

## **BENCHER ELECTION STATEMENT OF JENNIFER HALAJIAN**

So who would have thought I'd be elected as a Bencher four years ago? Certainly not me. I wasn't from Bay Street. I didn't have a lot (any really) money to spend on my campaign. I was too young. I was not connected to anyone important.

So when I was asked how I did it, my only explanation was that I must have been the protest vote. People voted for me because, well, I wasn't from Bay Street. I didn't have a lot of money. I was young. And I wasn't connected to the important people. I represented change. Those who voted for me, I assumed, were as disengaged as I was from the Law Society and what it stood for.

Other than not being quite so young, I'm still that person. But let me tell you, change is hard. And when people don't want or are afraid of change, they can dig in their heels and refuse to budge. So I learned early on that my approach would be to pick my issues, and not be that one who speaks up on every single thing. But when I spoke, I would speak for the lawyers that I worked with every day. For those who did not exactly welcome the thought of another Law Society audit. For those who needed to use agents for some of their court appearances. For those who thought we should, on principle, have a completely different oath than the paralegals. For those who now must compete against paralegals for clients. For those who wouldn't appreciate raising the fees paid to the board members at LawPro, while they were writing the cheque to cover their own insurance. I wasn't often successful. But I always tried to voice what I thought the lawyers I knew would say on those issues that affected them.

I also learned early on as a bencher that many of my colleagues did not openly embrace the new generation of lawyers that I represented. A new generation that needed to have a voice at the Law Society if it was to continue to represent us. But also a generation that didn't have a chance if the face of Convocation remained the same. A fellow bencher recently told me that the reason young lawyers didn't run for election was because they were too busy starting their practice and their families to be interested. I corrected him as politely as I could – the reason young lawyers didn't run was because they saw the Law Society as impermeable and the bencher election as unwinnable. I don't think I made many friends at Convocation the day I pointed out that the Law Society had become irrelevant to my generation of lawyers, and even more so to the generations after me. Change is hard. But it is also necessary.

If I'm elected again, I'll continue to speak up when it's important. I know now that I can't make any promises about what I will be able to accomplish. I may not be able to accomplish much. But I will listen. And I will speak up, no matter how cold the room suddenly becomes. I'll even use my mother's sense of guilt to, at least, try to point my colleagues in the direction I believe the membership wants us to go. If I'm not elected again, that's fine too. I won't miss the wine cellar or the meals because I rarely stay for them anyway. I just hope, though, that if I don't return, I'm replaced by others who speak for the future - for me and my peers - and not the status quo.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF JENNIFER HALAJIAN**

- Elected Bencher (2007 to present)
- Called to Ontario Bar (1999)
- LLB from University of Toronto Law School (1997)
- MBA in Marketing and Small Business from York University (1992)
- BA(Hons) in English Literature and Commerce from University of Toronto (1990)
  
- Assistant Crown Attorney (Newmarket) (2007 to present)
- Previously:
  - Sole Practitioner based in York Region specializing in Criminal Law (2005-2007)
  - Assistant Crown Attorney (Metro North) (2000 - 2005)
  - Associate at Goodmans LLP (1999 – 2000)
  - Summered and Articled at Blake, Cassels & Graydon (1996 – 1998)