

Marjorie Montgomery Bowker¹ (First Female Family Court Judge in Alberta)

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¹ <http://www.spiritofalberta.ca/soaquotations.html>



Marjorie was born in Prince Edward Island. At an early age she moved with her family to Wetaskwin, Alberta, where she received all her schooling. She graduated from the University of Alberta in 1939 with degrees in Arts and Law. She articulated with the law firm of Milner Steer, was admitted to the bar in 1940, and shortly thereafter married Wilbur F. Bowker who was then an associate in the firm. She carried on his practice during World War II while he was on active service. Following the war, their lives became centered at the University of Alberta, where her husband became Dean of Law, a position he held for 20 years. During this period and while raising their family of three children, she held various executive positions in various community organizations. In 1965, she was appointed to a provincial government committee studying adoption and child welfare in Alberta, the recommendations from which resulted in sweeping changes to child welfare legislation. For 12 years (1965-1977) she served on the Board of Governors of the University Hospital, the first woman so appointed. She would later serve for 3 years as Alberta Chairman of the Canadian Paraplegic Association. In 1968, she was invited to Korea as a speaker at Ewha Women's University, a leading women's university in Asia where she received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. During 1978-9, on invitation of the Canadian Club in Ottawa she was guest speaker at 14 Canadian Clubs across Canada, and at the Canadian Forces Base in West Germany. Her subject: "Can the Family Survive?"

ANSWER:

Long ago I learned this proverb: If you do something important, there will always be critics. If you don't like critics, don't do anything important. Survive?"

In 1966 she was appointed a Judge of the Family & Juvenile Courts of Alberta - the first woman Family Court Judge in the province - a position she held for 18 years. In her judicial capacity, with the aid of a federal grant, she was instrumental in 1972 in establishing in the Family Court of Edmonton a court-centered Marriage Conciliation Service - the first of its kind in Canada - aimed at preventing divorce, reducing divorce and conciliating differences created by divorce. It would become a model for other courts in Canada, as well as in Australia. It was partly in recognition of her work in this field that in 1978 she was the recipient of the Queen Elizabeth Silver Jubilee Medal; in 1981 the Alberta Achievement Award, and in 1983 the Award of Merit from the American Association of Family Conciliation Courts. She retired from her judicial position in 1983. Following her retirement, she was involved in a number of volunteer activities. She served as Honorary Chairman of the Big Sisters Society of Edmonton; on the board of the Elizabeth Fry Society; on the Youth Committee of the Bissell Centre; and on the government Advisory Committee on Foster Care. In 1985 she was Chairman of a provincial government Committee on Child Sexual Abuse. While she never perceived herself as an author, she found herself drawn into this role by public issues. Her book on the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, entitled "On Guard for Thee" published in 1988 was a national best-seller. Her two books on the constitution entitled "The Meech Lake Accord" (1990) and "Canada's Constitutional Crisis: Making Sense of it all" (1991) were also best sellers. Her honors since retirement include being named Woman of the Year by the Business and Professional Women's Club of Edmonton; being honored by the Y.W.C.A. Tribute to Women; receiving the Distinguished Canadian Award from the Council of Canadians in Ottawa - all in 1989. In 1991 she received an honorary degree from Athabasca University (June); and in November an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of Alberta. In February 1995 she was inducted into the Alumni Wall of Recognition at the University of Alberta (for distinguished graduates). Perhaps the greatest honor of all came in November 1995 when she was honored in Ottawa as one of seven pioneer women judges of Canada - an honor bestowed by the Canadian Judicial Council. In 2002 she received the Queen's Golden Jubilee medal. At Edmonton's Centennial celebration in 2004, she was honored as one of 100 "Edmontonians of the Century". In 2005 on the occasion of Alberta's 100th birthday, she was a recipient of the Alberta gold medal. In 1990 both she and her husband were awarded the Order of Canada.

Marjorie Montgomery Bowker's Obituary, Ottawa Citizen, August 26, 2006