

Louise Barrington

As a graduating student leaving Falconer Hall for the last time in April 1976, little did I imagine that thirty-one years later I would write this missive from Hong Kong. Ahead lay a career in family law and commercial law in a boutique Toronto firm, and a comfortable home with husband and dogs. Plans hadn't developed much further than that.

Five years later, career decisions loomed and my time see the world seemed then or never. Selling the house, storing the furniture and fostering the dogs, I set off on a year-long "sabbatical" to Europe...

After nearly a year traveling and finding odd jobs in Madrid and Tenerife, I landed in Paris, ostensibly for a three-month stint to work on my French. Armed, thanks to my Manchester-born father, with a British passport, I began to wonder about extending my stay. That was in 1984.

A Masters programme in International Commercial Law introduced me to civil law, to the European Union, to Cartesian logic, to illegible French handwriting, and to the world of international arbitration. Ah, it was love at first sight! The meeting of languages, cultures and legal traditions was fascinating. In that Eureka! moment, I'd found my *métier*. All that remained was to break into this exciting but exceedingly rarified community. It proved however, no easy matter for a foreigner, and a woman, to find a niche in that most male and hierarchical structure. I found other work, mostly teaching international business and law, and eventually returned for a two year stint at the University of Ottawa.

But Paris beckoned still. Through the good offices of a dear friend and fellow Canadian, I was recruited to join the International Chamber of Commerce to direct the Institute of World Business Law. During those four and a half years at ICC headquarters, I met and befriended all the silver-haired "gods of arbitration," as well as some of the younger aspirants.

A tiny group of women at my first international conference in Bahrain mumbled about the dearth of our fairer sex; my curiosity eventually produced the article that made me infamous: *Arbitral Women: A Study of Women in International Arbitration*. That in turn led to the formation of "arbitralwomen", a Paris-based, non-profit association to promote and foster the role of women in international arbitration.

Perhaps hoping to curb my heretical activities, the ICC suggested I head to Hong Kong to found and direct its first regional office. The idea was to spend two years in Hong Kong, recruit a local successor, and return to Paris afterward. Somewhat stunned at landing in Hong Kong just six months before its return to China, I established ICC Asia, the base for an exciting role as ICC ambassador and arbitration

consultant in a territory covering from Pakistan to New Zealand. (My argument that Hawaii should also be included in Asia fell upon deaf ears.)

I did recruit a local successor, after three years not two, but the excitement of Hong Kong business had captivated me. Just a year or two more, practicing law and arbitration with an English firm! But, when that firm packed up its tent and left during the economic crisis, I stayed put, doing solo consulting and training. A post at one of the Hong Kong law schools beckoned, and the university proved a wonderful platform for all sorts of creative projects.

A highlight of every spring was the annual Willem C Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot, which I began to attend as an arbitrator. The Moot impressed me as a unique opportunity for law school students from around the world to gain practical experience and establish long lasting social and professional networks. Once again I was seduced. I wanted the same for Asia. After some years of nagging, I was able to persuade Vis Director Professor Eric Bergsten to let me start the Vis (East) Moot in Hong Kong. Our first Vis East had 14 teams competing. This March, the Fourth Annual Vis East Moot welcomes 46 law school teams from 14 countries around the world to our host, the School of Law at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Among them is our first Canadian team, from Victoria.

Thirty-one years since that day in April, do I have second thoughts? Not for a moment. But one unfulfilled ambition, yes. The circle will be complete when I have the honour of welcoming the first University of Toronto team to the Vis East. I do hope it won't be a long wait.