Personal Reflection on Madame Justice Louise Arbour

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Louise Arbour is the reason I am in Law school. Madame Justice Arbour arrived at her International Criminal Tribunal post at a time when I was having a crisis of 'direction'. I was then a 25-year-old programmer, attempting to reconcile my micro cubicle-existence to the greater events of our world. I was toying with the idea of a legal career but cynically rejecting its stereotypical trappings. Justice Arbour re-injected a shot of long-lost clarity. Her role as the symbol of the International Criminal Tribunal called out that a legal career could be the mid-wife to something greater.

Justice Arbour served for three years on both the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rawanda. We saw her in the news, visiting horrendous mass graves, being turned down at the border crossing and coolly indicting heads of state. We also read about but did not see the great personal sacrifices she made while performing these duties on behalf of humanity.

Though she worked within the mandate of the United Nations Security Council, she was independent of States and often performed her duties without the full support of the international community. This lead to frustrations where persons were indicted but not apprehended. The inertia of the international community has prevented full peace to return to such places as Rawanda, where intervention would have prevented the abuses of the refugee camps. For Justice Arbour, this inertia also means that victims’ families are left still waiting for resolution.

Justice Arbour has been a respected teacher. She has been a daring jurist, protecting the rights of prisoners. She has served as Chief Prosecutor for the most horrendous crimes on the planet. And now she sits on the highest court in our nation. What lesson should the world and we Canadians learn from Louise Arbour?
Law school has its ‘tough’ moments. Whenever I fall into a tough moment, I recall Justice Arbour and the reasons why I am arming myself with Law. In her own words:

'I believe that we must guard against becoming a generation of armchair Schindlers. We must not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of reassuring ourselves w/ some kind of romantic notion that, of course, we would always rise to the big challenges, while in reality remaining conveniently blind to the constant but unglamorous day-to-day effort and commitment that it takes to put ourselves on the right side of history.'

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