

Arnold Bloch Leibler

Lawyers and Advisers

Leonie Thompson Room Dedication

Thursday 23 August 2018

Welcome and opening remarks

Mark Leibler AC

It is an honour, this evening, to be in a room filled with so many close friends and colleagues.

Let me begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this special event is taking place, and pay my deep respect to their history, their culture and their custodianship of the land.

Fink, many of us have known you for a long time. To you and all of Leonie's family who are here this evening, please accept our heartfelt welcome.

Some six years ago, when the partners were planning the launch of what was then a new corridor of conference rooms here at Arnold Bloch Leibler, we saw the naming of these rooms as an important opportunity to pay tribute to extraordinary people who had shaped the firm's culture and values. People who viewed the law, as we do, as an instrument of social justice. We wanted the lawyers who use the spaces to feel their presence, and be inspired and guided by it every day.

It took no time at all for us to identify the first three names: Arnold Bloch, Sir Zelman Cowan and Ron Castan.

It was similarly clear to the partners, when we discussed it late last year, that the fourth room should be named after another giant of the law - Alan Goldberg - and a number of you joined with us, and with Alan's extended family, for the dedication of the Goldberg Room in May.

By that time, the partners had already agreed - unanimously and by acclamation - that our remaining unnamed conference room would be dedicated, in perpetuity, in the name of Leonie Thompson. Not only did Leonie have formidable skills in black letter law. She also had exceptional judgement, and a singular emotional intelligence that allowed her to relate, with ease, to all manner of clients and colleagues.

Leonie played a pivotal role in transforming the litigation department from where it began, as a support service to the firm's commercial practice, into the powerhouse it is today. She was also heavily involved in the development of Arnold Bloch Leibler's unparalleled public interest practice.

Peter Seidel, our public interest partner, was going through some old photos recently and came across a wonderful image of Leonie and the acclaimed Aboriginal artist, Paddy Bedford.

Finding the photo prompted Peter to tell Leon what might have been an apocryphal story that the artist was so smitten with Leonie that, on the night the photo was taken, he offered Fink some paintings in exchange for Leonie. Of course, Leon didn't hesitate to check the story with Fink, by email, and he received the following, characteristically frank response:

"PB offered me 8 paintings to do the trade. I rejected the offer. Leonie looked displeased."

Leonie and Fink acquired some majestic Paddy Bedford paintings. And it is so fitting, almost providential, that works by her great friend also hang here in the Thompson Room at Arnold Bloch Leibler.

Leonie made partner here 20 years ago, at a time when the senior ranks of this firm, and the legal profession more broadly, were heavily dominated by men. As Leon said at the wonderful memorial ceremony for Leonie that was held here last December, rather than being frustrated or embittered by the challenges she faced, Leonie became determined to change things for the better. For herself, but even more so for the women who would follow in her footsteps. I know that the women in the room tonight feel a huge debt of gratitude to Leonie. They see her, and speak of her often, as a role model, a mentor, an inspiration.

In a few minutes we will hear from litigation partner Caroline Goulden, a fine lawyer, mentored by Leonie, who now occupies Leonie's former office.

Replicating a time-honoured tradition of the bar, where the names of barristers who have occupied chambers are placed on the rear of the door, we have recently placed Leonie's name on the back of Caroline's office door. It was Fink's idea. It was a good one, and you will all be invited to take a look at it after this evening's formalities.

You will see as you walk through the litigation department that, while Leonie was the only female litigation partner when she arrived at Arnold Bloch Leibler, we now have three - and the prospect of many more, given the high proportion of excellent women lawyers in the department, and throughout the firm.

Leonie Thompson was a pioneer. An outstanding lawyer and an outstanding human being, who helped to make Arnold Bloch Leibler the firm that it is today, a place where women and men are encouraged to bring their whole selves to work.

The naming of this room simply formalises the reality that her contribution to the law, to Arnold Bloch Leibler and to each of us, is enduring and ever-present. So it is now my great honour to declare this boardroom the Thompson Room, and to invite Fink to say a few words.