



Connecting Women Lawyers



Remarks from the Chair

By Daria Batkin

As I write this note to you, we are in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. All the things we took for granted, all the activities we habitually enjoy outside of our homes, have been put on hold for an indeterminate period of time. It is easy to fall into the trap of despair, worry and fear for the future.

However, as Albert Einstein wisely reflected, “In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity”. As we navigate the COVID-19 reality, I urge you to think of it as a unique chance to learn new skills, increase personal resiliency and develop a greater sense of gratitude for the many wonderful gifts our lives offer to us. From a professional standpoint, I cannot wait to see what the future will bring to the legal profession post COVID-19.



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If nothing else, we will be much more tech savvy than we were in February 2020. Our traditionally conservative profession has been collectively forced to learn to work remotely, to use video conferencing for client meetings, mediations, discoveries and even court appearances.

This is a promising development for those of us who juggle work and family obligations, live in remote and rural areas or have mobility issues. Could it be that this change will allow women with childcare obligations to level the playing field by alleviating the notorious 'face time' disadvantage compared to their male counterparts? Perhaps client satisfaction will increase if they no longer need to commute to the lawyer's office for a face to face meeting? Will access to justice take a leap forward when the legal costs associated with in-person court appearances are dramatically reduced? Will learning to work remotely create more opportunities for improved work-life balance?

There are many positive developments that may come out of the current crisis. And if we use it as an opportunity to expand our skill sets and think outside the box, we will be further ahead than we would have been otherwise.

As my term as Chair of BC WLF comes to an end, I am getting ready to pass the torch to Rose Keith, Q.C. as the incoming Chair. I am grateful for my executive team and the many volunteers who helped bring BC WLF programming to you over the last two years. It has been truly a thrilling experience to steer this amazing group of women. I am excited for what comes next, and look forward to continuing to serve the BC WLF as Past Chair very soon.

WLF Newsletter Spring 2020 Edition

Editors Grace Cleveland, Leah Seneviratne

Editorial Board Daria Batkin, Rose Keith, & Kathy Sainty



Connecting during the Coronavirus

By Arshdeep Sandhu

As the pandemic continues, more and more people are faced with working from home and foregoing the comforts of the office. Our old routines (the morning commute, clamouring with co-workers, coffee runs and lunch dates) are no longer an option. If you are feeling isolated, you are not alone.

For lawyers in particular, the importance of connecting during this time is clear. Law is a profession wherein hands-on, practical learning is integral to sharpening our skills. We now have a second challenge: trying to sharpen our skill set while we are working from home. Here are a few ideas to make sure that we are still connecting with one another while learning to be the best lawyers we can be during the pandemic.

1. Set a daily time to speak to your support staff

When working remotely, it can be difficult to pick up the phone and discuss the little issues that come up throughout the day with our support staff – conversations that we could easily have had in person, but that may not warrant a phone call on their own. Here’s an idea: write these down as they arise and then discuss them with your staff at a scheduled time later in the day. This will allow you to work efficiently (even if there’s nowhere to go after your work day is done).

2. Reach out to a Mentor

For juniors trying to learn the ropes, it is more important than ever to reach out to mentors (both present and past) and make time to just talk. It can be as mundane as asking how their day was, or as important as sharing your thoughts about the work you are doing, challenges you are working through, or possible career moves. While we are all sitting at home and wondering about the future, why not get a second (or third!) more seasoned perspective over email or telephone?

3. Don’t Forget about your Work Friends

Remember when we would run to our work friend’s office to share the good, the bad, and the ugly of the day? Continue to reach out to them and share as you would at the office – just do so over the phone. Your colleagues could have gone through a similar situation and you would have never known if you didn’t pick up that phone.

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Although much is uncertain during these times, one thing that is certain is that working from home has meant learning to live without the creature comforts and pleasant distractions that we are all so used to. Wherever we work from, it is important to continue sharing our wins, discussing our challenges, and creating new strategies to overcome our struggles together. The first step to staying connected is to reach out!

Networking with Fellow Junior Lawyers

By Leah Seneviratne

The Junior Women Lawyers' Networking Event took place on February 6, 2020 at The Shebeen in Gastown. Junior and recently-called women lawyers began to arrive at 5:30 pm in the private room located at the back of the gastropub. There were many excited faces eager to mix and mingle with other women in similar positions, and even some attendees for whom this was their first WLF event!



In the middle of the evening, BC WLF Secretary Sara Li spoke to the group about upcoming events and other opportunities to get involved with Women Lawyers Forum. Afterwards, attendees returned to their food and drink for more casual conversations about their practice, common experiences, and even non-law related topics.

Do most networking events intimidate you? If so, be sure to check out the next Junior Women Lawyers' Networking Event. This annual affair allows women who are new to the profession to develop their networking skills in a laid-back, approachable, and fun setting.





From Data to Resources, a New Blog Aims to Help Women in Law

By Rose Keith, Q.C.

A new program has been launched to provide a safe platform for women lawyers to raise difficult issues in a confidential environment.

Spearheaded by Harper Grey lawyers Kim Jakeman and Una Radoja, [Life in Law](#) (“LiL”) aims to help women succeed in their legal careers, even as they juggle life, family responsibilities and personal priorities.

The inspiration for Life in Law came from Kim and Una working together on the firm’s diversity and inclusion committee, where they were confronted with the data on women leaving the legal practice and some of the reasons why.

“Coming face-to-face with the data was a light bulb moment for us,” says Jakeman. “We knew we had to do something and began looking for a solution that went beyond traditional approaches to help stem the exodus.” From this, the concept was born. Life in Law developed into a highly accessible and confidential forum for women to talk to each other and share their experiences – what they have in common and what they struggle with in everyday life while practicing law. Within five minutes of launch they received their first “Dear LiL” question and have been encouraged by the number of women who have reached out since. Both are indications that they are on the right path and that women are finding value in the service.

“Women really need to know that we are all going through this together,” adds Radoja. “Our advisors are made up of senior women from our firm who bring the warmth of authentic connection and understanding of the emotional and practical issues unique to women in the legal profession. Our hope is to help women understand through sharing experiences that they are not alone.”

LiL can be accessed Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., by calling 1-855-962-2322 from anywhere in Canada, or by visiting the online [chat](#) or the [blog](#).

Though “powered” by Harper Grey, LiL is a separate entity and independent from the firm.



Kim Jakeman



Una Radoja





International Women's Day Potluck

By Stephanie Hu

The BC WLF held its third annual International Women's Day potluck at WLF member Anne Giardini's beautiful home in Vancouver. The potluck was hosted at a WLF member's home to allow women lawyers to connect with each other in a casual and relaxed atmosphere.

It was most kind and generous of Anne, herself an accomplished lawyer, journalist, and novelist, to open her home and share her comfortable space with the Women Lawyers Forum for an evening of stimulating conversation and delicious food. In addition to the above accomplishments, Anne

has been recognized for her support of other organizations that celebrate and empower women and girls in Canada and around the world. She was also a successful executive in the forestry industry, and is currently serving as the chancellor of Simon Fraser University.



Before sitting down to enjoy the meal, current BC WLF Chair Daria Batkin announced many exciting upcoming events for the WLF, which gives much to look forward to once regular activities resume.

When it came time to dine, guests were spoiled with a catered main course of pasta, including vegetarian options, while the accompanying sides, appetizers, and desserts were shared as part of the potluck. Some women of BC WLF displayed their talents by spending the time to make a variety of hearty dishes and yummy desserts, while others displayed their excellent

taste in wine by bringing some to share. Participants enjoyed catching up with old friends and meeting new faces in the spacious kitchen, dining, and living areas.

With plenty of food and drink to go around, guests were able to enjoy seconds while staying late into the evening to make new connections and bond with friends and fellow lawyers. The event was attended by junior and senior lawyers, and provided an excellent opportunity for women lawyers to connect and discuss challenges we each face in the legal profession, and ways to manage them. Conversation was casual and light, and guests representing a diverse array of backgrounds, ages, experiences, and practice areas shared a wonderful evening of celebrating International Women's Day and each other.

The BC WLF would like to thank the wonderful organizers, Nicole Chang and Stephanie Markovich, for their hard work in planning this event, and our incredible host, Anne Giardini, for the most amazing evening. We hope to see everyone again next year!



WLF Speaker Spotlight: Rumana Monzur

By Margaret Ostrowski Q.C.

We have an amazing new colleague in our profession - Rumana Monzur - a woman who has shown extraordinary persistence, fortitude, and acumen to join our ranks.

Rumana was born in Bangladesh and was a very bright student from a young age. She quickly obtained Bachelors and Masters Degrees in International Relations, was an assistant professor at Dhaka University, had an offer of a Fulbright Scholarship, and was pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of British Columbia. As you may have read in the media at the time, Rumana was brutally attacked by her husband in 2011, when she chose to leave her husband and continue her education in Canada. She suffered many injuries and was



rendered blind by his attack, which took place in front of her young daughter. Understandably, Rumana was devastated and told a CTV reporter that she doubted if she would ever smile again. But she has. *Source: [Women of Influence](#)*

In an interview for the Vancouver Sun, Rumana said she figured she had three options after her attack: “I can stay there, or I can try to stand up slowly, or I can stand up as quickly as possible and start to move forward.” She chose the last option because she, “didn’t want to loose hope.” And with that inner vision, she switched her career choice to law and chose to tell her story. Rumana has been interviewed by CTV Morning Live, CBC - the Current, Global News Radio, Spice Radio, the Lynda Steele Show, and by reporters for many newspaper articles. She is one of the four interviewed women in the documentary “Untying the Knot” shown on the Documentary Channel, which she said “aims to give women who are suffering violence a message for hope”.

Rumana worked hard as a blind student of law at UBC from 2013 to 2017 and was called to the bar in December 2018. She is now working for the Federal Department of Justice and has a special interest in Criminal and International Law, while she continues to care for her 14 year old daughter at home.

Undoubtedly, she is an inspiration and a hero. Rumana was also acknowledged as the special guest at our annual BC WLF Senior Women Lawyers’ dinner in February 2020.





Stay Connected!

BC WLF membership is open to all CBA members.

For membership information call the CBABC at 604.687.3404, toll free in BC at 1.888.687.3404, or visit: cbabc.org/sections/enroll for a Section enrolment form.

We hope you will join the Forum!

Get Social!

Follow us on:

Twitter: twitter.com/CBA_WLF and LinkedIn [linkedin.com/showcase/cba-wlf](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/cba-wlf) for all things WLF.

Write Us

Are you interested in writing an article for the WLF BC Newsletter or do you have any comments or feedback? If so, please contact the BC WLF Marketing and Communications Committee Co-Chair: [Leah Seneviratne](mailto:Leah.Seneviratne).

CBA National WLF Newsletter

CBA National WLF Newsletter - The Common Room is available at cba.org/Sections/Women-Lawyers/Articles

The CBA National WLF is seeking articles for its newsletters. If you would like to contribute, please contact: cbawomenlawyers@cba.org.

Lessons in Mentorship and Cross-Cultural Communication

By Margery Pazdor

On April 27, 2020, the WLF Mentoring Committee hosted its first ever online event. About 38 participants gathered from numerous locations across the province to hear from a panel of experts about cross-cultural communication in the mentoring relationship.

Expert Catherine Steele facilitated a ‘question and answer’ style discussion with panelists Qainoor Khan Nuraney and Tina Parbhakar. All three experts shared their own experiences in cross-cultural communication, both from living and working in Canada and all over the world. Examples ranged from humorous but harmless faux-pas, to misunderstandings of people’s circumstances that could detrimentally impact a person’s legal rights.

In addition to sharing cross-cultural experiences, panelists Qainoor Khan Nuraney and Tina Parbhakar each addressed the value of cultivating mentoring relationships with people of different cultural backgrounds. They highlighted the opportunity it provides for overcoming myths and biases, and for “fact-checking.” The panelists emphasized the importance of approaching such relationships with humility and curiosity, and of recognizing your own perceptions and reactions, and working to understand what assumptions might be underlying those reactions.

The panelists also identified some challenges in establishing such relationships, including a number of elements of legal culture that discourage conversations about cultural differences. One example cited was the emphasis placed on objectivity and analytical thinking, which works to create an assumption that a lawyer’s background is irrelevant. Professional relationships in law are also frequently not safe enough spaces to talk about cultural experiences and differences. The WLF mentoring program confidentiality agreement is helpful in addressing this second concern, as the guarantee of confidentiality facilitates a sense of safety in having more open conversations.

The BC WLF thanks the panelists and organizing volunteers for facilitating its event via Zoom.

Editorial Note: In the wake of recent #BlackLivesMatter protests around the world, we are reminded of the importance of challenging discrimination and biases. See the CBA’s statement on this matter [here](#).



BC WLF North Section Goes Digital

By Lisa Feinberg, Chair, BC WLF North

The membership of the BC North section of the WLF is spread out over hundreds of kilometers so it can be a challenge to connect with all our members. But whenever we manage to connect, the feedback is always positive!

This year, we held two very successful in-person events. In the fall, WLF BC North hosted a dinner at a restaurant in Smithers, which was well attended by both senior and junior members of the bar. In the winter we held a lunch, which was attended by many lawyers and a recently-retired judge, the Honourable Judge Christine Birnie. While these events were informal, we had great opportunities to discuss what has and has not changed for female-identifying lawyers and what we can do to promote positive change.

After the outbreak of COVID-19, our section decided to host an evening social remotely via Zoom, which would allow us to connect across distance. It was a smaller event, but it was wonderful that lawyers who are generally not able to make it to Smithers for events could still attend remotely. We definitely miss the in person get-togethers, but it was heartening to connect with our colleagues who we do not “see” in person very often.

BC WLF Vancouver Island Adapt Their Monthly Pub Nights

By Robin J. Gage, Chair, BC WLF Vancouver Island

At our planning meeting in the fall, the WLF on Vancouver Island brainstormed ways in which we could increase the connection amongst members in less formal ways, in addition to our general discussion about formal educational and networking opportunities we could deliver to our members. From this, our monthly pub night was born. It was envisioned as a drop-in, come-as-you-are, non-registered event that could be accessible to all.

We confess that we were not sure what to expect, but the women lawyers of Vancouver Island did not disappoint! Each month saw a different cross-section of members from all areas of practice. New connections were made, and others got to catch up and strengthen established relationships.

Discussions ranged from debating and informing about the latest legal trends to challenges facing women in the legal profession, to personal and professional developments and anecdotes. But mostly, we laughed, had fun, and got to know one another.

The feedback and buy-in was fantastic – and then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Not wanting to lose our momentum, and understanding that we were all in more need of connection than ever, our pub nights shifted from the Argyle Attic (a local pub near the Victoria Courthouse) to Zoom. We have now had two such gatherings, and although the forum has shifted, we are pleased to report that the enthusiasm of our members and the feeling of support these events engender has not.

We look forward to continuing these fun and informal events while also working to plan events for the spring, summer and fall – hopefully all soon to be in person!



WLF Book Club Hosts Screenside Chat

By Grace Cleveland and Emma Abdjalieva

On May 14, 2020, over 100 participants came together via zoom to discuss “[The New Billable Hour](#)” by Ritu Goswamy in a conversation facilitated by Paula Price.

Prior to the event, participants were asked to send in their topics of interest. Responses included keeping work and home separate, avoiding distractions, balancing kids with work, maintaining physical health and a social life, and many more issues that come with the territory of billing more hours while maintaining the coveted phenomenon of the “work-life balance.”

The new billable hour, Ritu explained, is “the concept of taking back one billable hour for ourselves as lawyers, of using the wiring in our brain to focus on ourselves, to essentially become your own client for an hour every day. It is easy for us to say that we have to perform acts of self-care but implementing these concepts takes effort. Acts of self-care include activities such as a morning and evening routine, exercise routine, healthy eating habits, meditation. You must bill your own hour before you bill for other people.”



The main takeaways from the event were to: prioritize yourself over your work, be proactive in fitting yourself and your needs in your schedule, think about how you let other people treat you and ask if it is currently working for you, choose how you let people treat you, and be accountable to yourself.



A huge thank you to the BC WLF Education Committee for organizing this outstanding event, and to our speakers Paula Price and Ritu Goswamy for sharing their time and knowledge.