



ON THE FRONT COVER

TOM SHORTHOUSE, RETIRED UBC LAW LIBRARIAN

By Bruce D. Woolley, Q.C.

Tom Shorthouse has played many roles in his life. The one for which he is best known to the legal profession is head librarian at the Faculty of Law, University of British Columbia. For 32 years Tom nurtured and guided the law library to its current position as one of the best in Canada. He has done that with unparalleled excellence and charm.

Tom's first role was just being a young boy growing up in Nelson, B.C., where by all accounts he performed well. His father was the mayor and a butcher (an interesting combination!) and the man who gave Kokanee beer its name. Tom's mother was keenly involved in theatricals, and she got young Tom doing activities not necessarily common for a young boy in Tom's neighbourhood, including tap dancing, figure skating and piano playing (which Tom still does). In grade 12, he went to Banff to attend summer theatre school. Subsequently, while studying at UBC, he became a member of the Players Club — for Tom the equivalent of being on an athletic team. Tom has acted even since then. This has been confirmed by his colleagues and his family.

Tom has appeared on the stage in roles such as Matthew in *Anne of Green Gables* and Herbie in *Gypsy*. He is well known for his work in television commercials, having promoted corporations such as White Spot, Coca-Cola, Canada Trust, B.C. Tel and the B.C. Lotteries Corporation. While in China for a year (and law library staff still fondly remember the fine letters he wrote to them from there), Tom played a major role as an American ambassador in a Chinese movie and is still greeted as such in China. He has played roles ranging from garage mechanics to judges. Tom's latest movie role in the not-yet-released *Fear of Flying* is as a heart-attack victim who discovers a body in the washroom of a plane. Unfortunately, Tom does not appear in the balance of the film.

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Tom has also directed *Twelve Angry Men* and *The Caine Mutiny* court martial on stage. In recent years, he has headed up the library group "Stomping Tom and the Stackettes", which, dressed in western gear, is a hit musical group whose appearances have included the opening of the new Koerner Library. Throughout, however, he has managed to reserve time for his main role as law librarian.

Before becoming a librarian, Tom obtained his B.A. in 1954 at UBC and subsequently a teaching certificate in 1955. He taught high school for nine years and then decided to go to library school. He thought being a librarian might give him a little more time for acting. Tom obtained his bachelor of library science degree in 1965 at UBC, and went to work for Basil Stuart-Stubbs in the education library. Soon after, Diana Priestly having left her job in the law library, Basil suggested to Tom that he might wish to go there on an interim basis. The interim stretched from 1966 to 1998. Tom, as always, tried to make the part last as long as he could.

When Tom arrived at the law library (not the current "bunker"), there was no card catalogue. Books were filed by author, and other materials were classified as journals, law reports, etc. The library spread throughout the classrooms — you could eat lunch, attend a seminar, or argue a moot court problem and find books at hand. Tom's assistant librarian was Donna McKenzie (Mr. Justice McKenzie's wife), and they were assisted by three or four support staff. George Curtis was dean, and the teaching staff included Eric Todd, Charles Bourne, Don MacDougall, Joe Smith, Bertie McLean, Jim MacIntyre and Leon Getz. Tom's goal was to ensure that the library was run efficiently, and he succeeded admirably. He took pride in the library collection being current, and, despite severe financial cutbacks in recent years, the law library has one of the best collections in Canada.

Over the years, Tom found that library work became more interesting, but also far more difficult than he could have imagined. Maintaining paper collections as well as computer databases presents an enormous challenge. Despite all, Tom succeeded, and the Faculty of Law nominated Tom for the President's Service Award for Excellence, which he received in 1994.

Tom has not always been right. His first impression of QuickLaw was that it was a "flash in the pan". Those who worked closely with Tom also remember Tom's numerous searches for his keys, which seldom seemed to be where he thought they should be.

A number of former law students remember Tom in a non-speaking role. He was an eager participant in charades (now defunct) and was a member of the library team, which included Dilma Huggett, Regina Tsanas and Deborah Udy. Two members of the old team are still active at UBC. The annual game of charades traditionally was played on Trike Race day, when Tom would perform another role: welcoming the Trike Race Band to the Main Reading Room. They would march and play their way through the stacks, cajoling the studious to put down their books and join the festivities.

Tom was not welcoming to all: after discovering fleas in the card catalogue, he was instrumental in banning dogs from the law library. Ultimately, however, Tom was concerned with the welfare of law students, which he ably demonstrated by adding footballs and jumper cables to the reserve collection. One can only assume the jumper cables were used to start cars and not worn-out faculty.

Tom's family is very important to him. He and his wife, Anne, were married in 1959. Anne is involved in international education, teaching foreign students. They have four children — Tom, Ellen, Kate and John — and, according to Tom, all of his children have jobs that are a bit of a surprise to him. Tom Jr. is a trumpet player, Ellen teaches Japanese, Kate teaches Mandarin, and John is the voice of the Canucks on CKNW. Tom and Anne have four grandchildren.

Although retired, Tom remains very active. One of his latest roles is that of songwriter, writing songs specially for people on request. Tom wrote a song for George Curtis's 90th birthday, which he also performed, to the delight of the former dean.

Whether in his role as a librarian, actor, husband, songwriter or father, Tom is loved for his kind spirit, sense of humour and gentlemanly manner. We look forward to seeing him play these roles and many others for a long time.

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