

# ON THE FRONT COVER



## MIRIAM KRESIVO, Q.C.

By Monika Gehlen

**T**he template for *Advocate* profiles is well known: (1) hard-scrabble childhood, (2) early signs of extraordinary intelligence and character, (3) impressive legal career, (4) significant contributions to the profession, (5) equally significant contributions to the community, (6) athletic prowess (or maybe not), and (7) despite all that, humility and a well-rounded personality.

With an uncharacteristic lack of originality, Miriam Kresivo, Q.C.,—the new president of the Law Society of British Columbia—follows that template to a T.

### Hard-scrabble childhood

Born in Montreal, Miriam grew up on Saint Urbain Street. The squalidness of the street, which ran through the heart of the Jewish immigrant area in the 1940s and 50s, was famously captured in Mordecai Richler's novels. The reality was not romantic.

Both of Miriam's parents were Jewish holocaust survivors. Both had been interned in concentration camps and had lost most of their families during the war. They met at a displaced persons' camp in Austria after the war and in 1948 came to Canada as refugees. The central horror of her parents' lives threw deep shadows over Miriam's childhood.

Miriam's parents spoke no English when they arrived in Canada. They had no skills. Miriam's mother was illiterate, something she hid from others all her life. Both parents worked in the *schmatta* (clothing) trade in factories on Montreal's east side. One thing they knew for sure: they wanted a good education for their two daughters.

Until she started school, Miriam spoke only Yiddish. Well, actually, she also spoke a bit of Greek. By the time she arrived on Saint Urbain Street, the Jews in the area had mostly moved on and been replaced by Greek immigrants. “Quick study” doesn’t begin to describe Miriam. Soon she was swearing fluently in Greek.

Miriam claims to have been a complete nerd as a youngster. This is hard to reconcile with the Miriam on the cover of the *Advocate* (which, by the way, is her second time she has landed here). Apparently she spent most of the sixties in the library with her nose in a book. She missed out on The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. (What about Leonard Cohen!?) She played no sports. Until she got to university (and put her foot down) her mother sewed all her clothes—“not,” Miriam says, “a pretty sight.” Obviously, that pendulum had to swing eventually. Today it rests on the “glamour” end of the spectrum, nudging occasionally into full-blown “bling”.

### **Early signs of extraordinary intelligence and character**

Miriam attended the High School of Montreal, at the time probably the worst school in downtown Montreal. Very few of its students managed the jump to university. But Miriam set her heart on McGill, so that was that. Four years later she graduated with an honours degree in art history with a focus on Renaissance art. This let her indulge her love of the arts, while making peace with the fact that becoming an artist was not in the cards for her. Miriam has always been a keen realist.

There not being much call for Renaissance expertise in the mid-70s (or ever, really) Miriam decided to attend architecture school at UBC. She had never been to Vancouver. It was love at first sight. Miriam detests the cold (it is so challenging to show off your tan in a winter coat) and left Montreal behind without regret.

Architecture turned out not to be Miriam’s true calling. But as with everything, she made the best of her two years in architecture school. For one, she met her husband-to-be, Dale Rickard. This was a stroke of luck. Dale is not just a wonderful man and sought-after architect, he also invariably and without complaint cleans up after every single one of Miriam’s dinner parties. For another, Miriam refined her aesthetic eye in architecture school. Together, Miriam and Dale have created a gorgeous home—artsy, stylish and warm—which they generously share with friends and family.

Following her flirt with architecture, Miriam cast about for a better match for her prodigious skills. On a whim, and without any prep, she wrote the LSAT. Of course she aced it. She had never met a lawyer and had no idea what lawyers do. Of course she decided to become one.

The astute reader, and even the only partly awake one, will guess what comes next. Miriam started UBC law school in 1979 and did very well indeed. What is more, she loved it. After graduating, she clerked at the County Court, followed by articles at what was then known as the “brainy” firm, Shrum Liddle (now McCarthys).

### **Impressive legal career**

In 1984 she moved to Alexander Holburn, practising mostly commercial and insurance litigation. She did superb work, really enjoyed herself, and made lasting friendships. None of it was enough to keep her at the firm when the next challenge cropped up in 1988: Chevron Canada was looking for a solicitor. Miriam thought this sounded more positive than litigation and hoped it would get her closer to the decision-making process. (She does, it must be said, have a boss gene.) Of course she knew nothing about oil, gas, or being a solicitor. She didn't even drive a car. Of course Chevron hired her.

Miriam stayed at Chevron for three years, but she started to worry about becoming a jack of all trades and especially a master of none. In “The World According to Miriam”, the logical next step was to specialize in something arcane that, once again, she knew nothing about. Pension plans and investments sounded suitably esoteric. Miriam joined William Mercer as a pension consultant. In no time, she was teaching CLE courses in pension law.

But Chevron, it turned out, could not do without her. Miriam rejoined the company in 1994 to manage the in-house legal group, eventually becoming general counsel. This was perfect for her—she never got bored. A typical day might find her in union negotiations, vetting a contract or a press release, dealing with an environmental problem, and visiting a refinery (in a fetching hard hat, no less). Chevron managed to keep Miriam interested for the next 21 years.

After Miriam left Chevron in 2015, she once again renovated her legal career from the ground up. Today, she divides her time between the Law Society, her work as commissioner for the B.C. Utilities Commission (a position to which the government appointed her in 2016) and her role as associate counsel with her former firm, Alexander Holburn.

It goes without saying that Miriam is scary smart. She has an uncanny ability to cut to the core of an issue and come up with the soundest, most practical, and most strategic response, often in mere minutes. Always, she softens this with a huge dose of tact. “What an interesting idea,” she might say when faced with a howling inanity. “Have you considered maybe tweaking it a bit this way ... ?” She is a model of integrity and a gifted lawyer. In 2011, to no one's surprise, she was awarded a Q.C. designation.

### **Dazzling list of contributions to the profession**

Miriam has been giving back to the profession for many years. She took on executive roles for the CBA's pension and corporate counsel sections. And she served as secretary treasurer of the VBA for almost 14 years, surely some kind of record. This allowed her to cement numerous new friendships, attend a whole bunch of interesting dinners, and run the VBA's annual general meetings complete with bun tossings and at least one fist-fight. Governance is not for sissies.

Miriam's *veni, vidi, vici* approach has translated seamlessly to the Law Society. In 2012 she sought election as a benchers and was successful (of course). The benchers are, by all accounts, a group of fascinating, smart and committed lawyers. (It must be pointed out that "all accounts" on this point come exclusively from benchers.) Miriam had found her tribe, as well as the governance work for which her entire career had prepared her. To their credit, the benchers quickly got the point as well. Within just two years of Miriam becoming one of them, they elected her to the executive committee and then as second vice-president, thus putting her on the path to becoming president in 2018.

### **Equally dazzling list of contributions to the community**

The list of Miriam's contributions to the community at large is daunting.

She served on the board of directors of B.C. Pavilion Corporation for 12 years. This spanned the time when PavCo built the new Convention Centre as well as the new roof for BC Place. She is justly proud of her work on these changes to the fabric of Vancouver.

In addition, she has served on the boards of the downtown YMCA (advisory board) and the Vancouver Writers' Festival. She has sat on committees for the YWCA. She has volunteered at the North Shore Multicultural Association. She is indefatigable.

### **Athletic prowess or lack thereof**

At this point, the *Advocate* template [*we'd love a copy of this thing, it would make things so much easier!* – Ed.] demands some comment, usually derisive, about the profilee's skills in sports. Here goes: Miriam has made up for her unathletic youth with a vengeance, playing tennis several times a week at the Jericho Tennis Club. No one has come forward to say she is any good at it. She also golfs, hikes, and attends the occasional yoga class. There are no testimonials for any of these activities, either.

### **Humility and well-rounded personality**

Much as we would wish it, Miriam does not flake out in front of the TV at the end of her busy days. Instead she is off to her chess-and-gossip group

once a week. She reads voraciously and is a member of not one but two book clubs, fiction and non-fiction. She goes to the opera and is learning to play the piano. She and Dale love to host friends, and she has perfected a rotating list of dinners she claims to be able to prepare basically while playing tennis. Nobody believes her: the food is way too delicious and there are always fresh flowers on the table.

And yet, Miriam makes all she does seem effortless. Getting her to talk about any of her many achievements is near impossible, as she finds that “obnoxious”. The question arises: is Miriam too good to be true?

Well, no. The fact is, Miriam has her quirks.

An obvious one is her obsession with her always-perfect tan. Known as “the George Hamilton of the legal set” (you have to be a certain age to get that) she misses no chance to manoeuvre herself into the sun. While it would have been much cheaper to just get a tanning bed installed in their home, Miriam and Dale bought a place in Palm Desert a while back in order to facilitate her addiction. This also allows her to torture her friends with photos of her grapefruit tree and fake-sympathetic questions about whether it is raining again in Vancouver.

There is, of course, more. Miriam’s defining characteristic is her wicked wit. There is a trail of funny stories around town with Miriam’s name on them. Sadly, most of them are unprintable.

To sum up: Miriam ticks all the boxes for president of the Law Society—and then some. The public interest is in extremely capable hands, as is the profession.

---

---

**The KEY to SUCCESS with SPEECH RECOGNITION**  
**Certified Dragon® Professional & Legal Software Training**

Speakeasy Solutions, industry leaders with over 20 years of experience, provides customized Dragon solutions and dynamic training for law firms.

**Dragon®**  
**Professional**  
Individual & Group

▶ One on-one or Group training sessions

▶ Personalized to your workflow and specific needs

▶ Exclusive and professionally written training materials

▶ Follow-up assistance and support



Contact us today to discuss your customized solution and secure the most dramatic return on your investment with Speakeasy Solutions training and support services.

[speakeasysolutions.com](http://speakeasysolutions.com) ♦ 1-888-964-9109