

# Karen Pruden Shirley

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Karen Pruden Shirley is a Métis woman who is now a retired lawyer after almost 30 years of practice in various areas of law, including Indigenous law and Crown law. She is a wife, mother of three and grandmother of eight. She is also a recipient of the prestigious Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.

Pruden Shirley has made it her life choice to blossom wherever she is planted. Born and raised in a blue-collar neighbourhood in Winnipeg, Manitoba, she cherishes her deep roots within the fur-trade families of the Red River Settlement. She also reveres her Pruden grandparents, who joined the Church in 1916 as a young married couple and became stalwarts in the Winnipeg Latter-day Saint community. They modelled what blossoming should look like. Pruden Shirley also credits the Relief Society as providing her with some of her most memorable experiences in leadership, team-building and public speaking.

Pruden Shirley's legal career began in 1986 when she and Sq'ewqeyl First Nations member Steven L. Point (later to become British Columbia's first Indigenous lieutenant-governor, 2007–2012) founded the first law firm in British Columbia to have an all-Indigenous staff. After that prodigious start, she spent almost 25 years as legal counsel within the Department of Justice, working on specific claims and the Nisga'a Treaty. For 17 years, she managed the team of Department of Justice lawyers whose primary focus was strengthening First Nations economic development opportunities on reserve lands.

Of her law career experiences, Pruden Shirley says, "I was able to stand on the shoulders of legal giants and dedicated First Nations leaders who, before me, worked tirelessly to benefit the lives of Indigenous peoples in British Columbia and, really, in all of Canada." She also says she fully expects "progress made up until now toward finding and speaking historical and other truths and reconciling Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships must keep advancing until Canada reaches a better, more complete nationhood.