

On The Front Cover

Peter Burns, Q.C.

by James M. MacIntyre

New Zealand is a small paradise, but for some reason many of its law graduates have made their way to Canadian law schools in general and to the U.B.C. Law Faculty in particular. Peter Burns is one of these. He was born in Dunedin, New Zealand. After some employment with the local police force there, he entered Otago University and when not preoccupied by literary, poetic and editorial pursuits, emerged with an LL.B. in 1962 and an LL.M. in 1963. He taught at Otago until 1966, and at Auckland until 1968.

Then the New Zealand wanderlust took over. Peter and his wife Charlotte came to Vancouver and Peter started teaching torts and criminal law at U.B.C. After establishing himself solidly as an expert in both of those fields, he became active in a number of Bar organizations. He was called to the B.C. Bar in 1975, became an executive member of the Vancouver Bar Association in 1977, and was appointed a Q.C. in 1984. In the meantime, he wrote articles, research papers, and books on a wide variety of topics in torts and criminal law, with special emphasis on the law of privacy; and he pioneered studies on victim compensation. In 1982 he succeeded Ken Lysyk (now J.) as Dean of the Faculty of Law. One might have expected that decanal duties would limit his other legal activities, but in the last few years he has also become a Commissioner of the B.C. Law Reform Commission, a Director of the International Commercial Arbitration Centre, and most recently has been elected to the Committee of Experts on the Suppression of Torture, a United Nations committee which gets to meet in Geneva, Manila, and other exotic haunts. (He hastens to explain to his jealous faculty that these places are expensive and really quite boring, and that he would much prefer the quiet life in West Point Grey).

In addition to being a bonny fighter for his faculty in the Byzantine politics of university budgeting, one of Peter's major accomplishments is a close linking of Bench, Bar and University. In his term of office as Dean he has encouraged members of the Bench and Bar to spend time with the faculty, initiating contacts which range from short special events such as Benchers' Day with the First Year Class to arranging conferences and masterminding the creation and funding of endowed Chairs, Institutes, Computer Law Projects, and so on. He has seduced a considerable number of specialist members of the Bar into the faculty as Adjunct Professors, teaching in their areas of expertise. He has also encouraged (nay, shoved) members of his faculty into joining Bar committees, giving CLE lectures, and generally ensuring that the Law School participates fully in the legal life of the province.

Only a person with boundless energy and a strong personality could do this much. His colleagues have wondered for years whether he really gets to work at 6 a.m. or merely leaves his car parked at night in the faculty lot. Certainly he is there by the timeclock as we punch in, and the nickname of Sergeant Pepper is not undeserved.

On the informal side, there were early attempts to lure him into the faculty ski team, but his initiation during a bitter weekend at Big White, a scant few months after his arrival from Auckland, was altogether too much, and he took up more literary hobbies, becoming a connoisseur of historic cartoons and comic strips.

Lest you be thinking of applying for the job as Dean, this is not a eulogy; Peter's term continues for a couple of years yet.

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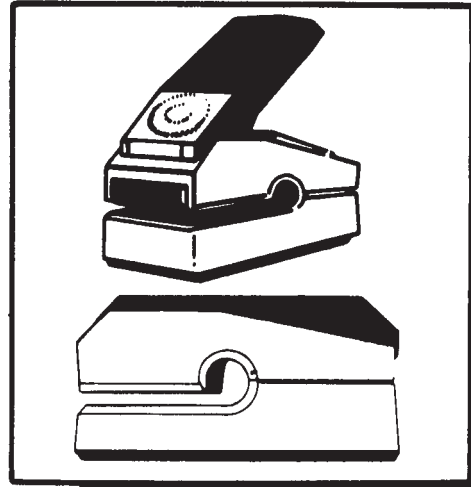
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