



ON THE FRONT COVER

GORDON TURRIFF, Q.C.

By David S. Cohen, Robin M. Elliot, Q.C., and
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Having known Gordon Turriff, Q.C., for more than a collective century, it is somewhat remarkable that we cannot easily describe the Law Society's new president in simple terms.

Gordon is first, and truly, a British Columbian and Vancouverite. He was born and raised on the west side of Vancouver, the younger of two children of Les and Mary Turriff. His father was a manager with an international transportation firm, and his mother, after raising their family, was secretary to the chancellor of UBC. Gordon was very close to both his parents, and credits his father with his love of both the law and sports, particularly baseball. His sister, Judy, a teacher in Campbell River, passed away tragically at the age of 50, leaving her daughter Alison, a teacher, and son David, an energy buyer, as Gordon's only extended family.

Gordon attended Trafalgar Elementary and Prince of Wales High School, graduating from the latter in 1967. He then took his B.A. in political science at UBC. He claims to have been an inveterate anti-authoritarian and contrarian at that time, with his heroes including Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman. There is no record, however, of his having joined the former in his occupation of the Faculty Club during a 1968 visit to the UBC campus, although Gordon claims he was present for the pre-occupation harangue. And he was a very active member of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity as an undergraduate, hardly a hotbed of either anti-authoritarianism or contrarianism—unless a penchant for milk-drinking and playing goalie for one's fraternity ice hockey team qualifies under one or other of those rubrics.

Upon graduating with his B.A., Gordon immediately went to UBC law school, receiving his LL.B. in 1974. As one of the top students in his grad-

uating class, he then served as law clerk to Chief Justice Nathan T. Nemetz. Interestingly, Gordon spent most of his time that year helping Mr. Justice Aikins sort out the constitutionality of the *Insurance Corporation of British Columbia Act*, which gave ICBC its monopoly over basic automobile insurance in this province. He then articulated with Shrum, Liddle & Heberton (now McCarthy Tétrault) under the tutelage of Winton Derby, Q.C. It is from Winton that Gordon says he learned—later than he should have—how to keep one's sense of humour while practising law.

Gordon remained with Shrum, Liddle & Heberton for three years and then took up a position as visiting assistant professor of law at his alma mater. Besides teaching contracts and civil procedure, he taught a seminar of his own creation, called "The Nature of the Judicial Function". After a year of this, he served for three years as a district registrar of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. In 1984, he returned to the practice of law, first with Pollard Morgan (1984–1987), then with Douglas, Symes & Brissenden (1987–2000) and for the past eight years with Stikeman Elliott LLP. The bulk of his work as a lawyer has focused on a narrow but important area—cases involving financial relationships between lawyers and their clients, disputes over costs, and remuneration for other professionals, including fiduciaries. He may be the only member of the bar in Canada who practises exclusively in these fields. Calling upon his expertise in the area of costs, he was asked to serve as an adviser to the benchers' Fee Review Task Force in 1998 and to the Costs Subcommittee of the Attorney General's Rules Revision Committee in 1999. He was honoured with his Queen's Counsel appointment in 2002.

Gordon is modest and private. He is committed to his family, dedicated to his profession and fascinated by baseball.

Gordon's relationship with his wife and children keeps him well grounded in the midst of an extraordinarily busy professional life. Anyone who has spent time with Gordon knows that his family comes first. His wife, Ellen Gerber, tells us that despite being a workaholic (which Gordon will deny), he never missed a game or an important event, and only a few practices—flying back and forth from benchers' retreats for birthdays and graduations. Gordon was extremely devoted to his parents. Indeed, in 1976, when his father passed away, he chose to give up his LL.M. studies at Harvard Law School in mid-term to return home to help his mother through a difficult time.

Gordon and Ellen met on a blind date shortly before his planned departure for an extended trip to Europe. He was instantly smitten. He cut his trip short, not wanting to risk that Ellen might not be available when he got back. They married in 1980 and have been inseparable ever since—

except on their runs, when Gordon tends to get a bit ahead of her, perhaps the only time he does so. Like Gordon, Ellen graduated from the UBC Faculty of Law and has an accomplished career in her own right. She was a Crown counsel for 25 years, including stints teaching at the Justice Institute, and is currently city prosecutor for Vancouver.

Ellen and Gordon have raised three wonderful and accomplished children. Katie, an equestrian, will follow in her parents' footsteps when she graduates this coming spring with an LL.B. from UBC and then articles at Lang, Michener in Vancouver. Andrew is an artist, designer and ice hockey player (he gets his soft hockey hands from Gordon) and will soon be graduating with a bachelor of fine arts from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Alexandra, an excellent field and ice hockey player, is attending the University of King's College in Halifax, majoring in early modern studies. Gordon and Ellen have for many years owned recreational property with a spectacular setting on Salt Spring Island, which they have used as a family retreat and a base for many tranquil hours of kayaking. By his own admission, Gordon is fortunate to have Ellen to ably look after all the skilled handy work at home and at their island retreat.

Gordon is an educator, author and voracious reader. On top of his other career commitments, he continued teaching at UBC as an adjunct professor between 1980 and 1988 and again in 1991. His broad range of publications includes the *Annotated British Columbia Legal Profession Act*, numerous book chapters on a range of topics in civil practice and a dozen chapters and book reviews in academic and professional journals. He has co-authored the *British Columbia Annual Practice* for over 20 years with Madam Justice Janice Dillon, who, not surprisingly, confirms that he is a stickler for detail and scrupulous about reviewing edits. He was and is a member of the Law Society's Lawyer Education Task Force. His reading interests are eclectic and include history, biographies and contemporary fiction. His favourite book is Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*. He says that in his next life he hopes to be a staff writer at *The New Yorker*.

Gordon is also a dedicated public servant. Since his call to the bar, he has incorporated into his professional life an overriding commitment to serving the public and the legal profession. He was a founding member and director of the British Columbia Law Institute and a director of the CLE Society of B.C. As an active member of the CBA from the early 1980s, he has served on its provincial and national councils and has chaired numerous CBA committees. All this besides being an invaluable contributor to the Law Society in roles too varied to enumerate here.

Since being elected a bencher in 2002, Gordon has demonstrated to his colleagues and the Law Society staff the same intellectual rigour and those

highest levels of diligence and hard work that have been the hallmarks of his legal career. He does not do anything by half-measures. He has been known to immediately respond to post-midnight e-mails. He takes his bench duties very seriously. He is thoughtful, incisive and apparently enjoys playing the devil's advocate to test contentious propositions. He is not reluctant to stand alone, especially on an important point of principle, such as the independence of the legal profession. At the same time, he is adamant that B.C. lawyers must fulfill their responsibility to maintain and improve their practice skills and legal knowledge.

Gordon may truly be described as a baseball fanatic. His nickname is "Hawk"—inherited from Bud "Hawk" Harrelson, the wonderfully acrobatic shortstop for the New York Mets from 1965 to 1977, Gordon's formative baseball years. But we know that Gordon's legal batting average is far superior to the "other" Hawk's .236! Indeed, it may approach Harrelson's .969 fielding percentage. Gordon has fond memories of attending Capilano Stadium, first with his father, then with his son and daughters, to watch the his beloved Canadians (nés Mounties). He also recalls that the first program he watched on television was the 1955 World Series between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Yankees. He played hooky with one of the writers to travel to Phoenix for spring training, and subsequently spent parts of nine spring training seasons in either Arizona or Florida. He makes every effort to attend major and minor league games whenever he travels, and we suspect that he sometimes schedules his meetings around baseball games!

But running is also Gordon's passion. He is known to run downtown from his home to work, and then back again. His one marathon was completed in 2:49:11—a feat to which most of us can only aspire. He manages to fuel all this with his favourite meal, a vegetarian tostada salad.

As a private person, Gordon enjoys nothing better than returning to the hearth and home to be with family and close friends. We know we speak on behalf of everyone in the profession as we congratulate Gordon and his family, and wish him the very best during his tenure as president. As it enters its 125th year, the Law Society is in good (soft) hands.

