood over him, laughing. Pained though he was, this stirred his feisty Aussie spirit. Knees, elbows and pride bruised, but unbowed, he struggled to his feet and was off like a shot, hurling invective over his shoulder as he ran.

You can't keep a good man down. The role of the president of the Law Society is demanding. One is expected to manage an endless stream of issues, make countless public appearances, sit on a variety of time-consuming committees, consult with one's constituents, be on call for public pronouncements and manage a busy private practice in the time that is left over. Richard brings to this job exactly the talent and diligence needed to do it extremely well. He also brings the confidence, good will and unqualified support of his many friends and colleagues throughout the province.