

MY TIME AT UCLA LAW

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My parents emigrated from Canton (Guangzhou), China in the late 1920s. I was the youngest of seven children born and raised in Los Angeles. My parents' relatives and friends dreamed of making a sufficient fortune to return to China to retire. World War II and the Chinese Civil War dashed that dream for many of them. While my parents did return to China about a dozen years later, they were able to return to Los Angeles just as the Japanese army was about to capture Hong Kong, where the family had been living.

I was born after the family returned from China and just before Pearl Harbor. My father's business was successful enough to allow my older siblings to attend college. But when it came time for me to go to college, I had to pay for my own education. Fortunately, I was admitted to UCLA, which had a great reputation and was virtually tuition free at that time.

When I arrived at UCLA as a freshman in the fall of 1958, it was quite different demographically than it is today. There were very few minority

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students. It was a bit scary for me at first because everyone seemed so intelligent. I had an aptitude for financial matters, and eventually I decided to study accounting to improve my prospects for employment after graduation.

The business school was located adjacent to the law school. The law students seemed to study constantly and appeared to enjoy what they were doing. It also seemed that the best accounting students were planning to attend law school.

As the Vietnam War was escalating and the draft seemed to be a certainty, my closest friends and I decided that by joining the Army Reserve, we could at least determine our own destiny and not be drafted. After six months of active duty, I returned to UCLA to earn my MBA at the business school. After receiving my MBA, I married and went to work at Deloitte, one of the large accounting firms. My first child was born soon thereafter. While I had, as I had hoped, enjoyed the study of accounting, I found the work in that field not as satisfying, so I began night law school at Loyola and finished the first year while working full time. I missed UCLA and the environment of the campus — Loyola just didn't seem like home. Fortunately, I did well enough in my first year to transfer to UCLA law school.

I can remember walking up the front steps of the law school and to the admissions office to enroll. I was excited, and happy to return home after spending five years on the UCLA campus, mostly around the law school itself.

My class of 1969 was the last of the small classes, and we had only around 180 students. The next two years were grueling. In addition to working full time to put myself through school and support my family, I attended Army Reserve meetings two weekends a month during my second year. I was always tired, but I could eventually see the light at the end of the tunnel. As a working student, there was not much time for any extracurricular activities.

The weekend before final exams in my last year of law school, my wife went into labor with our second child. I spent that weekend studying for finals and awaiting the birth of our second son.

One of my favorite family photos is a picture of my parents, my wife and our sons outside Kerckhoff Hall on the day of our law school graduation. My wife is holding our new baby as our older son stands next to her,

smiling. That night, my father told me for the first time that he always hoped that I would become a lawyer because one of his most respected friends, Y. C. Hong, was the first Chinese American to be admitted to practice in California. He wanted me to be like Y. C., who had been my mother's immigration lawyer and was a pillar of the Chinese community.

At that time it was difficult for minority and women lawyers to obtain positions in private practice firms, so I started my legal career at the California Attorney General's Office. After a few years, I went into private practice, before having the good fortune to be appointed by Governor Jerry Brown to the Municipal Court, and then elevated to the Superior Court and Court of Appeal. I served twelve years on the bench before returning to private practice. I am proud to be the first Chinese American to be appointed to the appellate court in the history of California.

When I left the court, I became a partner in Jones Day and saw that firm grow from 400 lawyers with three offices to 2,800 lawyers with almost fifty offices throughout the world. I was asked to start Jones Day's San Francisco office, and later to supervise the Chinese practice in the firm's four offices in Greater China. There were not many minority lawyers in the big law firms when I joined in 1987, and I became the first Asian partner in a firm that had started almost a hundred years earlier. Fortunately, times have changed and minority and women lawyers are now commonplace in law firms.

Last year I decided to retire after spending twenty-eight years with Jones Day. Governor Brown reappointed me to the Court of Appeal, the first time that a retired appellate judge had made a comeback. I enjoyed my time in private practice, but being a judge is an honor and a privilege. It is a way that someone can serve the community.

I am proud that my wife Crystal and I have two sons who have also pursued legal careers. Our older son, Bradley, is a partner in Morrison and Foerster, and the partner in charge of his firm's Washington, D.C., office. Our son Christopher practiced with O'Melveny and Myers and was an assistant United States attorney before his appointment as a Los Angeles Superior Court judge.

I have been the beneficiary of an extraordinary education at UCLA, which trained me and gave me the knowledge to pursue a career in business and law. I could not have succeeded without that education.

Last month I was invited to be a moot court judge at the law school. As I was walking from the parking facility to the school, I saw several hundred high school students on a tour of the campus. I thought how great it would be if they had as good a college experience as I enjoyed. I remember the day some forty years earlier that I walked up the steps of the law school to the admissions office to enroll. After the moot court session, I wandered around looking for where my name was posted. As a donor, I was told that my name would be recognized somewhere in the school. I found it on the Founders Wall, and it made me smile — it was a small “payback” to the school for the many opportunities that it has opened for me.

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