



Daniel Laprés: A worldly walk of life

Daniel Laprés was born in Halifax while his parents, who were from the Montreal region, were in the service during and after the Second World War. They moved back to Montreal where Daniel grew up until the family moved to Winnipeg when he was in high school and then to Regina. He says that Dalhousie was the only school to which he applied because of its reputation for excellence and also because he wanted to return to Halifax. Getting a Dunn Scholarship was “la cerise sur le gâteau.”

Can you tell us a little about your activities after leaving law school?

After graduation in 1972 I lived and worked as a lawyer successively in New York, Rio de Janeiro and Hong Kong. I settled down in 1976 on the Left Bank of Paris where I have lived and worked ever since.

You would not typically find a graduate fresh out of law school in such places as New York, Rio and Hong Kong. What circumstances motivated you to choose these particular locales?

Thanks to my parents, I had already gone around most of Canada and the continental United States as a child. By the time of graduation from law school

I had traveled in about 20 countries and I wanted to know what it would be like to live in those four particular cities and perhaps settle in the one I liked best.

What made you eventually choose Paris?

On a professional level, I came to Paris to enter the design field and founded and ran a home textile design company until the 1990s.

On a personal level, I like working and living in a multilingual context and, having been educated in French schools in Quebec, Paris was an easy choice. The French have an *art de vivre* that especially appeals to me and Paris is a beautiful city with a fine climate. And the French like Canadians, even the English-speaking variety.

“My fondest memory without question at the School would have been working with Dalhousie Legal Aid...”

Did you have any prior background in design or textiles?

None. In a sense, that was the point. I wanted to try something different and be in business as distinguished from being in consulting. Paris seemed like the best place to try my luck in the design field. This led me to work with many of the leading creators in Europe and America and to engage in trade with customers and suppliers on every continent. Our major source of supply was India and for several years in the 1980s I would spend three to four months a year working with artisans in India, mostly around the Holy City of Benares (Varanasi) along the Ganges River.

Were you practising law also during this period?

No, and I had no desire to do so. Still I have over the years always maintained my admission to the Nova Scotia bar, and more than once the qualification has proved to be beneficial. I had passed the French bar admission exam in 1978, but the French bar (like a lot of other bars) excluded most foreigners from practice. Then the new GATT was adopted in 1994 and national treatment was extended to legal services. So I was able to join the Paris bar and, coincidentally, that is what I then wanted to do. Since then I have been practising and teaching law.

What does your practice entail?

My favorite professional activity is court work. My current challenge is a case before the European Court of Human Rights in the defense of an official of an international governmental organization accused of sexual harassment. We are trying to have the rules of public international law on jurisdictional immunities rewritten. We won at the Cour d'Appel in Paris where a former Deputy Attorney General of France was

opposing counsel. All wishes of good luck are welcome.

In addition, I am “Of Counsel” to a leading Chinese law firm specializing in business and financial law. The Kunlun Law Firm is located in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Since last May, I have been appointed to the list of international arbitrators of the Chinese International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission (CIETAC). I am pretty much fluent in Chinese Mandarin. I have also developed a *pro bono* specialty in the representation of Chinese Christians seeking asylum on account of persecution at the hands of the Communist Government.

In law school you were a regular contributor of articles to the then student publication, *Ansul*. Do you continue to write?

I am editor and principal co-author of the book, *Business Law in China* (published by the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris). A second (electronic) edition of about 350,000 words is in the final stages of preparation and it should be posted in the near future. I've had published, as well, about 40 articles written in English or French, a few translated into Chinese, on law and economics in journals in North America, Europe and Asia. I try to make my web site a useful tool for communicating on the academic and professional levels.

Tell us a little about your teaching.

What I like about teaching is that it makes it possible to explore areas that I would not otherwise be exposed to. I create courses on subjects that I want to learn about. Teaching is a useful exercise for improving skills in that it forces you to make yourself understood, often about complex subjects, and to spark interest and empathy. I especially enjoy teaching international finance because

it is as intellectually rich and yet down-to-earth as a law class but with a lot of mathematics, which develops analytical skills, and to improvise mathematical problems in front of MBA students produces adrenalin!

In John Willis' *A History of Dalhousie Law School* he mentions that in 1970 the Dalhousie Legal Aid Service, or “The Clinic” was the product of a group of idealistic students spearheaded by you. Hearsay would like at some stage to get your story of the beginnings of what is now an important institution in the life of the School.

I would love to do that. My fondest memory without question at the School would have been working with Dalhousie Legal Aid with **Dennis Patterson, Greg Warner, Barbara Penvidic and Tom Boyne**. Dennis and Greg were in my class of 1972, and Barb and Tom were a year ahead.

Any other Dalhousie recollections you might like to share?

Well one unforgettable experience took place in 1972 when I reached Base Camp on Mount Everest with **Eric Rice (LL.B.'71)**. Some 30 years later I was part of a Paris bar delegation that welcomed Eric in his capacity as President of the Canadian Bar Association. There are many other memories. I fondly recall a Saturday afternoon sailing around Hong Kong Harbour shooting the breeze with **Bill Mingo (LL.B.'49)**. Bill had paid me the great compliment of looking me up. He had been my main mentor on supporting Dal Legal Aid. He also took me on as his articulated clerk and introduced me to the Wall Street law firm where I finished articling in 1973.

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I get the impression that we're just scratching the surface of a lifetime of amazing adventures and experiences.

Well, tell me when to stop. Perhaps one of my most exhilarating life experiences was when I became involved with the leaders of the Tian An Men student movement after their flight to Paris. Also, a very special encounter was meeting Mother Theresa in Calcutta in 1983. On the subject of adventures I suppose my most memorable goes back to 1972 sailing from Cairo up the Nile to Khartoum, overland from war torn Asmara Province in Ethiopia to Mombasa in Kenya, and then sailing across the India Ocean via the Seychelles Islands in the company of mostly Indian refugees after Idi Amin's expulsion of that community from Uganda.

It sounds like a possible script for an Indiana Jones film.

I think you are telling me to stop.

No! No! I wish we had the space to go on. Maybe we can revisit this material in a future issue. However, before we conclude perhaps you might tell us a little something of your family.

Sure. My wife of 17 years is from Beijing and we have two daughters aged 15 and 13. The girls are fluently trilingual in French, English, and Chinese. My wife and I are very proud of this, as even in Canada where, as you are probably aware, Chinese has become the second most spoken language, there are only a few thousand families whose kids are trilingual in those languages. We would like for them to spend time in Canada perhaps as students in a few years.

Daniel, thank you for sharing these fascinating episodes and experiences of your life, family and career with us. I know they will be of great interest to our readers. Also, good luck on your case in the European Court of Human Rights.

Thank you, and this has been a pleasure. •

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Alumni-Student Mentorship Program



This year the Law Alumni Relations Office and the Dalhousie Law Alumni Association have established a new mentorship program to assist students and recent graduates across Canada as they prepare themselves for their law career. This brand new service is off to a great start as we have a number of students and recently graduated alumni eager to meet with seasoned law professionals.

We are asking for your assistance.

These students are looking for alumni that will share their experiences and provide career advice to help them avoid some of the pitfalls and perils commonly faced by new lawyers. Your time commitment could be a brief response to an inquiry or ongoing supportive guidance. In addition to helping current students and recent graduates, this will be an opportunity to reconnect with the Law School and develop a chain of contacts with students and alumni that can be both personally and professionally rewarding.

Many alumni wonder how they can give back to Dal Law. Becoming a mentor is an excellent way to make a significant contribution to the School.

If you would like to make a gift of your time and experience by becoming a mentor please contact Karen Kavanaugh, Director of Alumni & Development at lawalum@dal.ca or 902-494-3744*

*With The Law School's Mentorship Program your name will not be published or widely distributed. Your contact information will be accessible to the Law Alumni Office and the Student Mentorship Committee only.