

THE ROAD *less travelled*

KIM BROOKS
CLASS OF 1997

ITS GOOD to be Dean

By Simmi Puri



Whether or not you have an interest in tax law, one thing is for certain, after talking to Kim Brooks you'll want to sign up for a tax law class. Brooks is passionate about the subject, so much so that she decided to leave the tax law practice and teach and inspire others to pursue the profession.

Her decision to follow the academic path was definitely a wise one. In just ten years, Brooks went from practicing tax law to becoming Dean at Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University.

"Some of my most terrific moments in teaching are like the best conversations I've ever had," says Brooks when talking about what inspires her as an educator.

"We've all been to those parties where someone strikes up a conversation about something no one else has any knowledge of or interest in. A classroom is like that party, except all the guests can't help but weigh in on the conversation since it's something they're all interested in."

Brook's passion for teaching, law and law

schools is undeniable. It's one of the reasons why she's been so successful in her career in academia. Earlier this summer, Brooks was appointed Dean of Law at Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University. She made the move from Montreal, where she was teaching at McGill University, to Dalhousie in Halifax in June this year.

Brooks reflects on how legal education in Canada has changed since she was a law student and where things are headed.

"We've seen some significant changes in the last 15-20 years. There's been a push to increase the international and interdisciplinary approach to learning and technology is playing an increasingly important role. All these things are creating challenges for the way we approach our teaching. It's interesting to see the pedagogical transformation that has taken place as a result."

Brooks believes that although the overall student experience has remained largely the same, the students are different.

“My sense is that students today are frequently multitasking and are quite accustomed to it. They are not only learning from classrooms, but from podcasts and other networking formats that aren’t face-to-face and sometimes all at the same time. As an educator, it’s something I’m constantly being reminded of as we look for ways to address the needs of students today.”

Brooks graduated with a B.A. from the University of Toronto and then went on to UBC to pursue her LL.B. After that she received her Masters in Law from Osgoode Hall at York University, specializing in Taxation. Between UBC and York, she worked for the firm Stikeman Elliott as a tax lawyer in their Toronto and London offices.

“I really enjoyed my time working as a tax lawyer. Everyday there’s a new problem to fix or changes in the law to address, and the challenge in that was the most fun for me.”

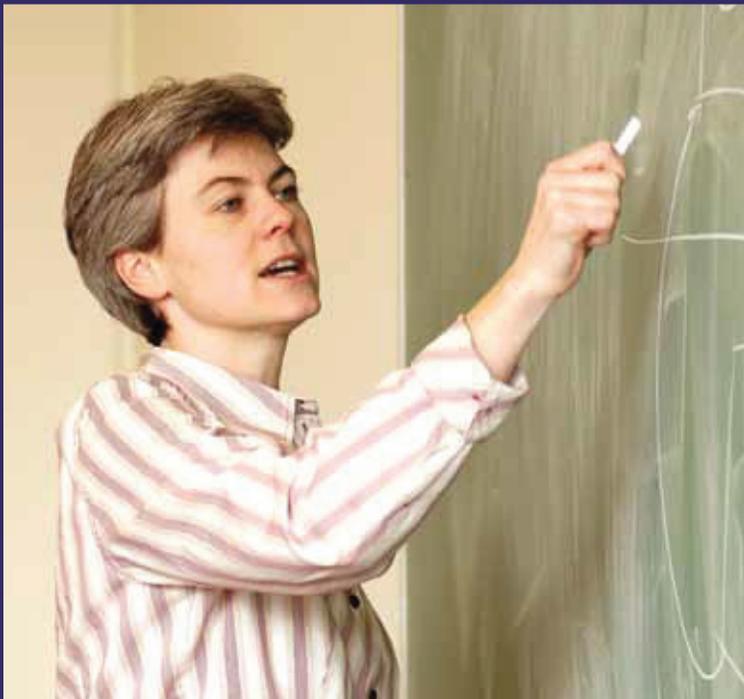
“But one day I was at my desk drinking coffee and reflecting. I started to think about my undergraduate experience and how you are given the opportunity to take courses in a variety of disciplines and have all these interesting discussions on how it all fits together. I started to miss those conversations. That’s when I thought of going back to school so that I can go there, drink coffee and think deep thoughts!”

After completing her LL.M. at York, Brooks went on to teach at Queens, UBC and McGill, where her primary research interests were in the areas of corporate and international tax, and tax policy. She soon became one of Canada’s leading tax scholars and was appointed H. Heward Stikeman Chair in the Law of Taxation at McGill’s Faculty of Law in 2007.

Brooks has received much recognition for her work, including holding an Honorary Research Fellow at Monash University, a Faculty Scholar Award from UBC and a Taxation Law and Policy Research Institute-Research Fellowship.

Her involvement in the academic and legal community is also impressive. She served as President of the Canadian Association of Law Teachers, Managing Editor/Secretary of the Canadian Journal of Women and the Law, Co-Chair of the National Steering Committee of the National Association of Women and the Law, Editor of Women and Gender Law Abstracts (SSRN), and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund-National Legal Committee.

In addition to all of these credits, Brooks is highly regarded for her teaching and has received several teaching awards over the course of her academic career. Earlier this year, she received the prestigious 3M National



Teaching Fellowship, which rewards exceptional contributions to teaching and learning at Canadian universities. The Fellows embody the highest ideals of teaching excellence and scholarship with a commitment to enhance the educational experience of every learner.

Both her students and colleagues acknowledge Brooks as someone who shows inexhaustible energy and passion for the law. Her student evaluations are loaded with praise for her ability to engage them fully in the subject matter. And when you talk to Brooks about one of her favorite subjects – tax law – it becomes clear that her passion is contagious. She likens learning tax to seeing the “Boss” play live.

“When you see a Bruce Springsteen concert, there’s no fancy stuff, just straight music for three solid hours. He goes so hard and that is a really fabulous thing to see. Tax is kind of like that in that it’s not a fancy subject and it doesn’t lend itself well to TV shows, but the joy is in the practice.”

Brooks uses her own experiences as a law student to relate to her students and help engage them. She remembers UBC Law as a place that is open to new ideas and where she could pursue a number of different interest areas.

“I took all kinds of courses at UBC like corporate transaction law and feminist law. Even though my specialization is in tax law, all these experiences helped bring me success in my professional life.”

For Brooks, one of her biggest challenges as Dean is the balance between preparing students to be full participants in civil society and ensuring that they are prepared for the practical and professional world as well.

“We want our students to make a significant contribution to society as well as their practice and that’s a tension that gets revisited ever year by the academics and by the profession.”

“When you see a Bruce Springsteen concert, there’s no fancy stuff, just straight music for three solid hours. He goes so hard and that is a really fabulous thing to see. Tax is kind of like that in that it’s not a fancy subject and it doesn’t lend itself well to TV shows, but the joy is in the practice.”

Another significant challenge for Brooks as she shifts from her role as teacher to that of Dean is coming to terms with the high costs of obtaining a legal education today. With increased operating expenses and a diminishing budget, running a law school is a complicated business.

“Do these increases make a difference in the way our students relate to their training? It’s a question as teachers that we need to ask ourselves and address as tuition increases come fast and furious. I don’t think we’ve quite fully absorbed yet how these changes are affecting the level of education students are receiving.”

Despite these challenges, Brooks is looking forward to her new role and the opportunity to connect the profession and the academia.

“Being the Dean means that you are the biggest cheerleader for the school. It’s exciting for me to be able to brag about my colleagues and students and all the amazing work that they are doing. This job is also about building connections between the law school and the community. It’s an opportunity to talk about the amazing and fascinating work that our faculty are doing when meeting alumni who might have similar interest. This is one of my favorite things about the job – establishing those connections and building those relationships. It’s part of what brought me back to academia in the first place.” ●