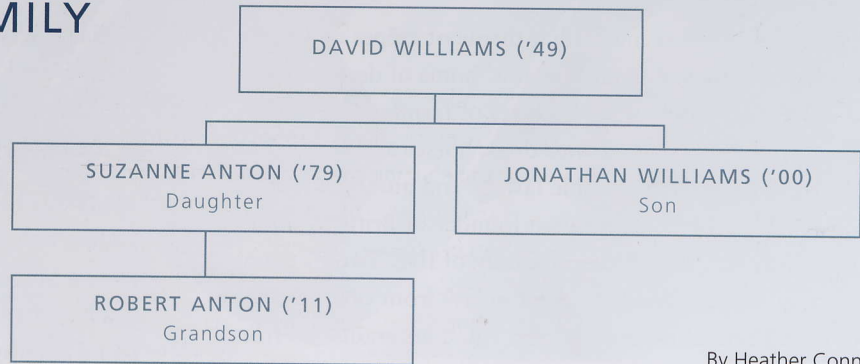


WILLIAMS FAMILY



By Heather Conn

In an artist's drawing, the late David Williams (Class of 1949) leans casually against his law-office desk, with a warm, bespectacled face and tousled grey hair. His distinctive feature, a compelling smile, suggests that he might have just told a great joke or a ribald tale. He's the November 1985 cover illustration of *The Advocate*, the Vancouver Bar Association magazine, which now lies on a table in a west-side café, next to cups of latte and pastries.

Left to right: Robert Anton, Suzanne Anton, Jonathan Williams



The café's urban scene, with a theme of crêpes and Paris, seems far removed from Williams' home of decades past, a welcoming patch of 8.9 hectares of farmland outside Duncan, BC, once filled with dogs, horses and sheep. From his rural haven, this notable lawyer and author, whom one writer called "the modern founder of British Columbia legal history," helped raise a family of five. Two of them became lawyers and graduated in law from UBC, like their dad, and one of these two has a son who graduated from UBC Law School in May 2011.

Today, Williams' two offspring and grandson gather around this café table and his image to share stories of his character and career. Lively Vancouver city councillor Suzanne Anton (Class of 1979), in a black turtleneck and short blonde hair, speaks French with the café owner. Her brother, Jonathan Williams (Class of 2000) of Owen Bird Law Corporation in Vancouver, in a suit and tie, has arrived late, misinformed about our meeting time. (He quips: "I'm a lawyer, I don't read the fine print.") Suzanne's son, Robert Anton, with a cropped reddish beard, sits next to his mom in jeans and a white T-shirt. Together, they evoke the legacy of one of UBC's few three-generation Law School families.

"We come from many, many generations of Anglican church parsons and lawyers," Suzanne says. "It's in the genes. I do not know why." She laughs.

Suzanne remembers her dad—"very gregarious" and "a great raconteur"—talking a lot about his Duncan law practice, Williams & Davie, where he worked from 1949 until retiring in 1986. "I always liked what I saw of the legal profession through my father," she says, noting that he did interesting work, interacted with many people, and was an important part of the community.

Williams wrote in *The Advocate* in November 1985: "Whatever new forms the legal profession will adopt in the coming century, certain values will endure: cultivation of the intellect, hard work, perseverance, responsibility to the client—and the profession; integrity."

Williams served on the UBC senate from 1964 to 1972 and on its Board of Governors from 1969 to 1972. He was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1968 and served as a bencher of the Law Society of BC from 1971 to 1975.

"He [Dad] had a funny pencil story," remembers Suzanne, adding that she can't necessarily vouch for it. "Madame Justice Mary Southin was a bencher at the same time. A fellow had a criminal record for stealing a pencil. They had a lengthy debate about whether he should be admitted to the bar. Mary Southin, I know, was strongly opposed. My father was opposed too. But they were outvoted."

"Anyway, they let him in. Sure enough, a few years later, or some time, this guy actually was disbarred for some kind of evidence of public fraud."

Robert remembers his mom telling him about his grandfather showing her "particularly gruesome" photos from a Nanaimo murder case that he was working on. "What I took from the story isn't that it was odd for him to be showing her these awful photos," he says, "but that it was noble of my grandfather to leave his comfortable house and go out and help deal with these terrible things."

For his own entry into law, Robert spent a month studying for his LSAT. His mother didn't study for hers at all; she wrote the exam in Kano, Nigeria, while teaching for Canadian University Students Overseas (CUSO). Suzanne says, "Those were the days when you just walked in and did it."

She says now of her legal education, "I don't think I did very much work. I remember thinking in third year, 'This is the easiest gig I ever had.'" She recalls a law-student charade tournament (not part of the curriculum), convened by the law librarian Tom Shorthouse, the father of John "Shorty" Shorthouse, play-by-play announcer for today's Vancouver Canucks Pay-Per-View. "You went into the library and chose the most outrageous titles you could find, the longer and more complicated the better. It was very, very entertaining. We actually practiced quite a lot. We had so much fun." Her victorious team "cleaned up so dramatically" that the tournament fizzled the next year and then disappeared, she says.



Suzanne also recalls members of her first-year class doing a 10-minute dramatization of a landmark case in English contract law, *Lloyds Bank Ltd. v. Bundy*. “It was very funny.” The instructor, Joost Blom, QC, who still teaches at UBC, remembers, “A great cheer went up. They [the students] set up a stereo. A tall woman in the class was dressed as the golden threads of the law. I think they wrapped the threads of the law around me. It was great fun.”

Suzanne says, “I loved being at law school. I really liked my classmates.” Starting in after two years away, she found that many of her fellow law students already had other careers. “Any area of expertise you could wish for, somebody had it.” After serving as a Crown prosecutor, Suzanne retired from law in 1999 to work full time in the community.

Her brother Jonathan entered law school after working as a supervisor for a tree planting company under Joyce Murray, later the Liberal MP for Vancouver Quadra. He remembers: “At the end of September, in first year, I couldn’t believe how much I’d learned. It blew my mind. It opened my eyes to a lot of things: how courts work, how administrative tribunals worked, how government worked — things that had touched my life.”

His most humorous memory of law school is “the look of stunned disbelief” on students’ faces when they got their first-term marks; many received lower marks, at least initially, than they had as an undergrad. Suzanne, who had excelled at math, says that she found adjusting to legal writing a challenge at first, but by the end of first year, she was in the top quarter. Back then, UBC Law ranked students based on marks, a practice now discontinued.

Suzanne remembers many of her professors with great affection, including Joost Blom, Robin Elliot, QC, and Liz Edinger, still on faculty, who also taught Jonathan and

Robert. Edinger, who belonged to the same South Cowichan Lawn Tennis Club on Vancouver Island as the Williams family, says, “I was delighted to have all of them [Suzanne, Jonathan, Robert] come through UBC Law.” She remembers David Williams as “always charming” and his law practice as “the eminent firm” in Duncan.

During the more than three decades that separate the graduation of Suzanne and her son, UBC Law has, understandably, seen considerable changes. Although there are more course options and offerings now, the core courses still remain, says Edinger, who started teaching full-time at UBC in 1978. Graduating classes are now smaller (about 180, rather than 240), more ethnically diverse, and the gender ratio is about 50/50.

Blom remembers that there were few female law students at UBC when he started teaching there in 1972. In the early days of feminism, he says it took only about two years before females made up one-quarter to one-third of the class. During that era, law students even published a rating of faculty members, based on their gender-correct language, he says. “They suspected me of not being correct, but they couldn’t prove it,” he says with a laugh. “You were suspect because of age and gender.” By contrast, most of Robert’s law professors were women.

Decades ago, in his first-year contracts class, Blom used English cases far more than now, when good, recent Canadian cases are available. Older legal decisions were much shorter than modern judgments because they drew on fewer cases, he adds. Jonathan points out that BC law is derived more from England; even today, this province tends to look at English law more than Ontario does, he says.

Technological change is one significant difference in modern law education, says Edinger. “Before, people actually had to sit in the library. Now, they can access databases at home.” Online archives have replaced swelling shelves of reference books and old cases. In the past, she says that she encountered incidents of articles torn out of law periodicals — “it happened enough to concern us” — but as Robert points out, “That doesn’t work anymore with the Internet.”

Today’s increased competition for articling jobs and student worries about potential employment are one big difference that both Blom and Jonathan see compared to law school in the decades prior to the most recent recession. “Everybody got a job in my year,” Jonathan says. “That is not always the case right now.” Nephew Robert will be articling for corporate law firm Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt. (As of October 2011, the number of third-year UBC Law students who reported securing 2012–2013 articling positions was close to 97 per cent.

As for the law profession itself, Jonathan reaffirms that the once-prized vision of a paperless office is a myth. “I have one single file that takes up about three rows of filing cabinets,” he says. “Technology certainly hasn’t led to a reduction in the use of paper. Far from it. Everybody delivers huge whacking affidavits by email. Almost every day, there’s a 70-page affidavit coming with a whole bunch of documents attached to it.”

Today’s UBC law students “are wired” for technology, says Edinger. By contrast, David Williams learned in army huts that were relocated on-site after Second World War use. Like many other students in the early days of the law school, he was a veteran, and enrolled after serving two years in the Royal Canadian Artillery. The UBC Law Library then had only two books, while case books cost six dollars each, reproduced by a Gestetner with brown material covers and shoestring (literally) bindings.

“He (David Williams) made a great point of not knowing how to put the paper into the photocopier. Things were simpler then. They were also more efficient.” SUZANNE ANTON

Did Williams ever share war stories with his children? Jonathan recalls, “Dad was the first to admit that he had an undistinguished war career. He served, but did not leave the country. His funniest story was being sent to guard a Halifax brewery during the Halifax riot in May 1945 on VE [Victory in Europe] Day. No rioter came within a mile of the place, but dad remembered seeing a rat climb out of one of the beer vats. Not that I ever asked him, but perhaps that helped lead to his preference for Scotch whiskey.”

Williams graduated from UBC’s second-ever law class. Many decades later, he gave informal presentations on legal history at monthly law gatherings on campus. By then, he had written significant legal books such as *Trapline Outlaw*, on fugitive Simon Gunanoot, and historical biographies of former Chief Justice of the Crown Colony of BC, Matthew Baillie Begbie, and former Chief Justice of Canada, Sir Lyman Poore Duff. Williams later joined the BC Press Council and was adjunct professor and writer-in-residence for many years at the University of Victoria.

How would Williams, who died of cancer in 1999, regard today’s law school experience and profession if he was alive? “The popular use of technology would both fascinate and mystify him,” Jonathan says. “Dad didn’t ever use a computer. He never learned to type. He dictated everything.” Jonathan calls himself a chip off the old block, saying he’s probably the only lawyer in Western Canada who doesn’t have a cellphone.

Suzanne adds, “He made a great point of not knowing how to put the paper into the photocopier.” She thinks that her father would find today’s practice of law far more complex. “Things were simpler then. They were also more efficient.”

Williams wrote in *The Advocate* in November 1985: “Whatever new forms the legal profession will adopt in the coming century, certain values will endure: cultivation of the intellect, hard work, perseverance, responsibility to the client — and the profession; integrity.”

His words might well form an inspirational subtext for UBC Law as it strives to create exciting new forms of exceptional learning and research, buoyed by its five-year strategic plan (2010 to 2015). Jonathan says, “UBC is the institution that shapes BC law.” As for practicing law, Robert says, “Helping solve problems, whatever the problems may be, is a pretty noble calling.” ●