



## ON THE FRONT COVER

SHARON D. MATTHEWS

By J.J. Camp, Q.C.

Sharon had a somewhat unruly birth 40-something years ago, and some would say that she has been unruly ever since. There is considerable debate in her family about whether she was “an accident” (she was born several years after the last of her four siblings), but there is absolutely no doubt that she is “special”.

Her family, including her three sisters and one brother, are extremely close. They enjoy extended family time together at various and sundry locations, including Salt Spring Island, where her mom and dad spend half their time. She is the “cool” aunt to her four nieces and five nephews, and devotes some of her precious time to each of them to attend special events such as hockey games. Although she is the youngest, some would suggest that Sharon is the hub for all family matters. She is the first to spring into action when need arises.

Her friends advise that she always wanted to be a lawyer like her father, Dick Matthews, general counsel at the Rayonier forest products company. She was always a top student and graduated with honours in commerce at UBC. A story is told by a friend during her “commerce days” as to how a psychology professor posed a difficult and thought-provoking question. Although Sharon was cat napping at the back of the class, she woke up long enough to provide an adroit answer which the professor described as “brilliant”, much to the consternation of the rest of the class.

When she was not working for the Bank of Montreal, Shoppers Drug Mart and Big Scoop Restaurant, she spent the summers with her family on Salt Spring Island. After her commerce degree Sharon and Nancy (one of her sisters) and two friends went backpacking in Europe. Four months and 14 countries later, Sharon had cultivated a lifelong passion for travel—although, if I had to make a wild guess, I suspect she has seen the last of a hostel. Word

has it that it was on her first European trip that she honed her leadership skills.

Although Sharon is brilliant, frugal yet generous, hard-working, fair-minded, altruistic, resourceful, humorous and charismatic (to name a few of her wonderful attributes), she is nevertheless biased. Her bias relates to beagles, which, so far she is concerned, are approximately twice as smart and twice as beautiful as any member of the human race. The two smartest and most beautiful of this breed are her most recent acquisitions, Brig and Finn. To say that these dogs are spoiled is an understatement. Witness the fact that they do not eat dog food, but only the best of ground pork or lamb tenderloin, hand prepared by Sharon.

Sharon graduated in the top ten students from UBC law school in 1992 and began her articles at Russell & DuMoulin. She finished her articles with Camp Church & Co. and, needless to say, remains as a partner at Camp Fiorante Matthews and Mogerman.

Her practice is focused on class actions and product liability cases, and she has enjoyed some notable successes. She was largely instrumental in the certification and ultimate settlement of the billion-dollar-plus hepatitis C class action in the late 1990s. She remains extremely active in the administration of that settlement, which has paid approximately \$700 million to the claimants so far, with more than \$1 billion remaining "in the bank". She was one of the lead counsel on the successful same-sex survivors Canada Pension Plan class action which she and her co-counsel argued in British Columbia, again in the Superior Court in Ontario, again in the Ontario Court of Appeal and again in the Supreme Court of Canada. She was lead counsel in the successful *Barbour v. UBC* parking class-action case. If you would like to see Sharon at her oratorical best, ask her for her views on the passage of legislation by the then Campbell Liberal government which retroactively legislated away this victorious outcome. Be ready for an earful on the subject of respect for the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary.

Sharon has devoted a prodigious amount of time to both volunteer work and pro bono work. Her pro bono legal work included the celebrated although not victorious CBA civil legal aid test case which she argued along with co-counsel before Chief Justice Brenner and the B.C. Court of Appeal but, unfortunately, not before the Supreme Court of Canada (leave to appeal was refused). The issue, differently formatted and with Sharon's continued support, remains before the courts.

For more than a decade, her volunteer work has been largely devoted to CBA matters. She has been extremely active. Her duties, offices and accomplishments include co-chairing the Class-Action Section, chairing the Sections Committee, chairing the Resolutions & Bylaws Committee (where she

rewrote the bylaws for the British Columbia Branch of the CBA), serving on the Audit Committee of the British Columbia Branch of the CBA (where she rewrote the audit charter), serving as an elected member of Council for Vancouver County of the B.C. branch of the CBA, serving on the CBA National Council, serving for several terms as an officer on the Executive Committee of the B.C. Branch of the CBA, serving as chair of the B.C. Branch Membership Committee, serving as chair of the B.C. Branch of the CBA Member Services Committee, and serving as secretary-treasurer, then vice president and now president of the B.C. Branch of the CBA. In addition to CBA matters, she has served as president of the Advocates Club. She has also written a host of legal articles, including one notable paper co-authored with the Hon. Chief Justice Warren Winkler from Ontario, and has given very freely of her time to speak at a large number of legal seminars on a wide variety of topics.

The extraordinary amount of volunteer work has not gone unrecognized or unrewarded. In 2003 she was awarded the president's medal for outstanding service to the B.C. Branch of the CBA. In 2006 she was recognized as a UBC Young Alumna of Distinction. In 2010 she was again awarded the president's medal for outstanding service to the B.C. Branch of the CBA. Being awarded the president's medal twice is a feat that is unlikely to be repeated.

Sharon also owes the CBA a debt of gratitude, since it was in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 2006 at the CBA annual meeting where she met Rob McDiarmid, then the president of the Law Society of British Columbia, now Master McDiarmid and Sharon's husband. It has been and doubtless will continue to be a "match made in heaven".

Her character is exemplified in a short speech she gave in Halifax at the CBA convention when she was invested as president of the B.C. Branch of the CBA. She referred to leadership concepts propounded by Max De Pree, who said the first assignment is to define reality, the last assignment is to say thank you and, in between, a good leader is a servant. She then gave a ringing endorsement of the urgent need for access to justice for those who cannot afford to hire a lawyer when faced with a legal crisis. Sharon has proved to be nothing less than relentless in the pursuit of this outcome.

Sharon is a formidable adversary and a formidable advocate. Witnesses and opposing counsel should not be beguiled by her charm. One of my partners reminded me of an anecdote: Sharon was cross-examining a critical eyewitness to an accident in which a tractor had collided with a helicopter. She was scoring some heavy blows by putting a prior inconsistent statement to a witness who then complained to Mr. Justice Spencer that Sharon was putting words in his mouth. The judge responded, "Yes, but your problem is that it is your words that she is putting in your mouth." As the witness left the wit-

ness stand, battered and bruised, he slipped a note to Sharon with his telephone number on it.

Outside of the law, Sharon is an avid skier and cyclist, a wonderful cook, a lover of fine wines and a glorious host. Speaking of fine wines, Sharon has been known to be slightly clumsy at times, but to the writer's knowledge she is the only person who while carrying a crystal wineglass full of fine wine can fall down stairs and end up flat on her face without spilling a single drop of wine.

Sharon will bring boundless energy, enthusiasm, skill and humility to her role as president. There will be no task too hard, too difficult or too tricky for her to handle.



# Help create a better future for everyone touched by cancer.

When your client remembers the BC Cancer Foundation in their will, they'll be supporting world-renowned research in BC that is shaping the future of cancer care.

Please be sure to use the full legal name of our organization:

**BC Cancer Foundation**

**Registration Number: 11881 8434 RR0001**

To find out more about the BC Cancer Foundation or obtain information to share with your clients, please contact Isabela Zabava, LL.B at 604.877.6157 or [izabava@bccancer.bc.ca](mailto:izabava@bccancer.bc.ca).



Supporting the BC Cancer Agency

1.888.906.2873 | [bccancerfoundation.com](http://bccancerfoundation.com)