



Bob Reid

Aim for The Stars!

In Conversation with Val Wilson

In June 2003, Robert S. Reid retired from UBC's Faculty of Law after 28 years. He was Assistant Dean of Admissions and Career Placement and an Associate Professor.

In 1988, 1997, and 2000, Bob received the Just Desserts Award, presented by UBC law students to honour the service and efforts of a member of faculty or staff who has "gone the extra mile" on their behalf.

Now Chair of the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline at UBC, Bob has been a member of the Notary Board of Official Examiners since 1990 and has taught our graduating BC Notaries since 1988.

Over the years, this forthcoming and capable man has served as mentor and role model to many, many students studying the law.

Scrivener: *Where were you born, Bob, and where did you live growing up?*

Bob: I was born on April 20, 1941, at the Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster and grew up in Haney, a small community on the north side of the Fraser River in the Valley—a place of legend, like Camelot, that exists today only in people's memories.

I learned there is no shame in failing, only in failing to try.

Scrivener: *Please tell us about your education and the schools you attended.*

Bob: I attended Haney Central Elementary and Maple Ridge Senior High School; College Militaire Royal de Saint Jean, Saint Jean, PQ; Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston, for a BA in History; Simon Fraser University, for part-time MA studies; RMC for an MA in War Studies; Carleton University, Ottawa, for part-time PhD studies; and the University of British Columbia, Faculty of Law, for my LLB.

Scrivener: *That's a lot of learning! What key events affected your life's path?*

Bob: They all appear to be educational. A key event, of course, was the air crash in

1966. [Ed. Note: please see next article.] On reflection, I would say it was growing up in Haney with a large family or tribe, including aunts, uncles, and cousins. My dad's side of the family came from Scotland in 1926. Even today, on the second Sunday in July, the family gathers for the annual Reid-Anderson picnic at Harris Park in Pitt Meadows.

The person who had the greatest influence on my life's path was my mother, who early on taught me you should always aim for the stars and do your best in anything you try. I learned there is no shame in failing, only in failing to try.

Scrivener: *What was your career experience prior to being called to the Bar in BC?*

Bob: Prior to becoming a law professor in 1975, my career experiences were limited to the following activities: student, aircrew navigator on a search and rescue squadron, hospital patient, and official military historian.

In 1964, I graduated from RMC as an officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force. In 1968 it became the Canadian Armed Forces (Air). After completion of aircrew training as a long-range navigator, I was posted to the Search and Rescue Squadron at RCAF Station Comox in March 1965.

In April 1966, I was the sole survivor of an aircraft crash and spent the next couple of years being patched up at Shaughnessy Hospital, a military hospital in those days. As I often told my students, if you think I am handsome now, you should have seen me before the skin grafts.

In August 1968, I was posted back to RMC as a full-time graduate student and after graduating in 1970, was posted to the Directorate of History at Canadian Armed Forces Headquarters in Ottawa where as an official military historian, I worked on the official history of the RCAF. I became the world's leading expert on the air battle during the Amiens Offensive from 8 to 11 August, 1918.

Being a military historian was a dream job—imagine interviewing World War I pilots about their experiences during the war-to-end-all-wars. All good things must end and, in 1971, the Forces finally decided I was medically unfit to serve—friends have often queried whether on physical or mental grounds—and retired me. When I was released, I was awarded the Canadian Forces Decoration for having served Queen and Country faithfully and dutifully for 12 years. Not bad when you consider I only worked for two of those years.

Scrivener: *Why did you become a lawyer?*

Bob: When the Air Force tufted me out in 1971, I was married with a three-year-old son and another son on the way. Law was not my first choice for a career. I wanted to become a history professor but had not completed my doctorate. Moreover I was climatically restricted as to where I could live in Canada in the Winter months.

As a second choice, law seemed like an attractive career. This decision was greatly influenced by a movie, *Anatomy of a Murder*, starring Jimmy Stewart and George C. Scott. Mr. Stewart played a small-town lawyer in northern Michigan who spent most of his time fishing. The lifestyle appealed to me. I could become a lawyer and practise law at Comox where I would spend my time fishing.

Imagine my surprise when, after the birth of my second son during my first

year of legal studies, I realized “the best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft a-gley, and lea’e us nought but grief and pain for promis’d joy!”

Scrivener: *No time for fishing? Bob, did you have a mentor?*

Bob: Many people have helped me along life’s journey. My father, whom I greatly love and miss, taught me there are two ways to do a thing—the right way and the wrong way—and it is just as easy to do it the right way. He also taught me that if you wanted something done right, you did it yourself!

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Another special person in my life was the law professor who got me into law school: Ray Herbert, QC. He was a warm, jovial man who had been a Wing Commander in charge of the Air Force reservists at the university. At the law school, he would go the extra mile for his students.

And during my idyllic days as a law student, I worked as a researcher for Peter Burns, QC, who has been and continues to be a good friend and mentor. Of course, there were many others in my lifetime.

Scrivener: *Why did you decide to teach law rather than practise law?*

Bob: I had always wanted to become an academic. That is why I had started working on a doctorate in history at Carleton U. I thought it would remain a dream until Dean Bertie McClean called me during my articling year and asked if I would like to teach at the law school.

Scrivener: *What did you most enjoy about teaching?*

Bob: In hindsight, I believe it was a gift to have the opportunity to work with law students—some of the brightest and most motivated students at the university. I also was privileged to work with great

colleagues at the law school and the university. One of the highlights of my teaching career was my involvement with First Nations law students in the classroom and with the First Nations Law Program. They taught me much more than I was ever able to teach them.

Scrivener: *How has your work made a difference in the field of law?*

Bob: Quite honestly I don’t believe my work has made any difference in the field of law. I had hopes a few years ago, when asked to serve on a Task Force to Amend the *Land Title Act*. A report was submitted three years ago to the government. There were hopes that the Task Force’s recommendations would be enacted . . . but the best laid plans . . . ! Maybe someday.

I had hoped that one of my students who became a judge would insert in his or her judgment one of the two principles I expounded in class—either the Doctrine of Tough or the “I Smell a Rat” principle. I continue to hope!

Scrivener: *Which of your professional accomplishments are most gratifying to you?*

Bob: I would have to say working with others to improve things at the law school for law students and the establishment of the position of Director of the Native—now called First Nations—Law Program and the fundraising for scholarships, prizes, and bursaries, plus the creation of the Office of Career Placement. These things were not done solely by me. Credit must be given to others also.

Professionally I was privileged to be the “academic in residence” at Ladner Downs, now Borden Ladner Gervais, from 1985 to 1987.

I can say, though, that the most gratifying event in my career was the retirement dinner organized by friends and ex-students. I was deeply honoured by the event and the accolades. I was touched by the number of ex-students who attended and who told me I had helped them when they were students.

In my speech I stated,

...at the end of our careers, we reflect back and question whether we made a difference—hopefully a significant difference to the institution we worked for—and especially for someone like me who was a teacher, a difference in the lives of his students.

I know that I asked myself this question. And for me, it was important to know that I had made a difference, to honour the memory of my RCAF crewmates who died so many years ago in the airplane crash.

Tonight you have answered that question for me.

Scrivener: *What do you see for the future of law in BC?*

Bob: Hopefully the current Treaty process will result in positive changes, not just in the law but in our society as a whole.

Scrivener: *Are you involved in community service?*

Bob: Currently I am a Director on the Scow Institute for the Communicating of Information on Aboriginal Issues and have served on the Board of Directors of the UBC Law Alumni Association for many years.

Right now, the most precious thing in my life, next to my wife, is my granddaughter Emma, born on August 11.

Until this year I was on the Membership Committee of the Canadian Bar Association, BC. In the 1970s and '80s, I served on the Board of Continuing Legal Education and, in the 1980s, on the executive of the Vancouver Bar Association.

Scrivener: *What are your special interests and hobbies?*

Bob: Who has time? My wife is always after me to get a hobby but I never seem to have the time. I guess you could say reading is my hobby. And eating!

Scrivener: *What book have you most enjoyed reading in the past year?*

Bob: I read a lot, mostly mystery novels and short stories. The book I enjoyed reading most in the past year is Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire's *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*. He is an RMC graduate and a Canadian hero—someone we can respect and honour, not only for what he has done but for what he is currently doing to assist those, especially children, who have suffered the horrors of war and civil strife.

Scrivener: *What is most important to you in life?*

Bob: At the age of 63, I realize the most important thing in my life is my family—my wife Robin and my three sons and their partners: Rob, Geoff (Eric), and David (Michelle). Most important in anyone's life are family, friends, and good health. Right now, the most precious thing in my life, next to my wife, is my granddaughter Emma, born on August 11. ▲