Bencher Election: Getting to Know You Questionnaire

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1. **<u>What is your favourite song, movie or book & why?</u>**

I addressed all three. I saw the “or” but decided to ignore it.

Favourite Song: Jours de plaine (Prairie Days) by Daniel Lavoie. I learned French as an adult and used French Canadian songs to help me in my journey to becoming bilingual. Daniel Lavoie is a well-known French-Canadian singer whose song about the prairies starts out with birds calling. He sings about how one can see all the way to the water and to the edge of the earth. He sings of how he can hear his grandfathers’ voices in the wind and he hears his mother’s language speaking to him. Sometimes, though, he cannot hear at all because the wind is howling so loud! Daniel Lavoie captures in that song what I have long felt about the prairies. I grew up in Alberta. The prairies are a big part of who I am. I am glad that, with my rural practice, I get to admire so much of our beautiful countryside.

Favourite Movie: Kuch Kuch Hota Hai. I like languages a lot. When all of us in my family were learning Hindi, I watched this movie over and over again. If you get the chance, you MUST watch it! I dare you not to cry! The themes of friendship, love, but especially forgiveness and acceptance, are portrayed with warmth, depth and pathos. I know most of the songs and dialogue off by heart, but it still gets me every time I see one character hold out a hand in peace to another in the movie.

Favourite Book: Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery. I have loved it since I was a child and love it still. Anne tries so hard to be strong, despite all the struggles she had to endure. She never knew a happy home before the Cuthberts. She searched for ways to cope. She had imaginary friends. She invented stories about herself. She finally found a spot that she thought would be home, and they did not want her. She had this fierce need to feel she belonged, and kept getting rejected. Finally, some very sweet people took the time to get to know her and that made all the difference in her life and in theirs.

2. **<u>What was the most inspiring or rewarding volunteer activity you have performed?</u>**

I created and helped run the Alberta Court Interpreters Course. (I did mention I love languages!) It started in 2019 and I admit, rather ashamedly now, that my initial goal was to “fix” the interpreters.

As I worked with them, however, I began to realize that these were people full of potential but who were encountering a lot of hurdles. How do you interpret correctly if

you don't know what a “screening device” is even in English? I began to shift my focus into investing in the people that we had. One of the most important things we did was offer opportunities for them to get together so that they could be a support for each other.

I helped many would-be interpreters learn how to move and present themselves in court. The course and the evaluations required reaching out to the Crown prosecutors and judges to recruit volunteers. We taught legal vocabulary based on various themes over lunch hours.

My family helped to find professors, and other volunteers who could assist in the evaluations. We had no budget – once you have a budget, things become official and then you get bogged down in a lot of red-tape. I knew if just given some freedom, we could help interpreters get the support that they were not getting anywhere else. I feel like we made a difference. I did that for 11 years before volunteer fatigue took over and I had to step back as there was a lot going on for me at the time.

3. **How do you deal with stress?**

I love my Calm app. The Daily Trip and the Daily Jay are beautiful ways to start my day. I believe in the power of prayer. I am at my best when I feel closest to God. I like to get out in nature. Paddle-boarding, walks with the dogs, and cuddle-time with my chickens all help keep me feeling grounded.

I have also learned that when my head feels like it is in a bit of a muddle, if I can find a way to verbalize what I am feeling to my husband, he has a wonderful ability to cut through the messiness and bring clarity and calm.

4. **What does lawyer well-being mean to you?**

This is a very tough profession. We can be exposed to vicarious trauma. As a criminal defence lawyer, I have seen and read things that I will, unfortunately, never forget. I am lucky that, as the defence, I can say no to cases. I cherish that freedom, as it is something that I am sure, at least at times, the Crown and Judges wish they had.

There is a lot of pressure to perform and often our mistakes can have very serious consequences and become publicly known. And we all make mistakes.

Lawyers need to be vigilant about their own well-being. A professor once gave me good advice – when you are feeling overwhelmed, identify the file that is stressing you out, and fire the client! If you dislike the file that much, the client should likely be in other hands anyway.

Life is so short. My father, a passionate criminal defence lawyer, passed away at 60 years of age. He died of stroke. I cannot help but wonder if the stress of this job did not contribute significantly to his premature death. He did not share his worries and

responsibilities. He shouldered them all himself. I wish with all my heart that he hadn't. Maybe if the load had been shared, he would still be with us now.

5. **<u>Do you believe mental health should be a priority?</u>**

Yes! Our office moved to a 4.5 day workweek a few years ago when a study came out showing that productivity did not go down with employees working fewer hours. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

Family time should not be optional or be whatever is left over after the law took nearly everything else you had.

Colleagues who check in with each other and demonstrate real caring are invaluable. I still work much longer hours than I should, but I am trying to find ways of easing that workload. I also understand that I need to model good work-life balance for the more junior lawyers in my office.

I just came away from a workshop on Team Emotional Intelligence. We will be having an office meeting about it this Friday. It is all about finding ways to support each other and encourage the creation of a workplace where everyone feels valued, and cared for. When people feel emotionally secure, they can align with their other teammates and, together, reach much greater heights than anything one could possibly do on their own.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts.

God bless you all!

Shannon