



ON THE FRONT COVER

STEPHEN DOUGLAS OWEN, Q.C.

By Robert Q. Gourlay, Q.C.

Stephen Owen, at still a relatively young age, has had careers enough for several men. Teacher, lawyer, administrator, human rights advocate, conflict resolver, international consultant, he is a unique British Columbian who, in an unassuming but decisive way, is making the world a better place. Currently he is the Dorothy and David Lam Professor of Law and Public Policy at UVic and director of its Institute for Dispute Resolution, and his life to date has been full of interest and achievement.

Steve's international associates and those who have worked with him at the Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE), the Attorney-General's Ministry, and the Ombudsman's office, speak of his subtle and supple mind, his sensitivity to the needs of people and institutions, his powers of concentration and his ability to see the forest *and* the trees. He is said by all to have a sense of the boundless possibilities of cooperative action. He identifies and musters what is best in people, and just as skilfully handles the difficult and obstructive side of the human personality. By his dedication and accessibility, he instills a sense of pride and purpose in his team. These qualities go hand in hand with an unquestioned integrity, an almost old-fashioned politeness and patience that seems bred in. In summary, a man perfectly suited to engage in public policy conflict resolution at a very high level.

Steve's family has been prominent in the public life of British Columbia for a good part of the history of this province. His father, Milton Owen, was a highly regarded lawyer of the Campney Owen Murphy & Owen firm, killed in a tragic small-plane crash in northern B.C. in 1956. Milton's brother, Walter Owen, Q.C., of Campney Owen Murphy & Owen and of Owen Bird, served as president of the Canadian Bar Association and lieutenant-governor of British Columbia. Steve's paternal grandfather, Walter Owen Sr., was a member of the B.C. Provincial Police and in the early part of this century helped maintain law and order in Atlin, near the Yukon border. Cousin Philip is the present mayor of Vancouver.

As a teenager at Shawnigan Lake School, Steve excelled academically and as a fierce, determined hooker for the 1st XV rugby team. Steve made up for his diminutive size with a grit and willpower uncommon even among rugby players.

In 1966 Steve nominally enrolled in UBC's Arts faculty, but he majored in Thunderbird rugby, while honing his poker skills with guys named Big Train, Tyre and Wesbrook Fats. Steve would arise in time for an hour's poker before class, slip into the aftermath of an all-night game to pick up \$100 or so, and by 9 a.m. be at his statistics class. At the bridge table, his forte was to finesse his opponent's no-longer-winning cards. Evenings, Steve demonstrated his finely tuned technique for opening beer bottles with his molars: the later the hour, the quicker the caps came off.

Working summers for his cousin David, who developed Place Ville-Marie in Montreal, Steve got to know business and the financial rewards that success can bring in North America. A career in law or business seemed assured. In 1969 he entered the UBC Faculty of Law, where his rugby and poker pursuits continued apace.

He married Diane Koerner, his sweetheart and best friend, in 1971.

After articles with Owen Bird, Steve and Diane journeyed to London where they mingled with such other expatriates as Ted Zacks, Dave Brine and Eric Rice, even before Eric was famous. Steve took his LL.M. in admiralty law at the University of London, and his talented wife perfected her culinary skills at the demanding Cordon Bleu cooking school.

Steve returned for a year at Owen Bird, but his talents and interests reached beyond the family law firm to the larger world. Steve and Diane packed up again, this time for Kano in northern Nigeria for a two-year CUSO posting, where Steve taught high school and coached basketball. Steve is 5'7"; the Nigerians averaged 6'6": another challenge met.

Overcoming a serious bout of a mysterious tropical ailment on his return to Canada in 1977, Steve signed on as a staff lawyer with the Surrey legal aid office. He moved from staff lawyer to director of the Gastown legal aid office, then to director of the Vancouver head office and finally to director of the Legal Services Society for British Columbia. Early on, Steve recognized the need to engender wide support for the legal aid scheme, not only from the practising bar but, more importantly, from the public. By 1986, Steve had left his mark on legal aid in BC.

One of Steve's many talents is identifying the task at hand, bringing to bear the necessary energy and organization to do the job and then moving on to new challenges. By now Steve and Diane were parents, and with sons Taylor and Jason they crossed the water again. At the International Management Institute at the University of Geneva, Steve obtained his MBA in less than a year.

An all-party committee of the B.C. Legislature recognized Steve's competence, training and breadth of vision and appointed him Ombudsman for B.C. in 1986. The next few years were a time of turmoil, with controversies including the Knight Street Pub fiasco, Fantasy Gardens and other shenanigans. Under Steve's tenure, the reputation of the Ombudsman's office soared. Calmly investigating apparent instances of official skulduggery, he brought questionable public matters to light in well-researched, well-reasoned and dispassionate reports. Steve's skills were recognized internationally by his election in 1988 as president of the International Ombudsmen Institute.

In 1990, while Ombudsman, Steve was appointed commissioner for the public inquiry into prosecutorial discretion in B.C. and the question of whether a cabinet minister should have been charged with a *Criminal Code* offence. The suggestion of political interference in the decision not to charge Bill Reid was a matter of intense public debate. Steve's report resulted in the *Crown Counsel Act*, which calls for special prosecutors to review allegations against public officials and decide whether charges are justified, thus removing the Attorney General's Ministry from suggestions of political interference in the judicial process.

CORE was Steve's next challenge. In 1992, then-premier Mike Harcourt recruited Steve to bring peace to the woods by reconciling environmentalists, loggers, native protesters and small-town mayors. Despite being once described as a condo-dwelling, cappuccino-sucking, tree-hugging yuppie (only three out of the four may be accurate), Steve assembled a highly competent specialized team to develop a strategy for land use and related resource and environmental management for the province. Steve's deep understanding of human relations and conflict resolution were essential for the success of the CORE process.

From 1995 to '97, as Deputy Attorney-General of British Columbia, Steve dealt effectively but quietly with the Gustavson Lake episode and with a shrinking budget within the AG's ministry.

His current university post allows him to further the work in the international arena that he had been pursuing for over a decade. Throughout the '80s and '90s Steve was legal adviser to Amnesty International in a number of projects, including reporting on human rights abuses in South Africa and Yugoslavia and the alleged shooting of IRA hitmen by SAS commandos in Gibraltar. In 1991 he went to South Africa to meet with apartheid government officials, who were not overjoyed at having outsiders investigating their activities. These trips have been gruelling. The Canadian government appointed Steve in 1993 to advise the Department of National Defence on the controversy surrounding the actions of Canadian Airborne troops in Somalia. He went to Nicaragua as a member of the Canadian Election Monitoring team in 1990.

Since 1993, he has been a consultant to CIDA for projects in Southeast Asia. He is director of the Cambodian Development Resource Institute — a challenge even for Steve, given the recent history of that country. He has organized human rights and conflict-management conferences in Cambodia and Thailand, with participation by members of government at the highest levels.

Most recently Steve has undertaken three additional assignments — commissioner of the Law Commission of Canada (a revitalized Federal Law Reform Commission with emphasis on public policy issues), Canadian representative on the Tri-lateral Review Committee for the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, and chair of the Attorney General's Independent Review Committee into Organized Crime, which reported in mid-September.

After such a recitation of achievement, we pause to catch our breath and wonder whether this man ever takes time to relax with family and friends and enjoy a joke. He does, and, more often than not, is the instigator of the frivolity. Late at night Steve can be counted on to entertain a friendly gathering from his repertoire of limericks and monologues, firmly lodged in memory, complete with appropriate accent. An impish grin overtakes his countenance as he relates the tale of "The McLachlin High School Band" ("We're goin' on toooor, don't ya know, and we hae not got no money for instruments"), the man from Timbuctoo; the Lion and Albert; or, more intellectually, Monty Python's "Philosophers Song". Friends will long remember his over-the-top portrayal of a hairy-legged Stella, in a living-room performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

His family is his centre. Diane remains Steve's most trusted confidante and the boys his greatest joy. Taylor, a Bishop's University student, has his father's interest in travel and environmental issues; after touring game parks in Zambia and Zimbabwe this fall, he is spending the winter term at the University of Malta. Jason, in grade 12, excels at math and rugby at St. Michael's School.

The power of Steve's mind, reflected in the clear blue of his eyes, is exemplified by his skill as a public speaker. B.C.'s Chief Justice has said that Steve is one of the two best extemporaneous speakers he has heard. The other was Anthony Eden.

Steve was the final speaker at the Commonwealth Law Conference in Vancouver in 1996. For 30 minutes, without a single note, Steve wove together the conference themes of human rights, conflict resolution, environmental sustainability and professional responsibility for the 1,000 judges, lawyers and others from around the Commonwealth who listened in rapt attention. It was a masterly exposition. Paul Fraser, Q.C., then president of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, echoed the comments of many in the room when he said: "A *tour de force*."

Stephen Douglas Owen, Q.C. — a remarkable life in progress, a remarkable individual.