

PHOTOGRAPHER/ARTIST:



Mary Dixon '87

CHRIS SMITH

stop during a transition point, but my mother was ill with cancer so I hung around, formed new relationships and decided I wanted to stay. My parents have since passed away but I am still here, now living in Newcombville, about six kilometers inland from Bridgewater on the road to Kejimkujik Park.

Did you initially have law as your goal?

In high school I thought I would become a newspaper writer. I started at the University of King's College and enrolled in the new journalism program in 1978. However, as a very naive and insecure 17-year-old, I felt intimidated by my early experience in the journalism part of the program so dropped it and continued with the Foundation Year Programme. I graduated from Dal in 1982 with a BA in Poli Sci. When I found myself as a young married BA grad selling wicker in Fredericton while my husband was at UNB, I decided there must be a better future for me and maybe I should be a lawyer too. I applied and was accepted at UNB. Frankly, being a lawyer fit with my family profile of professionals and academics, it made sense in terms of what I thought was expected of me and absolutely no sense in terms of who I really was, which I must admit, I am still unearthing.

When my then husband was hired to article in Halifax I managed to transfer to Dalhousie for my second year.

Do you remember much of your law school period? Do any particular experiences come to mind?

The first thing that comes to mind is my horror one day before starting law at Dal. I was taking the bus on my way to my summer job down on Terminal Road and I learned that the Law School was on fire! No library when I arrived!

I also remember being a member of the "Married Students Society" or something, a loose group of other students who were also married and generally a couple of years older than

Mary, you were born in Montreal. What brought you to Nova Scotia?

My father was born in Lachine, part of Montreal. My mother was a Newfoundlander schooled in Nova Scotia who met my dad during nurses' training in Montreal while he was a medical intern. When the FLQ Crisis happened in Quebec in 1970 my dad felt, as an "Anglo" he no longer belonged in his home province. During a doctor's strike that year regarding the introduction of medicare, he and a colleague headed east scouting other opportunities, fuelled by my mom's Nova Scotia school connections and my dad's love of sailing. My family moved to a house on the LaHave River near Bridgewater when I was 10.

And, you have lived on the South Shore ever since?

Yes, other than during university years in Halifax and four years in Cape Breton. My very brief legal career all happened in Sydney, articling and working with the then-named Sampson MacDougall Gillis law firm. I came back to the Bridgewater area in 1991 as my parents were still there. I thought it would be a temporary

Mary Dixon (LL.B.'87 as Mary Corsano) has called Nova Scotia home since 1971. Since her brief career detour as a lawyer (1987-91), Mary has been pursuing a lifelong interest in photography that was encouraged by her former partner, an editorial photographer. Her work includes the creation of fine-art prints in alternative processes such as polaroid transfer and hand-coloured black and white.

Since 1994 she has worked commercially as well, providing studio photography to regional artists and artisans, professional and personal portraits, stock travel photography and the odd freelance assignment. Her present focus is on her art. Mary has also lectured and provided workshops for camera clubs and individuals. A member of ViewPoint Gallery Co-operative in Halifax for its first seven years and of Visual Arts Nova Scotia, Mary's work has been in group and solo shows in Nova Scotia and is in the permanent collection of the Sherman Hines Museum of Photography, Liverpool, NS as well as various personal collections across Canada and the United States. Hearsay was pleased to have an opportunity to chat with Mary about her life and art.



Verandah (12"x18" black and white infrared print, sepia-toned then coloured by hand with oils and pencils)

others in one's class — I was still only 24.

I remember playing guitar and harmonizing (probably rather poorly) with Raylene Rankin (LL.B.'87) at a coffee house at Domus Legis. I hardly ever went there, being married and all. I did make some friends but it was harder to break in when one had not done first year at Dal with the rest of the gang. If it hadn't been for people like Rob Patzelt (LL.B.'87) (another married student who brought me into that crowd) I think I would have been pretty disconnected. I was in awe of people like Alex Neve (LL.B.'87) and RONALDA MURPHY (LL.B.'87) who were at the top of the class. They had a real grasp of the subjects and an intensity and intelligence that made me feel out of my league.

For the first time in my academic history I felt really mediocre, a bit of a fraud really. In first year law at UNB I had a kind of rude awakening in terms of academic challenge which continued at Dal. Way too much reading, ha ha! I had always been an "A" student in high school and undergrad, except perhaps for Foundation Year at King's. I think my grades ran the gamut from "A" to "E" at Weldon! Somehow I emerged with a respectable but unremarkable average.

Do you have recollections of any of your instructors at the Law School?

It's all a blur 20 years later but I did enjoy Rollie Thompson (LL.B.'78) in family law. And Peter Darby (LL.B.'58) was challenging and entertaining.

Could you tell us about how your present career as a professional artist came about?

Basically during my transitional time after leaving Cape Breton I met and developed a relationship with an editorial photographer, started doing odd jobs editing and cataloguing for him and accompanying him on assignments and started learning a lot about photography through the back door. I learned basic skills, editorial approaches and darkroom technique from him, but the urge to paint or play around with photos was there so I found other teachers and books to educate me on aspects like the alternative print processes I work with today. The commercial studio work evolved with us both learning at the same time.

So art was always there lurking in the background?

I think my artistic inclination was fostered in childhood by my parents who

were collectors and appreciators of fine art. My mother was a frustrated would-be painter who wouldn't permit herself the time to pursue it to a great degree. I think she felt that her painting was self-indulgent. I think that's maybe where I got the mixed message that although art is great, being an artist is maybe something that one wouldn't engage in, not seriously, at least in our family.

Could you speak a little about what you like to express in your photographs?

My choice of subject matter and technique are varied and I tend to choose particular techniques to portray different subjects. For example, Polaroid transfer for colourful travel images, hand-colouring when I want to reflect on something more nostalgically or romantically, straight black and white for portraits or quieter studies and digital capture in colour for natural landscapes. In all cases I try to find the inherent beauty in the moment and sometimes a little humour or quirkiness. They all tend to be a reflection of my inner landscape at the time I am observing and I find as I am evolving I am more and more drawn to the expression of beauty or spirit or gentleness in what I create, one of my



Mayreau Baby (digital reproduction of a 3"x3" SX-70 Polaroid print which has been manipulated during development to add the wavy texture)

Renaissance (12"x18" black and white infrared print, coloured by hand with oils and pencils)



Burano (3 1/4" x 4 1/4" Polaroid emulsion transfer print, slide copied on to Polaroid film, emulsion transferred to watercolour paper, some coloured pencil added)

"New Thought" mantras being "You get what you think about".

Can you look back over your body of work and give an opinion on aspects you have particularly enjoyed?

I still enjoy my hand-coloured series of the "Big Ex" (South Shore Exhibition) and the Polaroid series "Tropicana" that you may have seen on my web site. But, I am very proud of my newest work. They are black and white infrared images, all nudes, mostly very discreet. Some depict friends together; couples; a mother and baby, a man alone. All in nature, being loving, playful, meditative. They are important to me, representing a personal awakening as well as very personal artwork. I had a real sharing of feeling with my subjects who not only trusted me and my vision enough to model nude outdoors, many for the first time, but who also wrote very personal statements to accompany their images. It was a moving exhibit for some people.

Do you see any link or meeting point between law and art?

I suppose one could say that practicing law well is an art in itself. For all my abandonment of the career as not right for me personally, I have always maintained a huge respect for those who

can and do stick it out in private practice having experienced a bit of it myself. It takes fortitude, patience, creativity, good interpersonal skills as well as intelligence to do it well and maintain the respect of one's colleagues. Practically speaking the law influences art or restricts it, trying to draw lines between what depictions of nudity, or acts of nudity, are legitimate as art as opposed to something pornographic or otherwise illegal; or whether a street portrait or scene is an invasion of someone else's privacy or not. Otherwise I don't feel any connection to the law in creating my art.

On a practical level does your legal background have any impact on your life today – professional or otherwise?

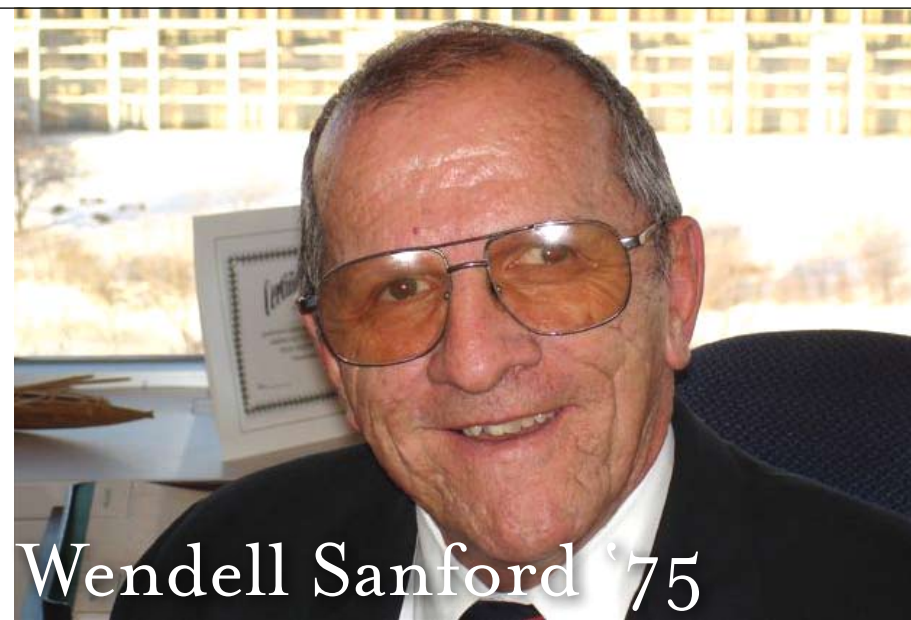
In a very general sense "yes"; it makes me very aware of fine print! I actually read things I have to sign although I know so much is boiler plate that you aren't going to get around anyway! On another level perhaps the same mind that can deal with the attention to detail required in the law is the one that can deal with the technical details in the darkroom, studio or on the computer.

Although you practiced for only a short period of time was the law school experience worth it?

Oh, yes that and every other experience has been absolutely worth it as it has all been part of my growth and somehow got me to where I am now, which is a really happy place! If nothing else, having a law degree is an accomplishment that not that many can claim. It requires a not inconsiderable amount of fortitude as well as intelligence to survive, so I take some pride in the fact that I did it. And my brief experience in Sydney doing a fair share of Legal Aid referrals at family court, assisting with some labour issues and other general practice matters was probably the more valuable part of that education. It opened my eyes to the experiences of other people from diverse walks of life and to the way the world works on a lot of levels.

Thank you, Mary •

This summer Mary will be listed in the Studio Map guide to fine artists in Nova Scotia and as such will be opening her home (at first) and, hopefully by June, her own gallery called Third Eye Gallery on her property in Newcombville. As well she has just been added to the artists at Anderson Gallery in Lunenburg, a commercial gallery of contemporary fine art photography.



Wendell Sanford '75

Wendell Sanford (LL.B.'75) has been appointed Director, Oceans and Environmental Law Section, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Hearsay asked Wendell for a few comments on his Dalhousie years and the path leading to his current position. (Ed.)

Wendell told Hearsay that as a first year law student he had not decided what career path to take. He enjoyed the challenges of studying law, but his options for more specialized study were many. That all changed when Wendell took Hugh Kindred's International Law course in the fall of his second year. "I was hooked", Wendell says. This was law the way he liked it — black letter conventions, coupled with international politics and great power interests. He recalls playing out a scenario in one class in which he had to assume the position of the United States in a debate with Canada over Arctic sovereignty. Garth Gordon (LL.B.'74) represented the Canadian interest. When Garth showed photographs of a frozen Northwest Passage Wendell jokingly said, "There I am in the picture — under the ice!"

In the spring term of 1974 Wendell took Douglas Johnston's Law of the Sea class. He says, "It was amazing. The negotiations for the Law of the Sea Convention had just begun. In those pre-web days Professor Johnston had all the

documents and knew everyone involved. I recall doing a paper for him on ICNAF (International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries), the precursor to NAFO (Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization) another subject of which I have learned a great deal over the years."

Following law school, Wendell served two years in the navy and articulated as a staff solicitor in the office of the Attorney General of Nova Scotia.

He passed the foreign service examination and joined the then Department of External Affairs. "My first assignment was in Bangkok in the years immediately after the fall of Vietnam. Early in my second year in 1982, a professor at Chulalongkorn University was looking for support to undertake an oceans law research project with two Canadian law professors. Small world being what it is, the professors were Douglas Johnston and Edgar Gold (LL.B.'72). We parlayed a \$15,000 contribution from the ambassador's post fund for small projects in the South East Asia Program on Ocean Law and Management (SEAPOL), which for 20 years conducted ground breaking research and developed programs and processes throughout an area of the world badly in need of cooperation and a rule of law at sea.

Wendell's next posting was to Boston. For four years he served as a trade

commissioner in the office of the Canadian Consulate General, and then stayed on for two more years (1990-92) as the founding Director of the Office of Nova Scotia in New England. He states, "The contacts with practicing lawyers in Nova Scotia and the Law School were legion in those years."

From 1996 to 1998 Wendell had the unique experience of an exchange assignment within the New Zealand foreign ministry in Wellington. Here his task was to develop a convention involving twenty states on the subject of the tuna industry in the South Pacific. Notwithstanding the distance from Halifax, one of Dalhousie's offspring, the International Centre for Ocean Development (ICOD) was everywhere. He says, "I met graduates of training courses at Dal, and those who had been trained by Hugh Williamson (LL.B.'84), and others with a Dal connection.

Today, Wendell is in Ottawa in what he refers to as "the penalty box." But, it seems his early life at Dal has come full circle. As Director of Oceans and Environmental Law in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade he leads a group of 12 lawyers whose task is to lead Canadian international law with respect to Arctic sovereignty, reform of NAFO, not to mention the Kyoto Protocol, and a host of other issues.

Wendell recalls that it was just over a year ago that he last worked with Douglas Johnston on what was to be his final project with the Department — a seminar on the Arctic at the University of Victoria. He says, "We also work frequently with Ted McDorman (LL.B.'79) who was just behind me, and David VanderZwaag (LL.M.'82) was in my office recently discussing a fisheries seminar later this year. Dean Phillip Saunders (LL.B.'84) advises us on Machias Seal Island and other issues, and a Dal law team has organized an important seminar for us on biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction.

Wendell concluded with "The Law School is present in my professional life on a regular basis and I am proud to support financially the Legal Aid Clinic — a course which I loved — and the Douglas Johnston Memorial Project." •