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# “Dear Rufus ...”: A Law Student’s Life at McGill in the Roaring Twenties from the Letters of John P. Humphrey

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John Peters Humphrey (1905-1995) was the author of the first draft of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, a McGill professor of law for many years, and a renowned advocate of human rights on the national and international scene. This article focuses on Humphrey’s undergraduate years at McGill University in the faculties of Commerce, Arts, and Law. It is based on the regular correspondence he (orphaned early in life) kept up with his sister Ruth for seven decades. The letters represent a first-hand glimpse of the academic and social life at a McGill University that has seemingly long since vanished. Humphrey details the trials and tribulations faced by law school students, from the disasters of his first year to the triumphs of his last. He was also extremely active on campus, serving, for example, as Prime Minister in the Model Parliament and President of the Literary and Debating Society, where he first met F.R. Scott. His social circle off campus, based largely on those he met in the congregation of the Erskine American Church, included jewelers William and Henry Birks and the family of accountant J.W. Ross. He was extremely candid about his political ambitions (which were never realized) and the beginning of the leftward slide of his political views, which led him from conservatism to socialism, can be detected. Humphrey’s own words provide a remarkable glimpse of his own formative years in this candid correspondence with the sister he affectionately called Rufus.

John Peters Humphrey (1905-1995) fut l’auteur du premier projet de la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l’homme*, mais aussi professeur de droit à l’Université McGill et défenseur des droits de l’homme sur les plans à la fois national et international. Cet article se concentre sur les années de premier cycle de M. Humphrey, lorsqu’il étudiait à l’Université McGill au sein des facultés de commerce, des arts, et de droit. L’article porte sur la correspondance régulière que M. Humphrey, se retrouvant orphelin à un jeune âge, a entretenue avec sa sœur Ruth pendant soixante-dix ans. Ses lettres représentent un aperçu de la vie académique et sociale à l’Université McGill, une vie qui a, semble-t-il, depuis lors disparu. M. Humphrey relate les défis auxquels un étudiant en droit devait faire face, en décrivant les échecs de sa première année d’études mais aussi les succès lors de sa dernière année. Il fut très actif au sein de l’université, remplissant, par exemple, la fonction de Premier ministre au Parlement Modèle. Il fut également président de la *Literary and Debating Society*, où il rencontra F.R. Scott. Son entourage social à l’extérieur de l’université incluait les bijoutiers William et Henry Birks ainsi que la famille du comptable J.W. Ross. M. Humphrey fut toujours très franc au sujet de ses ambitions politiques (qui ne se réalisèrent jamais), et les débuts de la tendance gauchiste de ses croyances politiques, qui l’ont amené du conservatisme au socialisme, se font ressentir. Ses propres mots, dans cette correspondance intime avec sa sœur affectueusement surnommée Rufus, peignent un tableau remarquable de ses années formatrices.

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## Introduction

John Peters Humphrey (1905-1995) was well-known internationally as the first Director of the United Nations ("U.N.") Division of Human Rights (1946-1966) and as the author of the first draft of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.<sup>1</sup> He was well-known in Canada and actively worked for sixty years as an advocate of bilingualism and biculturalism, of social security, and of individual rights—all of which he believed held the key to national unity. Humphrey was also the founder of the Canadian Human Rights Foundation and the Canadian branch of Amnesty International. He was well-known locally at McGill University as a professor of Roman law and International law (1936-1946) and of International Organizations and Human Rights (1966-1994). All these aspects of his public life are well-documented.<sup>2</sup> Less well known are his activities and thoughts while a student at McGill, from which he graduated with four different degrees from four different faculties—Commerce (1925), Arts (1927), Law (1929), and a doctorate from Graduate Studies (1945). Yet Humphrey left a fairly complete record amongst his papers of the life of a McGill law student in the 1920s. The extracts from the correspondence presented here will focus on references to the Law Faculty, on Humphrey's particular interest in the McGill Literary and Debating Society, and on his personal views and ambitions as they evolved.

Humphrey's life did not get off to an auspicious start. He was less than a year old when his father died, and with his mother's death when he was only eleven, Humphrey became an orphan. He had also lost an arm at age six when his clothing caught fire. It was decided by the family and his father's executor, St. John businessman J.M. Scovel, that Humphrey should be sent to Rothesay Collegiate, a boarding school run on the English public school model. Humphrey detested this experience, reacting badly to the school discipline and being the object of much bullying by his fellow students. The only consolation he could find was in his relationship with his older sister, Ruth, then teaching at the High School of Montreal. Ruth Humphrey acted as a surrogate mother and confidante for Humphrey throughout his formative years. From Rothesay Collegiate he wrote a weekly letter to his sister, beginning each one with "Dear Rufus". Since the siblings were seldom resident in the same place, the correspondence lasted

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<sup>1</sup> GA Res. 217(III), UN GAOR, 3d Sess., Supp. No. 13, UN Doc. A/810 (1948) 71.

<sup>2</sup> For his U.N. years, see Humphrey's autobiography: J.P. Humphrey, *Human Rights and the United Nations: A Great Adventure* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Transnational Publishers, 1983). For an assessment of his contribution to international law, see R. St. J. MacDonald "Leadership in Law: John P. Humphrey and the international law of human rights" 29 (1991) *Can. Y.B. Int'l L.* 3. For his political activities see A.J. Hobbs "Canadian Unity and Quebec in 1942: a roundtable discussion among John Humphrey, Hugh MacLennan and Émile Vaillancourt" (1993) 6 *Fontanus* 119; and A.J. Hobbs, "Humphrey and the Old Revolution: Human Rights in the Age of Mistrust" (1995) 8 *Fontanus* 121. For the authorship of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, see A.J. Hobbs "René Cassin and the Daughter of Time: the first draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (1989) 2 *Fontanus* 7.

for Ruth Humphrey's lifetime and, after her death, all the letters were returned to Humphrey.

The language of the letters naturally demonstrates the kind of archaisms that give P.G. Wodehouse so much charm. They are full of "fellows" and "chaps", people are "corking", wires are pulled as well as strings, and to dress well or possibly flashily appears to be "putting on some real dog." The meaning, however, is always clear and the letters are well-written given Humphrey's youth and inexperience.

## I. Life at McGill's Faculty of Law

After escaping Rothesay Collegiate, Humphrey spent two academically unproductive years at Mount Allison Academy. His results were so poor that Scovel was anxious for him to go to work in a bank rather than waste his time at university. With some effort he persuaded Scovel that a Commerce degree would be a great asset in business. Humphrey also applied to McGill so that he could be close to Ruth. A year after he started, however, Ruth went to Oxford University for an advanced degree and subsequently obtained a teaching appointment at Victoria College, British Columbia, and later at the University of British Columbia. Thus, the correspondence exists for most of Humphrey's student years.

Humphrey obtained his Commerce degree and was able to get a job with the Canadian Pacific Railway after his professor, Stephen Leacock,<sup>3</sup> wrote a letter on his behalf to Sir Edward Beatty.<sup>4</sup> Humphrey, ever ambitious, began to wonder early on about advancement in the company. He was told that there were really only two ways to advance: to become the secretary of an important man, or to become a lawyer as Beatty had done.<sup>5</sup> The thought of being a secretary did not appeal to Humphrey so he began to mull over the possibility of law as a profession. He discussed the matter with (Andrew) Harry Galley (1903-1995), who had been a year ahead of him in Commerce and who was to become a life-long friend—indeed, they had already been involved in various business ventures. As the resolution formed, Humphrey wrote to Ruth:<sup>6</sup>

July 27, 1925

I have practically decided I want to take up law. Harry and I have talked of little else for the last week so I am going down home so I can think the thing out better and also make the necessary arrangements. I wish that I could talk to you

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<sup>3</sup> While taking the commerce curriculum, for which he did not much care, Humphrey took as many political science courses as was allowed. He enjoyed the most those given by well-known Canadian humourist Stephen Butler Leacock (1869-1944).

<sup>4</sup> Sir Edward Beatty (1877-1943) was President and Chairman of the Board of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company (1918-1943). Leacock knew him as Chancellor of McGill University, a position he occupied from 1921 until his death.

<sup>5</sup> This was the advice given to Humphrey by Edwin Newman Todd (b. 1879), Freight Traffic Manager at the C.P.R. and a friend of his uncle, John McGivern Humphrey (1880-1961).

<sup>6</sup> This and all subsequent letters are held by the author in his capacity as Humphrey's literary executor. They will eventually be donated to the McGill University archives.

and tell you the real reasons for me coming to this decision. I think that you would agree then that I am doing the wisest thing. I may not make as much money in law as I would be in business, but I will get the opportunity of doing the kind of work that interests me most. As far as law being such a long draw-out affair I don't think that it's any longer a proposition than business. ... If I take up law I will specialize in corporation law and I think I will be able to receive a salary of from \$100.00 to \$150.00 a month as soon as I graduate. My idea would be to work for a good firm who specialize in that particular branch. During my three years in Toronto I should be able to work up a connection with some good firm. After I make a reputation for myself there I could go in for it on my own account. Harry is going to do the same thing. ... You asked me how this would affect my engagement and if I didn't think it would put off my getting married for a long time. I see no reason why I couldn't get married as soon as I graduate. Of course I may have to dip into my share of the capital of the estate some, but I will have to do this anyway during my course at Osgoode Hall.<sup>7</sup> In all it will cost me about \$4000.00 to take my degree in law and to enter the bar. That, however, would be an investment. Instead of investing that money in something or someone else I will be investing it in myself. I can see no better use that I could put it to. ... The reason that I want to take up law is that I think I would like that work and have some confidence that I would make a success of it. At McGill I did well in all my law subjects.

At this time, the Quebec Bar required an Arts degree as a prerequisite for a law degree. Galley and Humphrey both had only Commerce degrees, and so were obliged to study law in Ontario, where the Bar did not have the same requirement. Humphrey had been engaged for some time to a girl from New Brunswick and it was planned they should marry when he established himself in business. However, when his fiancée heard Humphrey planned another three years of study, she came to Montreal and quickly ended the engagement. Humphrey went to Toronto in the Fall and in three days he found a room in Knox College, found a law firm on Adelaide Street where he could article, and registered at Osgoode Hall. After this he did what he later confessed he should have done first—he took a bus tour of the city. What he saw on the tour convinced him that he could never live in Toronto. Less than a week after he left he returned to Montreal, where—with the exception of his U.N. years and study abroad—he resided until his death. Harry Galley also abandoned Toronto and the law at this time, joining the International Nickel Company in 1927 and was President of its subsidiary, Alloy Metal Sales Ltd., at the time of his retirement in 1963.

On returning to Montreal, Humphrey obtained a job with a firm of stockbrokers, Mathewson, McLennan & Molson. He did not give up on the idea of law, and by the end of 1925 his old mentor, Stephen Leacock, had suggested a way he could acquire an Arts degree at the same time as a Law degree. It meant taking a significantly greater

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Monmouth Humphrey (1873-1906) had taken the unusual—for the period—step of purchasing life insurance. His executor, J.M. Scovel, acted as guardian for his children until they reached the age of twenty-one. At this point, Humphrey still had a year to go until he controlled the funds. His inheritance finally ran out in 1929-1930 during his trip to France after graduating from law. Thus, the father that Humphrey never knew had the foresight to provide sufficient funding for his education.

load of courses for the first year and a half, and one extra term. He explained the proposal to Ruth as follows:

January 11, 1926

By the time you get this letter I hope to be diligently studying for my Arts degree. I have definitely decided to take up law and to take it up in the Province of Quebec. I discovered, however, that my Bachelor of Commerce degree does not qualify me to be admitted as a student-at-law in the Province although it would in Ontario (Quebec and red tape are one and the same thing). I consequently had to get over the difficulty and rather than write the junior bar examinations, for which I would have to cram for about six months and then not be sure of a pass, I approached Drs. Leacock and Hemmeon<sup>8</sup> and asked them whether it would be possible for me to get my B.A. in the Department of Economics. I finally arranged it so that I can do the major part of my work this term (i.e. from now until May) and the remainder I can do next year while I'm taking my first year in law. This means I will get my B.A. with honours in economics and political science in the Spring of 1927 and my B.C.L. in the Spring of 1929. This is a little longer and harder course than I planned last summer, but I think that the harvest will be worth the ploughing.

I have talked to different lawyers and to one judge of the Court of Appeals. From their conversation, and my own observation, I am convinced that there is a wonderful opportunity here in the Province of Quebec for an English lawyer. Since the war there have been very few fellows who have gone into the profession and it seems that unless more are drawn in within the next few years there will be a veritable scarcity of English-speaking lawyers in Montreal. Then there is the evident argument that Montreal is the financial centre of Canada and consequently the logical place for a corporation lawyer.

I gave up my job New Year's and, although I was very lucky in being able to find another and a much better one in a few days, I decided to start right away with my law course at Laval.<sup>9</sup> After finding out, however, that my B. Comm. wasn't worth the sheepskin it was printed on I decided on the new plan. I also decided to go to McGill for I have been told that the course at Laval is not much and that by going there I would be sacrificing my law for the French. Next fall I will try to get a room with a French-Canadian family and, with the French that I now know, should be able to pick up a working knowledge of the language.

Humphrey successfully passed his Arts courses in the Spring of 1926, and spent a large part of the summer in England and Scotland on tour with his sister. He returned to McGill in October to take his final year of Arts courses and his first ones of Law. He was also an active student in the Literary and Debating Society (the "Lit") and served as Prime Minister for the Conservative Party in the Model Parliament. Over the next few weeks he offered some thoughts on the study of law to Ruth:

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Clarence Hemmeon (b. 1879) came to McGill as a professor of Economics and Political Science in 1907 after teaching in Windsor, Nova Scotia and at the University of Illinois.

<sup>9</sup> At this juncture, Humphrey had very little French and studying at Laval was a fast way to become bilingual.

October 6, 1926

I've got nearly everything arranged as far as my course is concerned. I'm registered in both law and arts. I believe the law will be a very heavy course.

October 12, 1926

This law course means a lot of work but I think it is going to be extremely interesting. People have always given me the idea that the study of law is dry and boring. I think that is a mistaken idea, although, of course, I haven't been at it long enough to be any judge. I am still living in the fraternity, but I'm going to get out of here just as soon as I possibly can. Can you imagine paying \$10.00 a week for a bed-room? That's what one land-lady had the nerve to ask me yesterday. Then she wanted 50¢ for breakfast and 75¢ for dinner. American tourists have certainly ruined any idea of reasonableness that these people may have had.<sup>10</sup>

October 24, 1926

I have arranged to take lessons in French conversation from a Jesuit priest<sup>11</sup> (I think that he is studying and not yet a full-fledged priest) at the College Ste. Marie. I am also going to take lessons in elocution at the Conservatory of Music. Here's hoping they do me some good.

Whoever told you that law is an uninteresting subject didn't know what they were talking about. It is very interesting. It keeps me pretty busy and I don't get much time for my economics.

November 6, 1926

I like law more every day. I'm sure now that my decision last Xmas was the best I've ever made. If I hadn't taken up law I'm afraid I would have always been a square peg in a round hole. I can think of no broader study than, perhaps, philosophy—and law is especially interesting in this province for it is actually concerned with the evolution of Canada as an international person (this applies to the whole Dominion) and then we are building up a law which is founded on the best points of the French and English systems. You will think I am enthusiastic—I really am!

November 21, 1926

Speaking of magazines I've had some interesting discussions this last week. I had the idea that the "Lit" should publish a quarterly, something like the Dalhousie Review, and brought it up at an executive meeting. Then I started to

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<sup>10</sup> Prohibition was in force in the United States from 1920-1933, making Montreal a popular spot for visiting American tourists.

<sup>11</sup> According to a letter of November 11, 1926, the person's name was Monsieur Delisle.

look into details more carefully. Yesterday afternoon, after the Varsity-McGill football game, I had tea at a chap's apartment and met the editor of the McGill News. They are planning to change the character of the News from a mere graduate information bureau to a regular quarterly. Well we had a very interesting discussion. Frank Scott, at whose apartment I was, is editor of "Fortnightly"<sup>12</sup> so you see what little I knew about magazines wouldn't have much effect in such company, but I made up for it in enthusiasm. The outcome was that the "Lit" will not publish a quarterly this year, but will cooperate with this other attempt. It is quite exciting to have a part, even if it's a small one, in the creation of a new magazine. I'll send you the first copy.

F.R. Scott (1899-1985) was then in the last year of his undergraduate law degree and he actually joined the Faculty of Law, as a teacher, before Humphrey graduated. Scott would become extremely influential in shaping Humphrey's political views and concepts of civil liberties over the next decade. The editor of the *McGill News*, whose name was not mentioned, was Terence William Leighton MacDermott (1896-1966). The editorship was voluntary and MacDermott, a McGill graduate and Rhodes Scholar, was then a teacher at Lower Canada College (1923-1929). After teaching in the McGill Department of Economics and Political Science (1929-1935), he became Principal of Upper Canada College (1935-1942). After war service he joined the Department of External Affairs, serving as High Commissioner to South Africa (1950-1954) and Australia (1957-1961), and as Ambassador to Greece and Israel (1954-1957). He became chairman of the Political Science Department at Bishop's University (1961-1966) after retiring from public service. Nothing much appeared to come of the alleged publication plans for the *McGill News*.

The Spring term found Humphrey even more active in the Literary and Debating Society and he hoped to be chosen for a spot on the team for two planned debating trips—one to New Jersey and the second to England.

February 13, 1927

Now for McGill!! Last night I went to the Choral Society's opera "Tom Jones", and believe me I'll hit the next man who says there is no musical talent at McGill. It was so good that I forgot it was an amateur production. What more can a person say in praise of a college show?<sup>13</sup> The Literary and Debating Society is in its Slough of Despond and I've taken it upon myself to help pull it out. Last week we had a meeting, which was an experiment. It was conducted something like the Oxford or Cambridge Unions, or more exactly like the original meetings of the Society in the 1880s. I thought the meeting was a success, but the small turn-out was a disappointment. The apathy of the average student is awful. Unless you can promise a dance, a moving picture show or a

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<sup>12</sup> The *McGill Fortnightly Review* began life as a literary supplement to the *McGill Daily* in 1924. It was published independently from 1925-1927, but did not survive the graduation of its two leading lights, A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott.

<sup>13</sup> The Choral Society's production of Edward German's *Tom Jones* was the first comic opera ever staged by a Canadian University. It was held between February 12-14, 1927, at His Majesty's Theatre, and was most favourably reviewed.



boxing match, you are not liable to interest him. In spite of that we have high hopes for the future of the "Lit". Nothing more has been done about the trip to England,<sup>14</sup> so I'm no nearer there than I was when I wrote last week. I have just finished writing a history of the "Lit" for the McGill Annual. It was an interesting job. I only had 800 words so I had to leave a lot out. A fellow could write a good book about the history of the different clubs and activities at the university. For example the "Lit" goes back further than 1873. I had to stop there because that was the year of the publication of the first college magazine

February 20, 1927

The "Lit" is becoming a bit more exciting. The resolution for our last debate was "Resolved that the Student Council should be abolished", which caused some talk around the campus. This Wednesday we are sounding the death-knell of the School of Commerce. The Commerce men are a bit peeved and we expect a hundred per cent turn-out. I don't think there is any doubt to the fact that more interest is being shown in things literary and dramatic this year than in any other year since I have been at the university. We have the "Fortnightly", the "McGill News", next month the new "Martlet" (a humorous attempt) will appear for the first time, and the "Daily" is actually getting better. In dramatics there is the Players Club, which is putting on "Loyalties" in Moyses Hall; the English Department is putting on "Trelawney of the Wells";<sup>15</sup> the Choral Society did very well with "Tom Jones" and then there will be the Red and White Revue. And last but not least, the "Lit" is getting better, if I do say so myself.

Humphrey was chosen for the debating team which travelled to Newark, New Jersey. He decided to use the Oxford method of speaking extemporaneously without notes, although things did not go as planned:

February 28, 1927

The other side won the debate, the audience voting that the U.S. should not cancel their war debts. It was perfectly fair decision for the Americans certainly had their speeches well prepared. I did a foolish thing—the debate was in a church and while going up to the pulpit I gave my head an awful bump. That rattled me for a few minutes, but I soon got into my stride.

Humphrey glosses over the events to some extent to spare his sister's feelings. There were 800 in the audience. Humphrey was intimidated by the size of the audience and this—combined with the bang on his head—left him speechless for a few moments and his eventual speech was not of the highest order. He learned from the debacle. From that point on for the rest of his life, whenever he had to give a speech or lec-

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<sup>14</sup> Only three students were to be sent on this trip. Humphrey rated himself as the fifth best debater in the Society.

<sup>15</sup> The Arts Building was expanded in 1926, incorporating a new large lecture hall, Moyses Hall, which had a small stage at the front. The Player's Club put on John Galsworthy's three act play *Loyalties* in this venue, while the English Department—as part of its new Drama Programme—staged Arthur Pinero's 1898 comedy *Trelawney of the Wells* there.

ture, he always had a written text with him no matter how well he knew the material. Thus, he could always simply read if another accident happened or if he lost his nerve.

March 7, 1927

When I got back to Montreal I found that I had been elected president of the "Lit" for next year by acclamation. That's a position I don't mind holding at all for I'm ambitious to make something out of that society. We will probably absorb the activities of the McGill Canadian Club into the "Lit" next year.

March 13, 1927

Did I tell you that I was elected president of the "Lit" by acclamation? It will be a much more important office than it has been in the past for we are absorbing the Canadian Club and adopting a policy much more similar to that of the English debating unions. The new society will be known as the "McGill Debating Union". I'm going to try to have M. Henri Bourassa present at the first meeting at which I preside. He is a man whose ideas are finding much more favour just now and who is especially interesting to University students. You will probably remember him as the radical French-Canadian nationalist, but he has mellowed with [the] years and has now, I think, arrived at what will be the solution to the whole race problem here. He sees the Canada of the future a bi-lingual country, from Nova Scotia to British Columbia, peopled by a race which will be neither French nor English, but Canadian. Needless to say, I agree with him.

Henri Bourassa (1868-1952), French-Canadian journalist and politician, had something of a reputation as a nationalist and had founded *Le Devoir* as a nationalist newspaper in 1910. He had been a member of the House of Commons and the Legislative Assembly and was at this time M.P. for Labelle. It is possible Humphrey's assessment with regard to the mellowing had some validity as Bourassa broke with his old nationalist associates over the next few years and resigned as editor of *Le Devoir* in 1932. He does not appear, however, to have addressed the "Lit" in 1927, although he did give a speech on French-English relations at the annual banquet of the Arts Undergraduate Society. Meanwhile there was bad news about the trip to England.

March 23, 1927

I have delayed writing to you a couple of days so that I could tell you who had been chosen to go on the debating trip. I did not make it. Frankly I am disappointed for I really thought that I would be chosen and my friends assured me that there was no doubt about it. Two of the men, Frank Scott and Bernard Alexandor,<sup>16</sup> were sure of going from the start—the third, Gordon Nairn<sup>17</sup> (a good

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<sup>16</sup> Bernard Morris Alexandor (b. 1906) was completing his B.A. at this time. He received a B.C.L. in 1931 and practised law in Ottawa.

<sup>17</sup> (Alexander) Gordon Nairn (b. 1902) had recently received his B.A. (1926) and was in first year law, obtaining his B.C.L. in 1930. He spent his career working for various insurance companies, concluding it as Executive Director of Marketing, Coordination and Public Relations, Prudential Insurance Company of America, Toronto.

Scotch name) was a surprise. Nevertheless I think we are sending a strong team, and one which will be a credit to McGill. All three are personal friends of mine and I can vouch for them.

If I had the poetic instinct I would sit down and write a dirge about it. Perhaps I realize too keenly what I am missing. To speak in the Oxford Union, to be representing the youth of Canada in Britain; those are things which one dreams about. Well, the opportunity is gone forever. The future may hide bright things for me, and perhaps it may not, but it's certain that I shall never be part of the first McGill debating team to visit Oxford, Cambridge, etc.

To add a touch of irony to all this, I am presiding at the "Lit" tonight for the first time and part of my duties will be to officially announce the team.

In the same letter as the examination period draws close, Humphrey suddenly seems to become aware of the difficult academic schedule he has set himself by attempting the last year of Arts and the first of Law simultaneously.

Spring, after a brief interruption, has returned. The only thing that mars life right now is the thought of the nine examinations which are not far off. Did you ever hear of such a ridiculous number? I don't know whether I'll get through the week or not. Roman Law is the bug-bear of the lot. Justinian did civilization a service when he published his institutes, no doubt, but very few law students will admit it. It seems that we have to know more about Roman Law than the Romans did themselves.

Roman law was taught by the Dean, Percy Corbett. It is ironic, given the views expressed here, that Corbett would become Humphrey's friend and mentor, bringing him into the Faculty in 1937 to teach Roman law. However, as an undergraduate, Humphrey found Corbett remote and aloof. A fellow student, Arnold Heeney, stated that he had never sat under a better teacher than Corbett (and he had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford), and that Corbett's "lectures in Roman law were a model of clarity and precision."<sup>18</sup> Heeney's view was given after the lapse of almost half a century and Humphrey, in an unpublished autobiography,<sup>19</sup> would give a more balanced opinion in retrospect, when he wrote:

There was no mistaking the fact that he was a great scholar but, during my undergraduate days, I did not particularly like him. Like most other students I put him down as a bit of an intellectual snob. My opinion of and regard for Percy Corbett would radically change over the years. Percy helped the process along as he gradually mellowed.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A. Heeney, *The Things that are Caesar's* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) at 25.

<sup>19</sup> During the last few years of his life, Humphrey decided to write an autobiography of his entire life, since his previously published autobiography only covered the U.N. years. Tentatively titled "Life is an Adventure," this account is fairly complete up to the point Humphrey joined the U.N. in 1946. See McGill University Archives MG 4127, Cont. 008, File 133 "Life is an Adventure".

<sup>20</sup> "Life is an Adventure", *ibid.* at 56.

The correspondence continued:

April 10, 1927

I suppose you are in Italy now. You'll enjoy this trip more than the last for you won't have examinations to worry about. Don't try to shoot Mussolini, he is a dangerous man and might resent it.<sup>21</sup> I've been reading criminal law<sup>22</sup> all afternoon and my mind consequently is full of such things.

April 17, 1927

Thanks for your cable of condolence. All I missed by not making that team was a big disappointment for the University authorities have called the whole thing off. Frank Scott couldn't go. I imagine that they considered him as the back-bone of the team so they decided to cancel the trip. It's rather tough on the other fellows. ...

Examinations begin in just twelve days. I know my law pretty well, but if I get my Arts it will be by bluff and past reputation. I've had to pull so many strings for that B.A. that I certainly will be relieved when I get it. I might be pulled up on some technical point yet. One thing is sure. When they once give it to me, they would have a hard time to get it back.

Although he was still concerned about preparation for examinations, Humphrey began to reflect on the need for summer employment in a law firm:

April 24, 1927

I am pulling wires to get a job in a certain law office this summer, but I won't be sure of it for another week at least. Most lawyers consider students to be a nuisance so it's quite hard to get summer jobs with them. If I get this job I'll consider myself lucky and put my European trip off for a while. But don't take this as final for you may see me in Aberdeen yet.

May 8, 1927

I've finished my law examinations and have one more paper in Arts this week. I can't tell you how I made out yet, but I'm none too optimistic. I think I got through all right, for I knew my work. But there wasn't one paper where I could open up and let them know what I knew. The idea behind the papers seemed to be to find out what you didn't know. You know the kind! There is a rumour that they are raising the standard of the course. One way to do it is to plough half the class.

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<sup>21</sup> Neither Humphrey—although he was of a conservative disposition at this juncture—nor his sister, were admirers of Mussolini or Fascism.

<sup>22</sup> Taught by Robert Alfred Ernest Greenshields (1861-1942). Greenshields had been appointed Puisne Judge of the Superior Court of Quebec in 1910, and became Chief Justice (1933-1942). This was actually the last year Greenshields taught the course. He became Acting Chief Justice in 1928.

I still don't know what I am going to do this summer. Yesterday I called on Mr. Léon Gouin<sup>23</sup> of Beaulieu and Gouin (son of Sir Lomer). I would like to work there! The drawback is that it is against their principles to pay salaries to students. Ye gods, what a profession.

May 15, 1927

Examinations are over. Three hearty British cheers!! I have some unofficial results and believe me they are ironical. I made just three marks over a pass in one of my best legal subjects "Persons"<sup>24</sup> and most of the rest are second divisions. On the other hand I led the class in "Transportation",<sup>25</sup> an economic subject that I didn't know the first thing about.

May 19, 1927

The marks for law were published today. The results were very disappointing for me and I don't know whether I should feel disgusted or just plain discouraged. I didn't make one single first division and only three seconds. From the following list you will see where I came. About ten were completely ploughed.

1st Division:

Heeney, an Oxford man  
Dainow

2nd Division:

Bogante  
Godine  
Brierley  
Hyde  
Smith

3rd Division:

Hands  
Caplan  
MacLennan

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<sup>23</sup> Léon Mercier Gouin (b. 1891) worked as a lawyer in Montreal from 1915-1980, and was created K.C. in 1925. He worked in his father's firm, and with his father's partner until 1922, when he formed Beaulieu and Gouin. He was summoned to the Senate in 1940. His father was Sir (Jean) Lomer Gouin (1861-1929), who served as Premier of Quebec (1905-1920) and Minister of Justice in McKenzie King's cabinet (1921-1924).

<sup>24</sup> "Civil Law—Persons and Property" was taught by one of the few full-time professors, (Charles) Stuart Le Mesurier (b. 1888). Le Mesurier was on the Faculty from 1923-1958, serving as Dean (1936-1949).

<sup>25</sup> Transportation was taught by William Wallace Goforth (b. 1899), who taught economics briefly at McGill University (1924-1929) before going into business as an economic consultant. He was the son of well-known missionary to China, Jonathan Goforth (1859-1936), and authoress Rosalind Goforth (1864-1942).

Humphrey  
Harris  
Buckman  
Wolfson  
Handfield  
Macnaughton  
Kursner  
Smith  
Schwartz

An investigation of the Class of 1929 reveals the following history. Twenty-eight students were accepted to the first year of whom nine—to use Humphrey's phrase—were "completely ploughed". Of the nineteen Humphrey mentions above, only fourteen graduated in June 1929. Frank Godine, Barnet Buckman, and Sydney Kursner all transferred to the Université de Montréal to improve their French, the first two becoming licenciers and the last a bachelier in 1929. Charles Wolfson (Fall 1929) and Max Schwartz (Spring 1930) graduated in Law at later dates. James Gossage Brierley,<sup>26</sup> (Hamilton) Larrat Smith, Paul Sherman Smith, C.H. Beresford Hands, Joseph Caplan, Malcolm MacLennan, Theodore Harris, and Joseph Handfield all went on to practise law in the Montreal area.

Some, like Humphrey, gained a broader fame. Arnold Danforth Patrick Heeneey (1902-1970) had been a Rhodes Scholar from Manitoba in 1923. He practised law in Montreal before becoming Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister (1938-1940), Clerk of the Privy Council (1940-1949), and Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs (1949-1952). He was Ambassador to the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (1952-1953) and the United States (1953-1957, 1959-1962). He became Chairman of the Civil Services Commission (1957-1959) and the Canadian Section, International Joint Commission (1962-1970).<sup>27</sup>

Joseph Dainow (1906-1978) taught Roman Law at McGill and practised in Montreal before moving to the United States to teach at Loyola University of New Orleans (1935-1938) and Louisiana State University (1938-1973), after which he became Professor Emeritus. He served with the Judge Advocate General's Office (1942-1946), acting as part of the American prosecution at the Nuremberg Trials. He was also a prolific author, editing two revisions of the *Civil Code of Louisiana*.

(George) Miller Hyde (1905-1996) worked as a lawyer in Montreal (1930-1950) before becoming a Justice on the Court of Appeal (1950-1973).

Finally Senator Alan Aylesbury Macnaughton (b. 1903) practised in Montreal (1930-1939) and served as Crown Prosecutor (1939-1941). He was a Member of Parliament (1949-1966), serving as Speaker (1963-1966) before being summoned to Senate.

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<sup>26</sup> Brierley was the father of well-known legal academic and McGill professor John E.C. Brierley, who was Dean of McGill's Faculty of Law (1974-1984).

<sup>27</sup> Heeneey was also the grandfather of McGill Law professor Nicholas Kasirer.

Humphrey continued:

It is even worse than it looks for most of the men in the 3rd Division know very little about their law.

This may sound like a feeble explanation—"qui s'excuse s'accuse", but after seven years at university one has a fair idea of what one knows about a subject. I think I got as much out of the year as anyone in the class and what I did learn I understood. I did not expect to lead the class, but I did expect to be near the top. The papers were set to find out what you did not know, not what you knew. And a man who plugged up trick questions at the end of the year had a far better chance than the man who worked conscientiously throughout the year. Perhaps I have the wrong method, but I think you get more out of a course if you work regularly from September to April; the plugging you do in May may help you make high marks, but you won't have a very deep understanding of your subject. I'm not trying to make out that I should have received higher marks on the papers I wrote. What I am trying to get at is that the papers did not give you an opportunity to show what you knew about the subject. The two men in the first division, however, are certainly the most brilliant men in the class. They are both hard workers and Heeney has an exceptionally good brain. Now, Rufus, don't think I am trying to make excuses for my poor showing, I only want you to know that I got more out of the course than it would seem.

Isn't it ridiculous to lead the class in Arts in a subject you have paid hardly any attention to and at the same time make such a mess of the work you are more interested in and have put more work on? Well, the year is over now, and it can't be helped. Next year, perhaps, I will do better. My results have made me decide that I will not take my M.A. as I had planned to do.<sup>28</sup>

May 31, 1927

On Friday I received my B.A. degree. ... Convocation was a dreary affair from the beginning to the end. Even the principal speaker, Prof. Shotwell, from Columbia University, was a wash-out.<sup>29</sup> But the important thing is that I have my B.A. and with first-class honours in political science and economics at that! It is some compensation for the poor showing I made in law.

June 7, 1927

I had to pay out \$127.00 to the Bar of Montreal the other day. It was a real blow, but you have to be admitted as a student-at-law for three years before you can practise. So far I have seen no pay cheques from Wainwright, Elder and McDougall: they may pay me a small salary, but I've just about given up hope.

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<sup>28</sup> Humphrey had planned that if he were to work in a law firm, rather than go to Europe that summer, he would be able to write a M.A. thesis.

<sup>29</sup> James Thomson Shotwell (1874-1965), Canadian-born American academic, taught history at Columbia University from 1900-1947. He received a Doctor of Laws and gave the Convocation address on the subject of "Imperial Resources".

The partners in this firm in which Humphrey ultimately gained summer employment were Arnold Wainwright (1879-1967), lecturer at and benefactor of the McGill Faculty of Law, Aubrey Huntington Elder, and (Edward) Stuart McDougall. Elder and McDougall were both born in 1889, were members of the McGill Law class of 1913, and were hired by Wainwright at the same time and went on to become his partners. However, McDougall also became a judge of the Appeals Division, Court of King's Bench in 1942, and represented Canada on the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (1946-1948). Humphrey spent the summer working there and was able, when term started that fall, to report:

September 28, 1927

College will open tomorrow. I'm not at all sorry although it will mean that I'll have to give up most of my work in this office. Nevertheless the summer has been an interesting one and what experience I've had has made me feel more like a lawyer than I did. I found the work at McGill quite difficult last year, but I expect that after the summer's experience I'll be able to read my law with much more facility.

October 11, 1927

I spend the mornings, rising most mornings at 7:30, at lectures and reading in the law library. I take an hour and a half off for lunch and then to the office. Most afternoons I have a lecture at five o'clock, but on the others I stay until six. Then the evening is spent studying. If you ever hear any one talking about college men that loaf, please refer them to me.

Despite this apparently rigorous schedule, Humphrey still found time to devote to the direction of the Literary and Debating Society.

October 18, 1927

I'm having the very devil of a time with the "Lit". If a society ever needed a strong hand at the helm, the "Lit" needs one now. I don't know whether or not I have that necessary strength (I don't mean physical strength I mean political strength) but if I do something with that society this year I'll deserve a leather medal. These things take time, but even if one did not enjoy the work one could not conscientiously refuse to help along a thing he believed in.

November 19, 1927

Dr. Leacock is going to speak at the next meeting of the "Lit" so I expect one of the biggest turn-outs in history. I'm getting real keen over this. If I can create more interest in the students themselves this year, I'll try next year to get some philanthropist interested in the society. It should be endowed. The Oxford and Cambridge Unions have been the training ground for some of Britain's greatest statesmen and there is no reason why McGill students shouldn't have the same opportunity to train for a political career. I have been nominated as Law representative on the Student Council; if I am elected I'll be able to exert more influence and perhaps persuade the powers that be that debating is perhaps the most important extra-curricular activity in the University.



December 2, 1927

The McGill Debating Union is going over with a big splash, but, believe me, it means plenty of work. I've spent most of this afternoon, for example, interviewing two men who are going to speak at our next meeting on the 7th. Perhaps you've heard of them—Mr. J.M. MacDonnell<sup>30</sup> (Uncle Lawrence<sup>31</sup> will know him), Manager of the National Trust Company, who will introduce the following motion: "Resolved that this House deplores the lack of constructive policy displayed by His Majesty's Government". Mr. Herbert Marler<sup>32</sup>, late of McKenzie-King's cabinet, will lead the opposition. At our last meeting Stephen Leacock gave the Principal address. The idea of having men, other than students, address the Society, has its dangers, but debating has certainly become more popular at McGill as a consequence of the new policy. Right now debating is the big thing at college.<sup>33</sup> I don't take all the credit for the change on my own shoulders, although it would be hard to find another reason for it except that I've put my heart right into this and done some real work. Certain persons in the Law Faculty call me Mussolini—but it's a fact that Mussolini methods were the only methods that could save the "Lit".

Humphrey continues on a social note:

I'm going to the Junior Prom tonight. This will be the first McGill dance I have ever attended. I'm taking Edith Cochrane—real Scotch from Glasgow.<sup>34</sup> Con-

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<sup>30</sup> James MacKerras MacDonnell (b. 1884) worked for the National Trust Company (1911-1944), including service as Manager of the Montreal Branch (1922-1930) and President of the company (1939-1944). He was prominent in conservative circles and ultimately served as M.P. for various Ontario constituencies (1945-1962) and Minister Without Portfolio (1957-1959). Humphrey was to clash with him when they were both on the Executive Committee of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs ("C.I.I.A.") before MacDonnell was elected to Parliament. When Humphrey saw him in 1964 at the National Council of the C.I.I.A., he noted for his diary "J.M. MacDonnell, who is now over 80, was at the meeting of the Council. I have always had an indifferent opinion of him and this was confirmed yesterday; but he isn't without ability and as intellectually vigorous as I remember him 20 years ago" (A.J. Hobbins, "Eleanor Roosevelt, John Humphrey and Canadian Opposition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; looking back at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNDHR" (1998) 53 *Int'l J.* 325 at 332).

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Killam (1883-1975), Canadian engineer, was the husband of Humphrey's paternal aunt Edith, and first cousin of philanthropist Isaak Walton Killam. He had taught at Mount Allison Academy (1909-1920) and the University of British Columbia (1920-1925), before becoming President of the B.C. Pulp and Paper Company (1926-1950).

<sup>32</sup> Sir Herbert Meredith Marler (1876-1940) had been appointed Minister Without Portfolio in 1925, serving until his electoral defeat the same year. He was knighted (K.C.M.G.) in 1935 for his diplomatic services in Japan.

<sup>33</sup> Lest the reader feel that Humphrey was becoming carried away, the lead article for the *McGill Daily* of December 8, 1927 described this event as "one of the keenest political debates that has ever been waged within the precincts of this University." Marler was judged the winner of the debate by an audience which was described as "sparse".

<sup>34</sup> Edith Cochrane had received a B.A. from McGill with Humphrey in 1927. While she was born in Scotland in 1905, her family moved to Montreal while she was a child and she attended Trafalgar School. She subsequently lived in Vancouver after marrying Warren Malins. Humphrey always called

sidering that this is the third time I've been a junior, and probably the last, I decided that I simply had to go. I'll admit that the girl has something to do with it. She is quite exceptional—has brains.

December 18, 1927

I hasten to correct two misconceptions. First I'm going to have a real Christmas dinner at the Hyde's<sup>35</sup> and consequently won't have a miserable hotel Christmas after all, and—secondly I've discovered that the Scotch one isn't so brainy after all: she is merely the argumentative kind.

Re France. The idea is to spend a year there *after* I finish at McGill. Mr. Wainwright advises me to go if possible, but I don't know whether I can make the necessary arrangements with the Bar Society. I am proceeding under the system where you take one year's indentureship after you receive your law degree. The Bar wouldn't accept my year in France as constituting a proper indentureship and consequently going to France would mean that I wouldn't be able to practise (i.e. appear before the courts) until two years after I graduate from McGill. The only way I can get around that is to have a private bill passed in the Quebec Legislature, which would be quite easy in view of my two, then three, academic degrees and the practical experience that I am now getting with Wainwright, Elder and McDougall, which would be taken into consideration in lieu of regular indentureship. This is all in the air, however, and I can afford to wait for another year before coming to a definite decision.

At about this time Humphrey had become involved in a discussion group led by Gerald Walker Birks (1872-1950). This discussion group usually consisted of McGill students and was focused on the question of finding common ground between the various Christian denominations. Birks was the second son of jeweller Henry Birks and was Vice-Chairman of the company.<sup>36</sup> The routine of church service at the Erskine and American Church, followed by tea and discussion at Birks' Sherbrooke Street apartment, led to Humphrey meeting a new social circle during the holiday season.

December 27, 1927

Thanks for the tie, etc.—I will be able to put on some real "dog" now. My Christmas was a huge success—I was invited to seven Christmas dinners, although I could only work in five. Don't get excited for two of those dinners were at the Drummond Tea Room before Christmas had really got started.

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Scottish people "Scotch", and did not appreciate that "real scotch" comes from places like Glenlivet, not Glasgow.

<sup>35</sup> Miller Hyde's parents were architect George Taylor Hyde and Mary Reppert. In previous years Humphrey had found he could never afford to go to New Brunswick for the Christmas holiday, treating himself to a meal in a hotel on Christmas Day. For several years he had bemoaned this fact in seasonal letters to Ruth, but 1927 was to prove different.

<sup>36</sup> At this time the President of the company was William Massey Birks (1868-1950), older brother of Gerald and Governor of McGill (1910-1950). The Henry Birks mentioned in the next entry is not the founder, but William's son Henry Gifford Birks (b. 1892), also a Governor of McGill (1954-1968).

Sunday at noon Col. Birks, Bob Hall<sup>37</sup> and myself had dinner at the Colonel's apartment. In the afternoon the Colonel and I called at the J.W. Ross<sup>38</sup> who tried to give us tea, but I thought discretion was the better part of valour for I had another dinner coming at Boyd Millen's<sup>39</sup> that night. I wish you could meet the Millens. They are one corking family. My dinner there was the jolliest part of the whole holiday. Yesterday afternoon I drove out to St. Annes with the Ross family, Col. Birks, Mr. Henry Birks and Miller Hyde. We had tea at the Hudson Bay House. The scones we had would make a worthy subject for a poem. After that I had dinner at the Hydies.

Humphrey became close friends with two of J.W. Ross's five children—Howard Ross (1907-1974), former Chancellor of McGill University, and Aileen Dansken Ross (b. 1902), a professor in the McGill Sociology Department (1945-1970). For his part, Birks was interested in their younger sister, Phyllis, whom he married in 1929. A quarter century later Humphrey recalled this relationship in his diary:

Tue. 17 October 1950

Col. Gerald Birks is dead. He was in many ways the most fortunate person that I have ever known. He was rich yet not preoccupied with his business. He refused himself nothing. He was deeply religious and had strong beliefs. But he was also very generous and took a great interest in young men. How many Sunday afternoons did I spend in his apartment twenty-five years ago—before he married Phyllis Ross—with Boyd Millen, "Laddie" Smith, Arnold Heeney and others. He called me an iconoclast and it is true that I was never particularly attracted to his religious interpretation. But I am glad that I knew him and am sure that my life is richer by that fact. In many ways he even had qualities of greatness.<sup>40</sup>

Humphrey began to have difficulty juggling his studies, his student activities, his job, and his new social life, but he kept up the hectic pace.

January 11, 1928

I've been pretty busy since college opened again. There is so much work to get up that I don't see how I [am] ever going to be able to do it. Examinations are three months off, but in the meantime the faculty keeps piling on more work: they seem to enjoy it.

<sup>37</sup> Not identified.

<sup>38</sup> John Wardrop Ross (1870-1946) was a Chartered Accountant and the son of P.S. Ross, who obtained the first charter for accountants in North America. He was a close friend of William Massey Birks, with whom he gave and raised significant sums for the McGill Faculty of Religious Studies. He married Gertrude Holland in 1894.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Boyd Millen (b. 1904) had been Humphrey's classmate in Arts and was one year behind him in Law. He practised law (1930-1934) before joining his father's firm of wholesale merchants. His father, businessman John E. Millen, had married Grace Leslie Shivas in 1893.

<sup>40</sup> J.P. Humphrey, *On the Edge of Greatness: The Diaries of John Humphrey, First Director of the United Nations Division of Human Rights*, ed. by A.J. Hobbins (Montreal: McGill University Libraries, 1994) vol. 2 at 119.

February 6, 1928

Yesterday was Sunday. I had dinner with Colonel Birks, tea at Boyd Millen's and a mid-night supper at Mrs. Leslie Millen's, where I spent the evening discussing physics, philosophy and politics. Sunday is fast becoming the busiest day of my week. In that respect this college year is a striking contrast to the others I've spent in Montreal. Do you know that since last October there have been only two Sundays when I haven't been invited out to dinner. I feel that I am only now getting to know Montreal people. Last Sunday I had dinner at Mr. William Birks and two Sundays before that I had dinner at Mr. John W. Ross'. You would like all these people for although they are very wealthy (the Birks and the Ross') they seem to have a real family life. I think that there is a New Brunswick tradition which is liable to make us suspect wealthy people as being showy and shallow. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I personally have always thought that the wealthier people in Montreal would probably prove to be quite cheap when you met them. These people certainly are not. There is no social whirl in their set that I can see and certainly no splash of wealth.

February 26, 1928

I'm up to my ears in work, but that's an old story. By the time this term is over we will have practically gone through the whole civil code. That looks easy when you write it, but when you see the Civil Code you wonder why so many ostensibly sensible young chaps go into Law. If I manage to get through with this year all right I'm not worrying about the year to come. In comparison I expect the future will be as easy as falling off a greasy log.

March 18, 1928

The cold, by the way, came at a very inopportune time for I had a final exam on "Conflict of Laws"<sup>41</sup> on Thursday afternoon. ... Writing exams isn't a favourite past-time of mine even under the most favourable conditions, but it's a hell of a picnic when you have a head-ache (Pardon the French but I think the occasion demands it). Fortunately for me I knew my work well and I think I made a fair showing. I'm not so certain about the examinations to come in just a little over a month's time. Think of the sum total of the examinations during two years in arts and then you will get a fair idea of what I have ahead of me. I only have to think of those examinations to invite brain fever.

Ruth had hoped that Humphrey would spend the summer with her on Vancouver Island. They had originally planned to do this. However, the possibility arose that Humphrey could spend the summer in Grenoble taking the French for foreigners courses offered at the University. Humphrey found the thought of travelling in Europe appealing even apart from learning French, but he spent much of the spring trying to overcome Ruth's disappointment at the possibility she would not see him. In presenting the arguments for the Grenoble trip, some of Humphrey's new ambitions began to

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<sup>41</sup> Taught by Gordon Walters MacDougall (1872-1947), a prominent Montreal lawyer.

emerge. He had originally seen law as a route to the top in business, but now he had developed political ambitions.

April 8, 1928

Well, Rufus, this trip to Europe of mine is a plunge on my part. My abilities lie in directions different from Doug's.<sup>42</sup> It is doubtful whether I will ever make any money, but I may make a name. To misquote the text, where your heart is there shall be your treasure also.<sup>43</sup> My heart is in politics. The profession of law will be more of a means than an end for me. The study of law is training my mind for politics and the profession of law will, I hope, keep the wolf away from the door while I prepare for and participate in public life. You know, Rufus, I've had this ambition to go into politics so long now that I'm beginning to take it really seriously. I don't think it's reasonable to believe that I should have been born with such a passion to get into public life, if I wasn't meant to do that very thing. I'm going to open up my mind to you for a minute, or perhaps it is my heart, and tell you that I almost burn with ambition at times. Perhaps it is all conceit—I don't know—but when it comes to ambition Disraeli had nothing on me. My day dreams all dwell on the theme and even when I am writing my diary<sup>44</sup> I'm half consciously thinking that it will make good material for my biographer. ... The point is this, Rufus—if you are going to be a Disraeli in this province you must be able to speak French. And even if I am destined to be no more than a common humdrum lawyer, I need French.

Then it was time to prepare for examinations:

April 11, 1928

I have been working like a Trojan all day and my mind is rather fagged, but I'm going to get this letter off to you now since I expect to be even busier for the next three days. The reason for the concentrated effort on my part is that the faculty have sprung a particularly hard examination for this Monday, five days from today. Between now and then I have to accomplish the Herculean task of practically memorizing four hundred articles in the Civil Code. All our work isn't like that, but this is a hard course given by a poor teacher, who wants a résumé of the Code in answer to his questions in examination.

April 17, 1928

This is just a note to let you know I survived the examination, which I had yesterday. I was quite worried about it and crammed hard for a week. The night before the exam I didn't get much sleep, so you can imagine the feeling of relief that I experienced when I had finished the paper. I'm quite sure I passed

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<sup>42</sup> Humphrey's brother, Douglas, who had recently moved to Montreal to work for A.E. Ames and Company. At this time Douglas was registering some success in investments on the stock market.

<sup>43</sup> From Christ's Sermon on the Mount: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:21.

<sup>44</sup> Humphrey began this diary two years previously when he visited Ruth for the summer in England and Scotland, but it has not been found amongst his papers. He kept later diaries (1948-1968, 1989-1994) which are now in the McGill University Archives.

although I don't expect a high mark, one of the reasons being that this particular professor is of the opinion that a student is lucky to get a third, let alone a second or first division, in his subject. Well, it's over and I expect that I'll be able to approach the others in a calmer mood. I've been studying legal history<sup>45</sup> all day. There is no good text book on the subject so you have to depend upon notes and extracts. I don't consider it one of our hardest courses, but it is a bit involved. Sometime some student will work the whole thing out into a very interesting book. The subject starts with Roman law as it was first introduced into France; the development of the law there alongside the old Germanic tribal customs; the growth and decay of Feudalism; unifying influences, etc.; then the law as it was introduced into New France; seigniorial system here; our law up to the Cession;<sup>46</sup> the Cession; and the law since. It would be a fascinating subject to study at any other time but the examination rush.

May 3, 1928

You ask me to tell you how I celebrated the 30th.<sup>47</sup> I'll tell you. I spent six hours of it writing two of my hardest examinations, and the remainder was spent recuperating. In the morning we had one exam, which was so hard that for a while I didn't think I had a chance to pass and had visions of my B.C.L. and law career fading into dim nothingness. I was so steamed up that for about fifteen minutes it was a physical impossibility to even write. I learned afterwards that other chaps had analogous experiences and the present consensus of opinion in the faculty seems to be in favour of hanging the man who set the paper. The exam in the afternoon was quite decent, but we were all so exhausted that it was hard to do it justice. My exams are about finished now; only two more—one tomorrow and one next day. It's been an ordeal, believe me. Examinations have never affected me before the way this set has. Well, I've only got one more year of it and then I'll find something else to worry about.

May 12, 1928

Examinations have been over for just exactly a week and I'm beginning to feel like a human being once again. I've managed to get a few results, unofficially, and so far I have done better than I expected to. I think, however, that my marks in two of the papers that I have yet to hear from will pull down my average. It's much pleasanter to be surprised in this way than to be disappointed.

May 22, 1928

I have unexpected, but good news for you today. I have finally succeeded in getting my results and was surprised to find that I ranked second in the class. I

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<sup>45</sup> Taught by Percy Corbett.

<sup>46</sup> Somewhat uncommon term for the ceding of New France to Great Britain by the Treaty of Paris, 1763. Professor J.E.C. Brierley has suggested (in conversation) that its use in preference to a term such as "the Conquest" may be viewed as an early form of political correctness.

<sup>47</sup> Humphrey's twenty-third birthday.

really didn't expect to do anything like this this year. Now I can start out on my European trip with a perfectly free conscience.

Humphrey spent a truly enjoyable summer in Grenoble but, by the time he returned for his last year he was full of thoughts and anxieties for the future:

September 30, 1928

Oh Lord, Rufus, when I compare the ideas which fill my mind and the passion that I have to count for something in this drama of making Canada with what I actually accomplish, I feel that I am the world's greatest dreamer set by some cruel joke of fate in the most practical of environments. I sometimes wonder if it wouldn't be better for my happiness and usefulness if I gave up my great ambitions and would be content to play a smaller role. Perhaps I could achieve something tangible then, however small. I have enough sense to realize that I can't step out of McGill and by the aid of a few clever words or acts change Montreal into Utopia. Success, if it comes, will be slow and after many setbacks, but will it come? I think you know me well enough to know that for me success isn't measured in motor cars or country estates, or even in fame. When I die I want men to say "the world is a better place to live in because that man lived" and unless men are willing to say that about me then my life has been a failure. These are not just words although it may look that way on paper. It is my very religion. To me immortality is to live on in the contributions that one makes to humanity.

Humphrey was to remain relatively consistent to this philosophy, confiding to his diary on July 18, 1955:

At lunch today [U.N. Social Affairs Officer] Mousheng told me not to take the business so seriously. He also quoted Confucius according to whom the golden rule was not to do anything to others that you wouldn't have done to you. But I prefer the positive Christian formula. I also think that everyone should try to leave the world a little better place than he found it.

Humphrey decided that he would concentrate on his studies as much as possible in the final year, cutting back on work and social activities.

October 4, 1928

Work has started to pile up already. This is going to be one hectic year. If I get through with it I will consider myself equal to any grind. I will not be working regularly in the office this winter and will consequently be able to give my undivided attention to my studies. And a good thing that is too, for there are two sets of examinations—the ordinary McGill papers for a degree and then, Oh my God, the Bar.

October 27, 1928

I am more satisfied with the study of law each day. My only objection is that it monopolises all my time. As soon as those Bar examinations are over I'm going to read every book that I can get my hands on—history, fiction, economics and poetry, and I'm going to be a regular attendant at every political and literary meeting in the city. It's a great life, Rufus, if only we had more time.

November 9, 1928

One profitable thing happened to me during the week. I won the Rowat scholarship, given for proficiency in the French language and knowledge of the old French law. That sounds like a real accomplishment, doesn't it? The fact is that I was the only candidate and was only required to expound on a certain portion of the law, the subject matter of which I have been studying all summer. There was both a written and an oral exam. I think I did fairly well on the written, because when my paper was returned to me I noticed that my chief mistakes were in the gender of words. The oral was before a bench of two judges, one a French-Canadian, and the Dean. After it was over I was quite certain that I hadn't succeeded, for my French was vile and I couldn't even recall the law, with which I was perfectly familiar. However, the committee will recommend me to the faculty for the scholarship and after that august body's next meeting I will receive a cheque for \$100 or \$150, I'm not quite sure which.<sup>48</sup>

November 18, 1928

I started out the year working quite hard with the idea in my mind that I would assure myself good results in the examinations next Spring. I found, however, that I was working too hard to really get the best out of it so I'm slowing up some. You see I have two sets of exams—the McGill papers for my degree and the Bar. Each set requires a different kind of preparation. That, you will agree, is a big order and if one set out to distinguish himself in them, one would burn up all his available energy and need a year's rest after the effort. I had thought I would try for the Macdonald scholarship, which carries with it a year in France. I think that I am second in line as it is. The man ahead of me... Dainow, is both a clever man and a hard worker. In order to come out ahead of him, I would have to slave continually with one idea forever on my mind—examinations, and then I might not win out. Don't you think that I would be better off not to try for the scholarship? The year in France would of course mean a lot to me, but again it's very important that I get at my profession as soon as possible especially since according to my rather ambitious but vague plans I only plan to use the profession as a stepping stone to politics.

Humphrey vacillated for some time about the Macdonald Scholarship although he ultimately applied for and was awarded it. Years later, Percy Corbett told him he was the successful candidate because of the tremendous improvement in his marks between first and second year.<sup>49</sup> It is not known if Dainow applied for the scholarship, but he did, as anticipated, finish first in the class. In the meantime, Humphrey began to wonder whether allegiance to the Conservative cause was the wisest thing:

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<sup>48</sup> Actually it was neither. The Thomas Alexander Rowat scholarship, named in memory of a graduate who was killed in action in 1917, carried a value of \$120.00 in 1928. At this time, candidates had to be British subjects of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic origin.

<sup>49</sup> Undoubtedly, one of the main reasons for this improvement was that Humphrey was no longer taking a double course load.



November 25, 1928

Next year I hope to become more involved in politics. I have made up my mind that on a survey of the two parties the Liberal party stands for the best in our national life. The most important thing is that they have the men. The inclusion of some of the more advanced thinkers from the West has made the party broader and quicker to experiment. They stand for Canadian participation in world politics, a fair tariff and protection of provincial rights. Furthermore they represent all classes, whereas the Conservative party, in its last analysis, stands for the business community. For these and other reasons I will throw in my lot with the Liberal party. Whether I can do anything or not is a question, but I feel that my particular education, etc. has made me more of a Liberal than a Conservative and that whereas I have better Conservative connections than Liberal connections (in fact I have none of the latter kind), I will be more independent if I join up with the latter. These things can only be done gradually of course, but I'm making my first move soon when I will have my name put up at the Reform Club. English-Montreal is a hot-bed of Conservatism, but that will make it all the more fun and incidentally my being on the opposite side will make me stand out more than if I was merely one of many alike in ideas and ability. Politics means fighting and I may as well start in the thick of it.

December 4, 1928

This morning I had a talk with Mr. Wainwright about getting a job with Wainwright, Elder and McDougall next summer. What he said was very promising, but I won't know definitely until next week. I had been worrying about my chances for a while, because they had taken on two new men there since last spring and I didn't know whether or not there would be room for me. I'll be glad when I'm finally settled down to something—I've had about enough of student life. I think that after just one more year of it I would go to seed. That's probably one of the chief reasons why I can't work up any enthusiasm about the Macdonald scholarship.

## II. Afterword

The next package of the Humphrey letters is missing, leaving a gap until September 1929. By this time Humphrey had graduated, passed the bar examinations, was living in Paris, and was married. The record clearly needs a little filling in.

Academically, Humphrey did well in the Spring of 1929 finishing second in the class behind Joseph Dainow. He applied for and was awarded the Macdonald Scholarship with the encouragement of Arnold Wainwright, who undertook to keep a job open for him for a year. Professionally, Humphrey worked for Wainwright, Elder and McDougall for six years after his return from France. He then joined the McGill Faculty of Law at Percy Corbett's suggestion—working there for the rest of his life except for twenty years at the U.N. Socially, his life changed dramatically when Aubrey Elder, hearing Humphrey had booked passage to France on a Canadian Pacific liner, strongly suggested he change the booking at the last minute to Cunard, for whom his law firm were solicitors. Humphrey obliged and, the second night out, attended a tourist class dance on the R.M.S. Aurania. There he met a French Canadian, Jeanne Godreau.

Humphrey proposed to her before the liner reached Europe. They were married in Paris that September by the British Consul-General.<sup>50</sup>

Humphrey's dreams of making his name in politics never really got started. When he returned from France in 1930, he found Montreal in the throes of the Great Depression. He was appalled by the conditions faced by the working classes and he quickly became a committed socialist. Humphrey never abandoned his support for the concept of Canadian unity through bilingualism and biculturalism, but to these views he added the need for a social safety net. Humphrey would later join the League for Social Reconstruction. Although his political views would be considered mainstream in the 1990s, there was never to be a future for a socialist politician in Quebec during his lifetime. Therefore, Humphrey had to find other outlets for his ambitions. Ultimately, he was to make his name through his activity at the U.N. and through his subsequent championing of human rights issues.

## Conclusion

In reading Humphrey's letters after a gap of seventy years, one gets the feeling that the life of the McGill law student has not changed as much as might be expected. There are still students who find themselves anxious regarding the motives of the professoriate. Does the faculty enjoy piling on work? Are the rumours true that standards are arbitrarily raised through failing—or giving low marks—to large percentages of students? Are examinations designed to discover what one does not know, rather than what one does? The student of today may well be prey to the same anxiety Humphrey was, and ask the same questions that he did. The student leaders of today also find the apathy of the average student as astonishing as Humphrey did although it is doubtful that a "moving picture show" would grab as much of their attention today. Although McGill University's Faculty of Law has in many ways changed beyond recognition, it is interesting to notice how some things have clearly remained the same.

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<sup>50</sup> Canada had no consular services in France at this time. The marriage witness was the First Secretary of the Canadian Legation, Pierre Dupuy (1896-1969), later an ambassador and Commissioner-General for Montreal's world exhibit, Expo 67.