

# Special Award Recipient Beverley McLachlin



Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin spent her formative years in Pincher Creek, Alberta. A self-described “farm girl,” she later attended the University of Alberta, where she received a B.A. (honours) in philosophy in 1965. She pursued her studies at the University of Alberta and in 1968 received both an M.A. in philosophy and an LL.B, graduating with the Gold Medal.

She articulated with Wood, Moir, Hyde and Ross in Edmonton and was called to the Alberta Bar in 1969 and to the British Columbia Bar in 1971. The chief justice practiced law in Edmonton for a short time, spent one year in Fort St. John, and moved to Vancouver to practice with Bull, Housser and Tupper. Beginning in 1974, she taught for seven years in the faculty of law at the University of British Columbia as a tenured associate professor.

Her judicial career began in April, 1981, when she was appointed to the Vancouver County Court. In September, 1981, she was appointed to the Supreme Court of British Columbia. She was elevated to the British Columbia Court of Appeal in December, 1985 and was appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia in September, 1988. Seven months later, in April, 1989, she was sworn in as a justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. On January 7, 2000, she was appointed chief justice of Canada. She is the first woman in Canada to hold this position.

Chief Justice McLachlin has presided over thousands of cases in a 30-year career on the bench. Interestingly, she presides over a court where four of the nine seats are occupied by women. As the *Globe and Mail* reported: “In her early years, Chief Justice McLachlin often found herself wondering whether colleagues were parsing her statements with the subconscious thought, ‘Is that her hormones—or her women-ness—talking.’ That is no longer the case, she said. ‘We just don’t think in terms of gender on this court. I don’t think it is for the men on the court, either.’”

Rather, the challenge has become leading nine independent, brilliant minds in pursuit of making the best legal decisions possible. As she tackles this challenge, Chief Justice McLachlin moves closer to becoming the longest-serving chief justice in the 135-year history of the court (she is two years away).

In addition to her judicial duties at the Supreme Court, the chief justice chairs the Canadian Judicial Council, the Advisory Council of the Order of Canada, and the Board of Governors of the National Judicial Institute. She also serves on the selection committee of the Vimy Award.

The chief justice has written many articles and publications and is the author of two books. She is the recipient of 29 honorary degrees and was named Commander of the French Legion of Honour in 2007. She was presented with the Queen’s Jubilee medal and the International Jurists award in 2008 and is an honorary member of the American College of Trial Lawyers. In 2010, she was named Canadian of the Year by the Canadian Club of Toronto and was inducted into the International Hall of Fame by the International Women’s Forum.

Chief Justice McLachlin is married to Frank McArdle and has a son, Angus.