

REMARKS BY / ALLOCUTION PRONONCÉE PAR

Me Bernard Amyot
Premier vice-président / First Vice-President

L'Association du Barreau canadien
The Canadian Bar Association

à la / to the

COUNCIL OF THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION -
YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION

lors de la / during the

CONFÉRENCE CONJOINTE DE LA DIVISION DU
JEUNE BARREAU DE L'ABA & DE L'AJBM /
ABA YLD & AJBM JOINT SPRING CONFERENCE

Le jeudi 3 mai 2007, 13h00 – 17h00
Thursday, May 3, 2007, 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Hyatt Regency, Montréal

Check Against Delivery / Seul le texte prononcé fait foi

Thank you so very much Jay. Welcome all to Montreal, the city with the most discreet massage parlours north of D.C.!

J'avais préparé un merveilleux discours, mais mon chien l'a mangé. This, in my native tongue, translates as: "*I'd prepared a great speech but my dog ate it.*" I guess that's hardly original these days...

When, a few weeks ago, Jay so very kindly asked me to bring greetings to your Council, I was delighted to accept, not only as President Elect of the *Canadian Bar Association*, or as a past Chair of the *Young Bar of Montreal*, or even as a native Montrealer, which were all very nice reasons to invite me, but mostly as one of the few survivors of the 1987 *YLD* dinner here at *La Maison Kam Fung* (the place has never been the same again). It was a memorable evening. The Sake world reserves were almost depleted in one night. It's remained to this day the most talked-about event of that Spring Conference. The oddest thing is that most people who still rave about it have absolutely no recollection of any of it. The wonders of Sake...

I feel particularly blessed to have been invited because my *ABA* connections run deep: some of the longest lasting friendships I have made were through the *YLD*. They include past presidents, directors and Council members such as Judy Perry-Martinez, Mark Sessions, Barb Howard, Pam Bresnahan, Barbara Mayden, Allen Kimborough, David Bienvenu, Randy Noel, William Hubbard, Ken Young, Pam Roberts and Walter White, to name a few. All of these *YLD* fellows are still very active in the *ABA* and I continue to see them, always with renewed pleasure. Many other fellows have made it to the highest echelons of your great Association. And I know it will continue to be that way.

As an alumnus of the *YLD* connection, when I prepared for today's address, I was struck by how much has changed since my *McGill Law School* days in the early 80s and my first involvement with the *Young Bar of Montreal* in the late 80s.

When I was a young lawyer, word processing did not exist. Fax machines were the hottest innovation. Telexes were still the preferred international communication route. Internet was not a word. The Web was still a spider's masterpiece. *Google*, *YouTube* and *iPod* would have been incomprehensible blurbs. So much has changed.

So much has changed. It used to be that one George Bush was the President of the United States... OK, this may not be the best example...

So much has changed. It used to be that one President Clinton would succeed to President Bush... Sorry, again!

So much has changed. In those days, there was a war against Irak.... I guess I'm not doing so well...

Now, there's a war against "terror". It's perplexing to think that an army would be summoned to tame a human emotion... So much has changed (and yet, sometimes, you wonder how so little has changed.)

My own country has dramatically changed in the last 40 years. 40 years ago, Montreal hosted Expo 67 to celebrate Canada's Centennial. In those days, a Canadian would be either French or English, Catholic or Protestant. I remember, when I introduced a girlfriend to my Grandfather, before he even asked her how she was, he inquired whether she was Catholic or Protestant. A little embarrassed, she answered "*Well I'm Jewish Sir*". To which my granddad replied, insisting: "*Yes, OK, but are you a Catholic Jew or a Protestant Jew?*"

Our worlds have changed and for the better. We've become more diverse, more global and that's good. As Canadian lawyers, we look up to you. We look up to the way you stand up for principles; the way you defend the Rule of Law, at home and around the world.

We even sometimes suffer from *ABA* envy... I had the pleasure of seeing your President in Dallas a few weeks ago, on my way to the *ABA's Litigation Section Meeting* in San Antonio. When I learned that that Section alone had 75,000 members, the exact double of the entire *Canadian Bar* membership, I was humbled... but I was also reminded how very warmly I'm always received when I attend *ABA* events.

As friends, allies and trade partners, our two peoples have always been and will continue to be like Siamese twins and that's the only way it should be. Our politicians don't always agree and I guess that's OK too. I remember Pierre Elliott Trudeau, former Prime Minister of Canada, who I was blessed to work with after he retired: when he decided to recognize Cuba and China, President Nixon called him, in one of his undeleted tapes, "*the little Canadian bastard*".

On the other hand, Jean Chrétien, another former Prime Minister of Canada, now also a law partner of mine, was once embarrassed when one of his aides was overheard by a reporter saying that President Bush was a “*moron*”. The Aide was of course immediately fired and Prime Minister Chrétien rushed to the press and said, with his usual eloquence: “*He is not a moron, he’s my friend!*”... A few weeks later, when Mr. Chrétien introduced me as “*my friend Bernard*”, you can imagine my immediate relief...

As the start of my year as *CBA* President is approaching, in August in Calgary as you will be meeting in San Francisco for your own annual meeting, I can’t help but remember the importance of the young lawyers’ contributions to both our organizations. Work-life balance, Equity and Diversity, *Pro bono* and Access to justice initiatives, mentoring, lawyers’ assistance programs and outreach projects have all been initiatives spearheaded by young lawyers over the past 25 years.

I had the pleasure of attending one of your AOP meetings in Vancouver (another joint initiative with the CBA Young Lawyers at the time) and another one in Boston. I remember being exhilarated to see so many great ideas being promoted and such goodwill being exerted by young lawyers across the US. We implemented here in Montreal, projects that I'd brought back from these meetings. Your generosity has always been remarkable. You were honoured to be plagiarized, and we were delighted to be inspired.

When the *Virginia Tech* tragic events occurred, I was reminded of the *École Polytechnique* shooting that took place here on December 6, 1989 killing 12 innocent female students and, more recently, last Fall, of the one at *Dawson College*, a block away from my house. We have a strictly enforced National Gun Registry here in Canada. The *Dawson College* killer's arms were duly registered...

As much as these were tragic events, they are to the largest extent random or accidental. Untimely loss of life is not only profoundly upsetting, but also extremely frustrating. Our ideal society is one without accidents. However, it will always be impossible to eliminate accidents. And yet, we cannot accept accidents. So we deny them. And how do we deny them? By giving them meaning. By definition, an accident has no meaning. Once an accident has acquired meaning, then it can no longer be said to be an accident.

To give it meaning, we try to find a cause. The lack of gun control is a good example, and yet it doesn't seem to have made a difference at *Dawson College*. Blaming the media is another one. Analyzing an accident enables us to deny that the event was an accident, but denial is of no use. Spirituality may help us cope, but certainly not denial.

I'm telling you this because I was mentioning how young lawyers can make a difference in achieving work-life balance. Denial fulfills our inherent desire to avoid facing the facts, it's part of the makeup of our society. We need to explain away any situations that fall short of our ideal.

As lawyers, we want to bring sense, meaning, to our clients' lives by resolving their problems. As solution seekers, we tend to forget about ourselves. Our profession has developed a culture that's partly to blame.

It's still taboo to talk about one's personal problems: drug or alcohol abuse, burnout, and the like. The need for lawyers' good-image just gets in the way.

Perhaps meeting that challenge is something my generation can help yours with. We have a lesson to teach: don't do what we did. Find better ways, create more reasonable sets of values.

Initiatives by Young Lawyers over the past many years have helped bring about a change in mentality and an improvement in the health of all members of our great profession. You, as young lawyers, today, seek a work environment that takes into account the necessary balance between work and family life. This bodes well for the future. And I commend you for that. I encourage you to continue your efforts in this direction. At the end of the day, what's really more important: being the highest billing lawyer in your firm, or reading a bedtime story to your kids? I hope the choice is obvious.

I believe that today's young lawyers have the talent and energy to make a difference. I know that you have the courage and the will to turn your back on the old, and seek better ways to practice law.

Law will once again become a collegial profession. Clients will bond with lawyers who service them personally. I think your generation has what it takes to put *humanity* and, dare I say it, *thrill* back into the practice of law.

Getting involved as a volunteer with the *ABA* or the *CBA*, giving back to our profession, is a wonderful way to seek that balance. It's certainly worked for me. Helping others, surrounded by friends sharing the same ideal, is a great stress-reliever. It helps putting *fun* back into our profession.

Again, congratulations on your great initiatives on behalf of our profession.

Thank you for the difference that each of you makes.

Have a grand old time in Montreal, and may God bless you all!

Thank you.