

The Polar Barristers



Interview with Koovian Flanagan Executive Public Representative

THE ROAD TO PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVE

Koovian Flanagan is the current public representative for the Law Society of Nunavut (LSN) and is in the process of being considered for another three year term by the Minister of Justice.

She noticed a call for a public representative in the local paper three years ago. She admitted this intrigued her as she had spent 23 years of her career working for the Department of Justice in Nunavut, NWT and Alberta.

Koovian self admits that the Department of Justice helped her become who she is today. Her time with justice started in 1988, when she was just about to graduate from high school. At the time, she was approached by the Director of Corrections who asked her about her career aspirations. Koovian quickly stated she wanted to be a police officer. The Director encouraged her to consider applying to be a summer student for the Baffin Correctional Center before leaving for RCMP Depot.



Little did she know this quick summer student opportunity would last for 30 years.

Koovian is a very confident Inuk woman, not afraid to speak up as she is one of five daughters who were all raised to be strong, independent and very vocal Inuit women in their community.

"I am where I am today because of the strong support I received from my family, the great foundation that was laid for me to be strong, to be able to challenge what I know what is wrong and applaud all that I know is right," says Koovian.

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"My first job as a summer student correctional officer, in a mostly male dominate environment, was very intimidating. I was actually very scared because we were working with violent and hostile men everyday. Men who had severe alcohol abuse issues and made poor life choices when they were under the influence of alcohol."

"Imagine being a young 18 year old Inuk woman telling a grown Inuk man what to do and when to do it – it went totally against our Inuit Societal Values to have an Inuk teenager order a man

to do anything in my culture. It was something that took me a very long time to overcome."

Luckily for Koovian, she is not weak and definitely not a quitter. She never left Justice after her quick summer job. Her career span led her to work in positions from a correctional officer, classification officer, Assistant Director of Community Justice, Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) of Justice to finally becoming the Deputy Minister for the Department of Justice.

She knew she had to prove herself and would need to work very hard. "Nothing was ever given to me. I worked very hard to get to where I am. I applied for all my positions and fought for them like everyone else," says Koovian.

"I remember I was about 37 years old with over 20 years of experience working with the Department of Justice (but in all honesty I looked to be only 20 years old) when I was sent off to ADM training in Eastern Canada with other newly appointed ADM's from across Canada. I remember my heart sank and my pride quickly diminished when one ADM reached out her hand and said 'and how old are you?' as she lowered her head to look into my eyes (Instead of asking 'who are you?'). She was quickly embarrassed and in utter shock as those words escaped her mouth and immediately apologized for that question. But it must have been on everyone's minds. I told her proudly that I was 37 years old, I am an Inuk from Nunavut and I have 20 years of hands on experience working with Justice; and no I am not a lawyer but I was the successful candidate for my new position."

"I was sure I was the topic of discussion by many in that room that week, but I didn't care. I knew I needed this ADM leadership development course like everyone else and told myself to learn



as much as I could so that I could go home and help lead Justice for Nunavummiut like I was hired to do," says Koovian with pride.

"It was a pivotal moment for me to realize that I will be judged, I will be challenged, I will be put down by many non believers. With my husband's support, my strong family foundation, my years of experience, and great training opportunities, I knew I was the perfect candidate to help provide access to Justice in a territory that needed it the most."

Her interest in becoming the Public Representative to the Law Society of Nunavut (LSN) was an easy one. She still had a passion for justice and all that it has to offer. She knew she could still provide a great opportunity to Nunavummiut by being their voice.

The position of Public Representative with the LSN presents a great opportunity for Koovian to help hand pick lawyers who truly want to provide the best service for the most vulnerable clients in Nunavut. "It has been eight years since I left Justice and walking back into the LSN feels like I never left."

"The Executive members have treated me with nothing but utmost respect and are always welcoming my thoughts, ideas, experiences, knowledge and most importantly my culture around the LSN table."

When asked about her thoughts about the Nunavut Law Program and the recent cohort of graduates, she immediately beamed with pride. Her nephew Robert Comeau is one of the recent graduates.

"My nephew and all the recent graduates have made a huge commitment to this program, to their communities, to their families, and even more importantly, to themselves. Their dedication and determination to not give up is evident in how they have supported one another throughout the four year journey. They beat issues, they tackled barriers they faced daily, and they studied so hard to ensure they could successfully complete the program. So many young Inuit kids are looking up to them – they are our positive role models. They are very important pillars in our community now and they will help change Nunavut."

"The graduates are from our communities, so they understand our challenges. They know our culture and more importantly, they know our history. A wonderful advantage for us too is that many of them can speak and understand our language so there should be no loss of translation as they will be hearing it first hand in their official language."

"The graduates of the Nunavut Law Program have set a very high bar for all Nunavut students. They have proven

