



January 2, 2024

JUDICIAL RETIREMENT – JUDGE JUSTINE SAUNDERS



Photo Credit: Retired Judge
Cliff MacArthur

VANCOUVER, B.C. - The Provincial Court of British Columbia announces that Judge Saunders retired from the Court on December 31, 2023. Her last sitting date was November 17, 2023.

Judge Saunders was born in Grahamstown, South Africa. After graduating from boarding school she spent two years in Australia working as a Jillaroo, rounding up cattle and shearing sheep, spending much of her time on horseback. She was the first woman to race motocross in South Africa and was a provincial senior diver while at university.

On returning to her home in South Africa, she worked for six years in the Supreme Court registry clerking for numerous Supreme Court judges who encouraged her to attend lectures at Rhodes. On graduating – one of the only four women in the class – she worked as a Crown Prosecutor for a year before commencing a six month pupillage, a period of practical training required to become a fully fledged advocate. She was called to the Bar in May 1981. In 1988 Judge Saunders moved to Vancouver, Canada, working at Bull, Houser until she received her foreign law accreditation through UBC in 1990, after which, she moved to Nanaimo.

Judge Saunders was appointed to the bench on January 2, 1998 and assigned to Prince George where, at the time, it was minus 30 Celsius. Rather than counting down the days until she could return to milder winter temperatures, she enthusiastically embraced learning all she could about the community. Between being appointed and her Welcoming Ceremony in the March, it was said she had already made inquiries as to how one got “musher training” with a view to getting a dog sled team to compete in the Iditarod.

Judge Saunders elected to the Senior Judge Program in April 2019. She returned to Vancouver Island with home chambers first in Port Alberni (2000), then Nanaimo (2003) and finally in Duncan, while continuing her passion for education, completing her Ph.D. in 2002. In 2003, Judge Saunders coordinated and presented training for Judiciary members on the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. She has served on various committees of the court including the Family Law Committee.

Judge Saunders came to the Court with an extensive background in family law and the reputation of being an intelligent, hard working, tenacious and compassionate individual. In her spare time, she now devotes herself to her love of equestrian sports and her family and friends. The people who have appeared before her have all been the beneficiaries of her professionalism and dedication to the practice of law. She is a valued colleague who will be missed.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation on behalf of the Court for Judge Saunders’ dedicated service and best wishes on her next journey in life.

Melissa Gillespie
Chief Judge
Provincial Court of British Columbia