

# NOS DISPARUS

## Inger Hansen

Inger Hansen's father, a Danish civil servant, was adamant that he would not send his only child to university, no matter how smart she was, because she was a girl. So Ms. Hansen found her own, rather circuitous, way to a stellar career. After first coming to Canada in 1950—where she took a job as a cook on a farm in the West—she eventually managed to work her way through to a law degree at the University of British Columbia. That credential led to ground-floor roles in three key areas of public life that have now become an integral part of the national dialogue.

As the country's first penitentiary ombudsman, Ms. Hansen, who died on September 28, 2013, at the age of 84, was an advocate of inmates' rights and prison reform. As Canada's first privacy commissioner, she handled complaints regarding the *Human Rights Act's* privacy provisions. And as the first information commissioner, she was responsible for complaints regarding the *Access to Information Act* and fought to make the workings of the federal government more transparent.

"What stands out in all of her career roles is Inger's dedication to public service and the long hours she put in to do the best job possible in the various positions she held," Mary Dawson, Canada's conflict of interest and ethics commissioner, said of her friend at Ms. Hansen's recent celebration of life. "She was a perfectionist, but she also displayed great compassion in all she did."

Inger Hansen was born in Copenhagen on May 11, 1929, to Jens Hansen and Agnes Marie (née Jorgensen). She was an inquisitive child who loved sports and craved adventure. In 1940, the family's comfortable middle-class life was upended by the Nazi occupation of Denmark, and during the



next five years she learned about hatred, bigotry and the brutality of war. Ms. Hansen witnessed firsthand the violence used to keep an oppressed population in check. Jewish children disappeared from her classroom, and she recalled having seen people shot. She became peripherally involved in the underground at the age of 14 and was taught to handle a gun, although she never used one. Those traumatic years made an indelible impression on her, leading to a lifelong appreciation for the importance of human rights.

Ms. Hansen married Arne Schou in 1948, and the two backpacked throughout Europe. In 1950, the adventure-hungry couple came to Canada. After their first job on the farm didn't work out, Ms. Hansen found other employment. One job was in Sudbury as a telegraph operator. The couple eventually returned to Denmark, where they divorced in 1954. Ms. Hansen planned to pursue a university degree, but the New World beckoned. She returned to Canada and took whatever jobs she could find to support herself. Work as a legal secretary led her to apply for law school at the University of British Columbia, where she graduated in 1960.

The legal profession was not a welcoming place for women at the time. In an interview with the periodical *Canadian Woman Studies*, Ms. Hansen recalled applying for a job as a prosecutor and being told: "Women don't prosecute, well maybe in family court ... No woman can do that kind of work." She articulated, first to S.B. Gervin and then to George van Roggen, and was called to the bar in June 1961. She set up her own practice, doing mostly criminal defence work. She married fellow lawyer Gerald Morin; the two divorced in 1968.

In 1969, she left British Columbia to join the Solicitor General's Department in Ottawa as a legal officer. There she represented the Justice Department on the Committee on the Status of Women, worked on revising the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* and began to look at the issue of inmates' rights. When a riot at the Kingston Penitentiary in 1971 led to the government's establishing a Canada-wide correctional ombudsman, Ms. Hansen was offered the job. Once again, she found herself in a place that was unaccustomed to welcoming women. Her first stop on a tour of Canadian prisons, in 1973, was the Dorchester Penitentiary in New Brunswick, where she was barred from entering the main hall because of her gender. "I had a talk with security," she told *Canadian Woman Studies*, "and from that day forward I was never denied access anywhere in any penitentiary in Canada." In this post, she worked to promote mediation as a way of resolving prisoner complaints.

In 1977, she became Canada's first privacy commissioner, where as a member of the Human Rights Commission she oversaw complaints related

to privacy rights. There she continued to break ground, interpreting the law in what was a relatively new area. Then in 1983, under the Trudeau government, the *Access to Information Act* and the *Privacy Act* came into being, and Ms. Hansen was appointed for a seven-year term as the country's first information commissioner. Her job was to make sure that the Acts were doing their job—allowing Canadians to access government files, while at the same time protecting individuals' privacy rights. In this capacity, she was once again called upon to mediate among conflicting interests, which she did gently but firmly. It was a style that earned her the moniker "velvet steamroller".

Ms. Hansen was cordial, respectful and willing to listen. Friends describe her as being kind. But at the same time she was determined that the right thing be done, both by herself and by others.

"She tried to work with honey, but when pushed, she held to principle," said Lynn Freeman, assistant director of policy studies at Queen's University and one of Ms. Hansen's close friends. The principle here—that a healthy democracy depends on access to information—eventually brought her into conflict with Brian Mulroney, who became prime minister in 1984. Ms. Hansen believed that his government was too secretive and went so far as to file a complaint in the Federal Court.

"Inger was quite humble," said Julia Ginley, another close friend. "But she always held her ground." When her term as information commissioner was up, she became a Provincial Court judge, first in Kitchener-Waterloo. She ended her career in Perth, Ontario, retiring in 2003.

Ms. Hansen—who believed strongly in the power of education—completed a master's degree in public administration at Queen's University in 1996. Throughout her career, she lectured internationally and held senior positions with the International Bar Association.

In her personal life, Ms. Hansen was a loyal friend and an avid reader who enjoyed entertaining, movies and all of the arts, especially music, theatre and dance. "She was like family to us," Ms. Ginley said, remembering the many holiday dinners they enjoyed together, and how Ms. Hansen always made time for special outings with the children. "She loved being at our cottage, and preferred to come when we were opening or closing it so she could help with the work. She liked to roll up her sleeves."

Ms. Hansen talked about wanting to have time in retirement for creative pursuits such as writing and acting. She even expressed a desire to go to clown school, revealing a playful side left largely unexpressed in her professional endeavours. But those dreams were cut short by dementia. "My only regret [was] that she wasn't able to enjoy her retirement years more fully," Ms. Ginley said.

One consolation was to know that her legal trailblazer of a friend was able to appreciate her career in artistic terms. As Ms. Hansen told an interviewer for the Danish Emigration Archives in 1989, "I view my work as an artist may see his or her creation ... I sometimes call this the artistic approach to life. It has to do with the happiness derived from concentration, absorption in a subject, whether it is technical drawing, practising a musical instrument or writing a speech."

Susan Smith, *The Globe & Mail*  
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## David Stuart George Purvis

David Purvis died on December 3, 2013. His end was sudden and, for him, painless. He fell on his way home from St. Christopher's Church in West Vancouver and never recovered consciousness.

David was born in New Westminster on July 3, 1929. His father was a well-known general surgeon and one of the founders of the Essondale psychiatric hospital. His mother was an opera singer. Both his parents were graduates of Queen's University. David and his two older sisters grew up in New Westminster. His eldest sister, Margaret, was a professional violinist of some repute and has two daughters. His younger sister, Bettina, produced four children.

David approached life at full tilt. He loved skiing, fishing and hiking. In the 1950s he and a small group of scapegraces, including this writer, rented a cabin each winter on the banks of the Nooksack River and skied the slopes of Mt. Baker, in the days when that mountain only boasted two, very long, rope tows. You had to be sure that, when you used one, there would be at least two others hanging on to it, or you would be swept up into the air.

David tended to be accident-prone. He was often laid up with some broken bone, usually fractured while skiing. He was once ejected from the back

