



## ON THE FRONT COVER

### RICHARD GIBBS, Q.C., PRESIDENT OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

*By Patricia Schmit, Q.C. and Peter Warner, Q.C.*

**T**he journey to the president's desk is long and arduous for any bencher and particularly so for a sole practitioner, barrister, father of six and aspiring farmer from Prince George.

We have known and enjoyed Richard for many years here in Cariboo County and have seen first-hand the scrupulous and unstinting effort and energy that he devotes to his bencher duties and Law Society initiatives. Our members and the public have a tireless worker in this president.

Richard is now 50 years among the living, having been born in Vancouver in May 1951. Expelled from the maternity ward for argumentative behaviour even at that age, Richard was raised in Powell River, where his father worked at the local pulp mill. After articling with Rod Johnston in Powell River in 1977, Richard moved to Prince George to practise with Hope Heinrich & Hansen. By January 1979 he had struck out on his own.

The seemingly random but connected events that lead to meeting one's future spouse began in Richard's case with the birth of his charming wife-to-be, Barbara Bienkowska, in England to Polish parents. She completed her training as a physician/gynecologist and moved to the colonies, where she took up a family practice in Fort St. James. Driving in snow for the first time, Barbara crashed her car, needed a lawyer and got one in Richard. She claims she was referred to several lawyers, but Richard had the best references so he got the business. Matters certainly evolved from there and, in due course, Barbara and Richard bore and are

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raising six fine children, Leopold, Marynia, Jozef, Halina, Teresa and Jan, aged from 10 to 17.

The Gibbsses live on a 160-acre property 15 miles west of Prince George and one mile down a dirt road, where they garden, shovel, swat flies, shoo critters and raise vegetables, chickens and pigs amid a forest replete with moose, deer, fox, coyotes and bears, the whole scene reminiscent of a non-tropical Swiss Family Robinson operation minus the tree house. It is somewhat fitting that this great bear of a man should live among bears.

Barbara tells the story of Richard's first experience in getting his pigs to market. It took him and six helpers four hours to manoeuvre the pigs into the truck and involved a lot of mud, torn clothing, kicking and porcine verbal abuse. At the combined hourly rates of those in attendance, the bacon had to sell for \$90 per pound to break even.

As if all of these activities were not time-consuming enough, the Gibbsses have welcomed exchange students into their home and have travelled to New Zealand, Australia, Poland, France, England and Hawaii. They enjoy houseboating and chess. Richard has learned the Polish language to speak with relatives and has become a wine connoisseur, but he tries to avoid speaking Polish while drinking wine.

Richard's barristerial practice is a busy one involving criminal law, aboriginal claims, medical malpractice, personal injury and general commercial litigation. For 22 years now he has travelled about 10 times per year, a week at a time, to Fort Nelson on litigation matters, because the city has not had the services of a resident lawyer for most of that 22 years. He often finds himself representing the next generation of some of his earlier clients, and Fort Nelson has become a second "professional" home to him.

Richard's focus as a benchler and as incoming president will be upon three main areas. He is chairing the Federation of Law Societies' committee on the new proceeds of crime legislation and directing its challenge of those parts of the Bill that threaten and undermine the independence of the bar. That challenge has enjoyed some success with the granting of an interim order in B.C. Supreme Court November 20, 2001, exempting B.C. lawyers pending trial.

As chair of the Credentials Committee and the Admission Program Task Force, he is leading the review and improvement of the articling and PLTC process, and he has contributed much to the western Canadian credentials portability that lawyers in western Canada now enjoy.

Richard has also worked to improve the due process of Law Society operations, particularly in relation to the hearing and review procedures, which most effect our members and the public. All of the members and students who appear before the Credentials Committee leave knowing they have been fairly listened to regardless of outcome, and Richard always provides specific personal guidance and words of encouragement. The Law Society cannot always be a friendly place, but Richard Gibbs strives to make it so.

Richard has worked hard for all of us, particularly during his last two years "on the ladder". He is away from home half the days each month. As he embarks on

his most demanding year as president, we know he has the confidence and support of his fellow benchers and of his family and many friends throughout the province. We hope and fully expect he will enlarge the admiration and respect that all of you have for him.



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