

HUGH LAWFORD PROFILE

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An excerpt.

An hour after he had closed his last shareholder's meeting, Hugh Lawford hosted a dinner in the old stone courtyard of the Chez Piggy restaurant for a few friends who had helped him build QuickLaw Inc. into Canada's leading source of legal research. Coming on the eve of the company's sale to Leis-Nexis, an American rival, it was a nostalgic occasion with an inevitable mix of euphoria and sadness.

Certainly a casual onlooker would not have easily guessed the reason for the million-dollar smiles that occasionally flickered around the table for Hugh, in blazer and bright yellow tie, still looks more Queen's professor than high-tech tycoon. None of his guests, in fact, fit the stereotype of dot.com entrepreneurs for their success had spanned decades rather than arriving overnight. Among the seven diners that warm July evening were retired Kingston realtor Graham Thompson, an old friend and investor; former law professor Dick von Briesen, QuickLaw's co-founder and executive vice president; and Lillian Lawford, former Quicklaw secretary, now senior vice president and wife of Hugh.

Hugh's professorial bearing is indeed genuine for he taught law at Queen's for 40 years, balancing a full-time teaching schedule with his corporate duties. But when the Law Society of Upper Canada honoured him recently with its Law Society Medal, it was in recognition of his work at QuickLaw rather than his teaching or academic achievements - which were already honoured with the title professor emeritus in 1999. In the eyes of the Law Society, Hugh's most noteworthy accomplishment was bringing Canadian legal research into the computer age, a task he started several years before personal computers had been invented or the term Information Age had been coined. Now, thanks to QuickLaw, lawyers across the country have instant access to several million court rulings from across Canada, the USA and beyond.

Today, Hugh takes delight in explaining that his own university schooling involved "no math, no science. Nothing related to computers." Attending Edmonton's University of Alberta in the 1950s, he served as editor of the student newspaper, graduated from law school and won a Rhodes Scholarship. In 1955, he earned a Bachelor of Civil Law at Oxford before returning to article in Alberta. After being called to the bar in 1957, he headed east to Kingston at the invitation of Queen's president Bill Macintosh who hired him to join the fledgling law school in its second year.

"There were just 20 students," Hugh recalls, "and most of them were older than me." But despite a reputation for being too keen and giving long assignments, he was a popular and

witty professor who would deliver a lecture and then adjourn for further discussion to The Chalet, a popular drinking establishment that dated back to John A Macdonald's lawyer days.

"I think that more law was learned at The Chalet than at the law school," Hugh chuckles. In later years his lectures on evidence, civil procedures, torts and trial techniques ended with long, crowded sessions at Chez Piggy.

In 1962 he took a leave of absence from Queen's to investigate the efficiency of federal tribunals for a federal royal commission into government organization. It was an important career diversion for not only did he get a first hand insight into the task of managing the Canadian government's gargantuan amounts of information, he also caught the attention of the Liberal Party. In 1964 he was made special assistant to the president of the Privy Council and, the following year, became a special assistant to the prime minister, serving as a liaison between Lester Pearson and Liberal House Leader George McIlraith.

While political scientists may remember Hugh's work in drafting procedural changes that sped up government business in the House of Commons, Hugh fondly recalls his work during the national flag debate in 1965 when part of his duties was to bird dog Conservative Leader John Diefenbaker. "I would watch the gallery for the arrival of Diefenbaker's wife Olive," explains Hugh. "He always brought her in to watch when he was up to something. It was a signal that something outrageous was going to happen." From his seat in the wings, Hugh helped mastermind cabinet strategy, sending notes to Pearson in the midst of debate.

Hugh returned to Kingston and his teaching duties in 1966 but never stopped thinking about the difficulties of accessing the mass of legal information sitting in Ottawa. When Queen's president John Deutsch was soliciting research funds from U.S. computer giant IBM in 1967, Hugh suggested that the money go into developing the world's first on-line research system for lawyers. At a time when computers were the size of trucks and data-crunching was done with binary numbers rather than text, it was a revolutionary proposal but IBM agreed with Hugh's vision and provided \$2.7 million. *[continued...]*