

## Profiles of Diversity and Leadership

Please take a moment to browse the featured profiles and resources page. Our hope is that those considering a career in the law, or those who have recently joined the profession, will find inspiration from the lives of people who have gone before them.

The WSBA would like to sincerely thank the attorneys who agreed to share their stories for this website. These exceptional individuals generously gave of themselves so that students, attorneys and members of the public could see a more representative cross section of attorneys in our state.

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### Interviews



**Sherri Allen**  
**Solo Practitioner**  
**Bremerton, Washington**

**"Never let your present circumstances determine your destiny."**

With 20 years' experience, the Law Office of Sherri Allen, PS focuses on social security disability and personal injury cases. Sherri has been married for 17 years and is the mother of two boys ages 12 and 3. She was a partner at Theiler, Douglas, Drachler, Mckee, LLP prior to opening her own office in Kitsap County.

Sherri is a former board member of the ACLU of Washington and serves on the WSBA Legislative Committee. She is a member of the Bremerton School Foundation, the Kitsap Community Credit Union Audit Committee, and the National Organization of Social Security Representatives.

#### ***Were you always interested in becoming a lawyer?***

No. I was born in Richmond, Indiana. I had two brothers and two sisters. I was the middle child. My mother quit high school to marry my father. My major in my first two years of college was chemistry. Once I took a political science course, I decided to switch my major to political science.

#### ***Was there anyone who encouraged you to go to law school?***

No, and I did not have any role models. The only African-American teacher at my high school assisted me in obtaining a scholarship to attend Indiana University. I was nervous about telling my mother that I wanted to become a lawyer, because all of my life I had told her that I would become a doctor. When I told her that I was going to become a lawyer, she told me that my father had always wanted to become a lawyer.

My father was a straight-A student in high school and his mother worked as a housekeeper for a lawyer. In order for my father to go to college he needed a scholarship. Although my father had the highest GPA of any minority student in his high school, he lived on the "wrong side of the tracks." The scholarship

designated for a minority student was given to a non-minority student, and because of this my father was unable to attend college.

***What challenges did you face in you pursuing your law degree?***

We were very poor. My parents separated when I was in high school. My mother was barely able to earn enough money to support my younger siblings. After my first year of undergraduate studies, I took a leave of absence from school to work. I worked during the day and eventually began taking courses at night. Once I was accepted into Indiana University School of Law, I worked three jobs to support myself and to send money home to my mother.

I was in an accelerated program in law school and I finished in two years and three months. I moved to Los Angeles, California, my final year and completed my coursework at Loyola Law School. I took the California State Bar and passed. I was a lawyer.

***What brought you to Washington, and what has been your experience in practicing law here?***

I was offered a job with the firm Theiler, Douglas, Drachler, Mckee, LLP in February 1997. The firm had a good reputation and I made partner. The firm was family oriented and my experience was positive. I left practice in Seattle so that I could devote more time to my family. I've learned from my experience that regardless of what it seems like at the time you can overcome your present circumstances, and I would encourage students and young lawyers to never let your present circumstances determine your destiny.



**Spencer Bergstedt**  
**Partner**  
**Bergstedt Wolff P.S.**

**"If you approach people from a place of shame or discomfort with who you are, they will pick up on that and they will jump on it. I've never been ashamed of who I am. I wasn't ashamed when I was a butch lesbian; I'm not ashamed as a trans man. And that made all the difference for me with my clients."**

Spencer Bergstedt is general practitioner at a two-lawyer firm in Lynnwood, Washington. He is a leader in the transgender community and pioneer in the legal community. He was born a woman in Sweden but grew up in the United States. He came out as a lesbian when he was 16. He transitioned from female to male identity after establishing his legal practice in Seattle. He is the author of *Translegalities: A Legal Guide for Transsexuals*.

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***What prior experience did you have with attorneys or with the judicial system before you went to law school, if any?***

Really nothing with the judicial system itself, but plenty of contact with attorneys. I think I'd always been sort of a law and justice kind of person. The first thing that I ever really wanted to be was a cowboy, followed very swiftly by wanting to be a sheriff. So I think being a lawyer just really appealed to me in general.

***How did your parents handle you coming out as a lesbian?***

They weren't so hot about that idea.

***Initially?***

Well, for quite a while, actually. I think I was maybe 16 when I came out to them. My dad was pretty cool about it. He was, like, "Well, you know, if that's who you are, that's who you are." My mother, on the other hand, freaked out about it. It took her a long time to come around. But since I transitioned, my parents completely changed. They've told everybody they know.

***So they had an easier time dealing with you being transgender?***

They had a much easier time dealing with me transitioning than being perceived as being a lesbian. I think that my transition put a lot of pieces of the puzzle in place for them, from my earliest childhood until the point that I transitioned.

***And I assume it put some pieces of the puzzle in place for you as well?***

Oh absolutely. Yeah. And now, they're to the point, my mom actually said to me, "You know, honestly, I forget."

***She forgets that you used to be a woman?***

Yes.

***How affirming.***

And my extended family has been totally groovy about it, too.

***In your professional life with clients and so forth, do you make a point of trying to be out as transgender, or is it really more about you're a man and that's the identity? How do you deal with that?***

Really, it depends on the client. I'd say probably for 99 percent of the people that I come in contact with, it's a nonissue. I'm just some guy that's their attorney. My history is irrelevant to them. And it's not relevant to the work that I'm doing for them. I do get a fair number of clients who come to me because I am FTM [female to male transsexual] and they're either trans or partnered with somebody trans. So they're seeking out an attorney who will understand their history and their issues and also be sensitive to using appropriate language and pronouns with them and treating them respectfully. I get people that come in during varying stages of transition and I think one of the challenges for people that are not familiar with trans people is that you may have somebody sitting across the table from you who, to outward appearances, may still appear to be male or female but their identity is opposite to what their appearance is. I just take it as, if you look male but you tell me your name is Kathy, I'm going to refer to you as Kathy and as she. Because, to me, it's not the outward part that's important.

***When you went to law school, you went as a woman and as openly lesbian?***

A big rompin' stompin' butch lesbian.

***How do you define "butch"?***

More masculine presentation. I think that the challenge in being a butch lesbian is really more about the butch part than the lesbian part. It really is more about gender presentation than it is about sexual orientation. And I actually had this discussion recently with an attorney in town who is in a position to hire at one of the larger firms and he was going on about how, "Oh no, we have a lot of openly gay and lesbian people working at the firm." And I said, "Yeah, and how many of the women are butch?" And he went, "Oh, uh, well, that's a really good point." I said, "Yeah, you know, the reality is you're still hiring Ken and Barbie. You're still fitting people into a paradigm of what you think your clients are going to be comfortable with."

***And the premise of that being that clients may at this point be comfortable with the concept of their attorney being gay or lesbian so long as their gender is presented "appropriately"?***

Exactly. So your men can't be too effeminate and your women can't be too masculine.

***Looking back at law school, how was the experience of being openly lesbian and butch?***

Generally, pretty good. There were a number of openly gay or lesbian students. So, in school, I didn't experience any problems.

***Did you experience any trouble trying to get a job?***

That was the biggest issue for me in terms of actually doing this for a living — just getting that first job. You would think that with my résumé, somebody would have snapped me up. I had good grades in college and law school, a track record of commitment to community service, and a strong leadership history. This was around 1987. I sent out 150 resumes to Seattle and Portland firms. I had 20 on-campus interviews. I got one call-back interview. No job offer. Eventually, I went into business for myself because no one would hire me.

***What advice do you have for young attorneys who are transgender or are thinking about transitioning and just starting out in their legal career?***

I think what's hard is that law firms, while they have gotten better about having out gay and lesbian attorneys, they're like a lot of other employers — they just don't know what to do with trans people. So they end up doing the same kinds of things that many other employers do that make it more difficult for the person who's transitioning. They go through the whole rigamarole about "What bathroom are you going to use?" instead of just saying, "Oh, okay, so you're identifying as male. Great! Then please start using the men's room." How hard is that?

***What about the more subtle personal interactions that are so important in the legal profession, such as making a good impression, pleasing a judge, appearing competent or gaining the trust of the client? How can someone who's transitioning and practicing as an attorney address those issues?***

Well, I can only speak from my experience and what I did. I sent a letter to each one of my clients that said "Look, here's the situation: as of this date, this is the name I'm going by, this is how I identify, I am now living my life as a man. I'm happy to answer any questions you have, also I understand that you may be really uncomfortable with this. If that's the case and you'd like another attorney, let me know and I'll help facilitate finding you somebody else." I didn't lose one client. Not one. But I also approached it from a position of pride in who I was. If you approach people from a place of shame or discomfort with who you are, they will pick up on that and they will jump on it. I've never been ashamed of who I am. I wasn't ashamed when I was I a butch lesbian; I'm not ashamed as a trans man. And that made all the difference for me with my clients. I was confident and straight up about it. I remember distinctly one client at the time that was a Southern Baptist preacher. She was an African-American woman in her mid-50s. She called me up and she said, "Well you know what? God put me on your doorstep and if this is God's path for you, then go with God."

***What about mentors? Did you have a mentor and, if so, how did they help you?***

I had a lot of mentors and people who influenced me. Somebody who had a tremendous influence on me was [openly gay former Washington State Senator] Cal Anderson. Cal and I met when he was in the legislature. One of the things that I took from Cal was the sense of needing to persevere, even when you are the only one, or seemingly the only one, speaking out for a particular issue. For a long time, Cal was a lone voice for the community, but he never stopped despite what seemed like insurmountable odds. It's one of those things about looking at the long-range goals. I may not be able to affect this change right this minute, right now, but I may lay the groundwork for something to change 15, 20, 30, or 40 years down the road.

***What are some of the changes that you would like to make?***

Well, one thing that I really hope that I can do is, if nothing else, to make the judicial system more comfortable for trans people. For the most part, judges in King County are very sensitive. Once you get out of King County, not such nice things happen. There was a case maybe six years ago in Tacoma where a judge refused to sign name change orders for two MTFs [male to female transsexuals] despite the fact that they were there with an attorney. The judge made a number of disparaging remarks about them. He ended up getting disciplined by the Judicial Discipline Committee and had to issue some sort of a formal written apology to the two.

***How has being transgender made you a better attorney?***

I think it makes me more cognizant of how people want to be treated. One of the things that you hear frequently from trans people is that their identity is being erased because, if they're early in their transition, people don't refer to them by the name that they've chosen for themselves and don't refer to them by appropriate pronouns. And so I think being trans and seeing that happen to people, I try really hard to pay attention to how each person wants to be treated, whoever they are, trans or not. "How do you want to be seen?"

***How does that impact the way you approach your practice?***

People want to be heard. And that is often why people come to lawyers. They're feeling ignored somewhere. The reality is that most of the stuff that I do probably is the result of people just not being heard. And they just want their day to be heard. Sometimes I think we forget that our title is "attorney and counselor at law," because we actually do a lot of counseling. Why they don't have psychology classes for lawyers I've never understood. A lot of what you do is listen and kind of hold people's hands and tell them "You know what? It's okay. It's okay that you ended up here. You'll move forward."

***Can you describe a challenge you faced as a butch or trans attorney and what you did to overcome it?***

Absolutely. This is kind of a funny story. It's funny now. It wasn't funny at the time. It was my first year of practice. I had a divorce case. The trial date rolled around and because we had not been assigned to a judge yet, we had to go to presiding [for assignment to a judge]. I was there with my client dressed in my normal everyday attire of wingtips and some trousers, a white shirt, and a blue blazer.

***And you're presenting as a butch lesbian?***

Yes. This was probably 1991. I sat in the courtroom with my client. About 100 people were there. When our case was called, I stood up and acknowledged the judge. The judge looked at me and said, "Well, how long is this going to take?" I said, "Maybe half a day. It should be very short." He asked, "All right. And who are you?" I said "I'm counsel for the petitioner, Mr. So-and-so, who's sitting right here."

I sat down, and as my butt hit the bench, he leaned into the microphone and said, "Counsel, is there some reason you're not wearing a tie in my courtroom today?" 100 heads – all attorneys — looked at me. At that point, I felt very uncomfortable. I looked up at him and said, "Well, Your Honor, I'm a woman. I didn't realize that was part of my dress code." He stammered, "Oh, oh, I'm sorry. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry." I replied, "That's all right, Your Honor. It happens all the time."

After a few titters from the audience, the judge continued. When he came to the second call and he asked me to approach the bench. I thought "Oh, my God. Now what?" So I walked up there and the

judge said, "Counsel, I just wanted to say again, I'm very sorry." And I replied, "It's all right your Honor. Don't worry about it." But then he assigned me to a judge I knew was on criminal calendar.

When I got to that judge's courtroom I told her clerk and her bailiff, "They sent me down from presiding. I have a presentation of a dissolution to do." They both looked at me and said that she was on the criminal calendar. I explained that I understood she was on the criminal calendar, but that the presiding judge was just very confused and, nevertheless, had assigned my case to her. They both cracked up. As I walked out to get my client, the bailiff said to me, "Counsel, I think you should wear some earrings next time. That might help."



**Laura Contreras**  
**Attorney**  
**Columbia Legal Services**

**"It is just odd to me that I get paid to do this kind of work because, when I was a kid, I could never imagine any lawyers helping people like me. I never realized that lawyers could do that."**

Laura Contreras lives in Toppenish, Washington, where she was raised. Her family emigrated from Mexico and Texas and settled in the Yakima Valley when Laura was born. She is the youngest of four siblings and the first to graduate from college. Laura has been married for 22 years and has two young children. She attended Yakima Valley Community College and the University of Washington. She earned her law degree from the University of Oregon.

After law school, Laura was a judicial clerk for the Oregon State Circuit Court and then returned to the Yakima Valley to work with legal services. She has represented farm workers for 14 years and currently works for Columbia Legal Services. In 1999, Ms. Contreras started the Amigas Unidas Project in Yakima. The group provides training and support for farm worker women who are survivors of domestic violence.

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***Tell us about Amigas Unidas, the project you started in 1999.***

Well, it is an example of why I love the work that I do. The Amigas Unidas Project has been an opportunity for me to work with farm worker women from the Yakima Valley and all over the state. At my first job in legal services all of my clients were mostly men, and I never ran into women like my mom, my aunts, and my cousins, who I knew were working out in the fields, but were unseen; nobody ever talked to the women.

Amigas Unidas created a network of women who support and empower each other while they deal with the reality of violent relationships. Our clients have been through so much. They have been shot at, have had their homes burned down, choked, burned with pans, hit with objects, and scarred. They often feel they have nowhere to turn. I had one client show up in the office with her clothes, her bloody clothes that she saved because no one believed her partner was abusing her. I make sure that the women and their children are safe by helping them with family-law matters and coordinating the women volunteers.

***What do you like best about your job?***

It always amazes me that I get paid to represent farm worker women in family law cases, that I get to talk to them in our own language and encourage her to keep moving forward, encourage her to go to school, encourage her so that she can do it on her own without having to get beaten up. It is something that I would normally do anyway, it is just odd to me that I get paid to do this kind of work because, when I was a kid, I never imagined any lawyers helping people like me. I never realized that lawyers could do that.

***What did you think about lawyers before you became one?***

I thought they all made a lot of money, they wore nice clothes, were very smart, respected, and that they did good things. I found out that they don't all do good things, and that some of the lawyers that do the best things don't necessarily make a lot of money. I think that lawyers are kind of exclusive. I had hoped that they would be more inclusive and welcoming of others, but it has not always been like that. I do not always want to go to bar association functions because I often feel like I am the only one. I am in a room full of a bunch of lawyers, but I still don't feel like I am part of the group.

Part of that is because the population of Yakima has changed so much in recent years. Even though the population is almost 50 percent Latino, there are still just a handful of Latina attorneys. I remember that once there was a bar association holiday party at the Yakima Country Club. I must confess that the only reason I went to that holiday party was because I had never been to the Country Club and I thought this would be my only chance to go. One of the most memorable bar celebrations I attended was when the Yakima Bar Association held an event at the old theatre in Toppenish. I, and others, really had fun. People were in my space and I was kind of like, "This is who I really am, this is the other me that you never see in Yakima." The location really made a difference.

***Is there anything that people or organizations can do to make the practice of law more inclusive?***

On a state level, I think it is great that the Bar Association has meetings in Central and Eastern Washington. Having the westside folks come over here and spend time in Yakima is very helpful. We here often have to go to Seattle for one reason or another, and it is nice for people to come and see our space and see where we live, see where we work, and be genuinely interested in life outside of the Puget Sound area.

I also think that it would be wonderful if events could sometimes include families. As a mom and a wife, I am always trying to find ways to include my family at a conference or an event. It's hard to balance personal and professional responsibilities. Making the two less at odds with each other would be helpful.

***Did anyone encourage you to go to law school?***

My parents were always very supportive of me going to school, as was my husband. They always believed in me and gave me the confidence to just give it a shot. I feel very lucky.

***What advice would you give students and young lawyers?***

To students, I would say that they should read, read, read anything and read it anywhere. In my house, the only real book that was around was my mother's Bible. When I got to law school, it was hard getting used to doing all that reading.

As a newer attorney, I think the most important thing is to try to find a mentor or a person that you can vent to. You need someone you can talk to and can use as a sounding board. I was very fortunate that there were two or three women in the local bar association that I could spend some time with, share experiences, and rely on their friendship.

***Do you think you have been treated differently as a lawyer because you are a Latina?***

Definitely. It's usually something indirect, but it can have a profound effect on me. It's hard to always speak up about it, but I have found that when I do, people, despite initial reluctance, hear what I am saying. I've seen people change after bringing issues to their attention and that gives me hope. It often takes time, but I have seen change. One thing that keeps me going in those circumstances is that I have the support of my family and my coworkers.

***Is there anything that you would change about the practice of law?***

I think much more needs to be done to make the bench more reflective of all communities across the state. We need people on the bench who understand what it is like for a farm worker or a Native American living in Toppenish. We need to have people who understand those realities, and I don't think the makeup of the bench is always reflective of that.

***How do you define diversity?***

I think diversity is when there is a mixture of many ideas and opinions and there is an environment that welcomes those ideas and opinions. If there isn't a safe environment to be able to express what you want to say, then even if all the faces around the table look different, there isn't any diversity at all.



**Chief Judge Kenneth H. Kato**  
**Washington State Court of Appeals Division III**

**“In Spokane, I believe that, as a lawyer, you are judged by your legal ability and what you can do, not by your race.”**

Judge Kato was born in Spokane, Washington. His parents owned a hand laundry service, and his father worked for the Great Northwestern Railroad. His grade school, Lincoln School, was very diverse for Spokane. Many of the students were African-American, Asian-American, and Native American. He attended Lewis and Clark High School, and was able to attend the University of Washington, graduating with a degree in psychology in 1971. During school, he obtained a scholarship from the railroad, and continued work at the railroad in the summers during college.

At first, Judge Kato did not want to be a lawyer, and did not have anyone in his family that was a lawyer. He was the first one in his family to attend college or law school. During his studies, he became interested in law and graduated from the University of Washington Law School in 1975.

Judge Kato returned to Spokane after law school and joined the Huppin Ewing law firm, where he was an associate and principal. With an emphasis on appeals, research and writing, and creditor's rights, he practiced law with the firm for 13 years. He was then appointed a commissioner of the Washington State Court of Appeals, Division III in 1988. He became a Spokane County Superior Court judge in 1996. In 1997, he was appointed a judge of the Court of Appeals and was elected to the position in 1998.

Judge Kato is a member of the Washington State Bar Association, the Spokane County Bar Association, the Asian Bar Association of Washington (ABAW) and the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA). He is also a member of the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission and is chair of its Research Subcommittee. Judge Kato was honored as ABAW's 1998 Judge of the Year and was one of the recipients of NPABA's Trailblazer Award in 2000. He is also on the Advisory Board of the WSBA Leadership Institute. He has been a presenter at numerous legal and multicultural seminars and is also active in youth sports, particularly with the Washington Junior Golf Association.

Judge Kato and his wife, Sheila, have two children, Kevin and Lauren. They live in Spokane.

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***Which people or what experiences influenced you to become a lawyer?***

At first, I wasn't interested in becoming a lawyer or an advocate. I wanted to be a clinical psychologist. I applied to graduate school, but I quickly found out that I did not want to teach or practice clinical psychology. During my undergraduate years, which were around the late '60s and early '70s, the Vietnam War and civil rights were major societal issues. That interested me in legal issues and the practice of law. I applied to law school, and was accepted in other schools, but chose the University of Washington over other prestigious schools. I believed that law could change things. At the time, I had no legal mentors to guide me in my career choices.

***Did you have a mentor and, if so, how did they help or inspire you?***

My mentor was Justice Charles Z. Smith of the Washington State Supreme Court. He had been my evidence professor in law school and is a powerful man. I hadn't seen him in 13 years when I became a commissioner and, out of the blue, he sent me a letter of congratulations. He became my mentor through the judicial system. I admired him because he had what he called "children in the judicial system." His advice and mentoring helped me forge my path and, with his advice, I became a Judge of the Court of Appeals.

***What advice would you offer to a young attorney from an underrepresented background just starting out in a legal career, and what do you enjoy most/least about being a judge?***

After returning to Spokane to practice law, I was only offered one position. I didn't really know any attorneys in Spokane at the time. I chose to accept that position, and remained there until I applied to the Court of Appeals as a commissioner. As an attorney in Spokane, I found that I was not discriminated against as a person of color. I was judged by my legal abilities and what I could do. It's great to have the job I have now, because I can always try to do what's right. As a young attorney, you may be advocating for a position that may not be what you consider is the "right" position. I believe it is best for a young associate to still try to do what you believe is "right," but that can be a difficult goal to achieve when trying to advocate for a client and bill hours while keeping in mind ethics and professionalism. What I enjoy most about my job as an Appellate Court Judge is that I can always try to do what I believe is right.

***Has being an Asian American helped you to be a better judge? If so, how?***

I believe that I have more empathy for people of color who appear in my courtroom. Many of these people may not be comfortable with the legal system. I have a greater understanding of litigants that allows me to perceive what the complaint actually is about. I also believe that I have been more respected by persons of color who have appeared before me. For instance, in my experience at Superior Court, some of the defendants before me were multi-race gang members. They never seemed to have a problem with me as a judge, and seemed to respect me. I understand that these defendants did not treat some of my other colleagues with the same respect. I was also able to understand culture clashes between victims and juries. While I was on the Superior Court bench, there was not a large minority population in the jury pool. I think that I was able to ensure that everyone coming into my courtroom was treated with equal respect and dignity.



**Patricia Loera  
Program Officer  
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**

**"My philosophy in life is that if you get education right, everything else falls naturally into place...No one can ever take it away from you and you will be able to take risks."**

Patricia Loera was raised in Sunnyside, Washington, in the Yakima Valley. She comes from a family of migrant farm workers who immigrated to the United States from Mexico in the early 1960s. They followed the crops around the country and within Washington state, finally settling in the Yakima Valley. Patricia grew up in a family where college and law school were not topics discussed at the dinner table, and she had to create her own road map to law school. But with hard work and good fortune, Patricia made her way and has been blazing the trail for those coming behind her for the last 15 years. Patricia graduated cum laude from Central Washington University. In 1993, she earned her juris doctorate from the University of Washington. During the last year, Patricia has been a program officer for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle.

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***Please explain your position and the work you do.***

As a program officer for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, I manage the Foundation's investments to ensure that all students graduate "college-ready" in the state of Texas, focusing especially on the achievement of African-American and Hispanic students. The Foundation is especially focused on reducing the drop-out rates and increasing the college-bound rate of low-income and minority students. I accomplish this by leading the Foundation's strategy regarding its philanthropic giving of grants to schools, districts, and community-based organizations.

***Did you have any interactions with the judicial system or with attorneys prior to deciding to go to law school?***

I was in college when I met, for the first time, a lawyer who explained the process to become a lawyer. If I had not participated in one of the career fairs sponsored by my college, I probably would not have started planning so early in college to pursue a legal education.

***Which people or what experiences influenced you to become a lawyer?***

The biggest influence that led me to become a lawyer is, frankly, witnessing the injustices, the different treatment, and different expectations of poor people and migrant farm workers. I thought that there had to be something that could be done to change these inequities. I realized that the law played an important part in helping people protect their own rights and leverage change. I guess that's why I was always very attracted to the law.

***What were the obstacles that you had to overcome to become a lawyer?***

I did not fully understand the process to become a licensed attorney. Going to college and becoming a lawyer were not topics discussed at our dinner table growing up. Once I was in college, I was fortunate

that I had earned good grades when I began to apply to law schools. I knew many students who decided later in college that they wanted to go to law school, but they did not have a strong grade point average; they didn't realize how important it was to study for the LSAT; and they were not able to obtain strong letters of recommendations from important faculty — all of which prevented many of them from getting admitted into law school. I was fortunate because I did get to know my professors, I had good grades, and I knew it was very important to have a strong LSAT score. Not knowing the process was a huge obstacle, but I got through it because luck was on my side.

***Were there any high points or low points in your legal education that you would like to share?***

Towards the end of my third year in law school, a member of my family had some medical emergencies that we had to deal with, and it was very difficult to focus on my schoolwork. The high point was that I really enjoyed law school. I made some really good friends in law school and we are good friends 15 years later.

***What advice would you give to high school and college students considering a legal career?***

Well, my first advice is once a student makes the decision to become a lawyer, he/she must believe that they can do it and begin planning what is necessary to achieve it. Planning and understanding the process and then staying focused is very important. And don't give up. Along the way, there will be times that you will second-guess yourself — you may not have the GPA you wanted or the LSAT score you hoped for, or you may not get into the top law school that you wanted to get into, but if you really want to be a lawyer and you really plan for it, you can overcome any obstacle.

***Describe a challenge you faced as a young attorney and what you did to overcome it, and whether or not being a woman of color had any bearing on this challenge or its resolution?***

My first job right out of law school was as an assistant attorney general in Yakima. I represented social workers in child abuse and neglect cases. When I went to court, sometimes my clients, who had not seen me before, mistook me for the interpreter. They were surprised when they found out that I was a lawyer.

***How do you define diversity?***

Specifically with respect to the legal profession, diversity to me means opening doors of opportunity to those who otherwise would not have access to careers in the legal profession.

***Have you had a mentor, and if so how has he or she helped or inspired you?***

I've been really fortunate because I've had many, many mentors at important stages of my life. Through high school, my mentor was my oldest sister. She was the first person in our family of six children to graduate from high school. She went on to college and was the first person to really introduce the concept of college to our family. She blazed the trail for me.

***If you could change one thing in the practice of law or the legal system what would it be?***

One thing I would change would be to ensure more equitable access for good legal representation for low-income people. I do pro bono work and I see a number of people who don't have access to good lawyers, especially in civil proceedings.

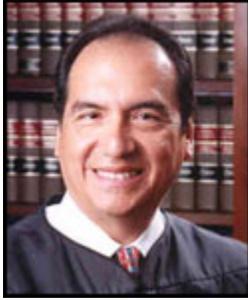
***What do you enjoy most about being an attorney and what do you enjoy least?***

What I enjoy the most is the freedom. I have had three careers in the 12 years that I've been a licensed attorney. I've practiced law as an assistant attorney general; I went to work for MALDEF in Washington, DC, as an advocate for equal opportunity in education; and then I became the legislative director for the National Association for Bilingual Education. Now, I work in the area of philanthropy for the largest foundation in the world, whose mission is to improve the education of low-income minority students. This freedom to explore a variety of career options is wonderful. And one day if I decide I don't want an employer, I can hang out my own shingle. That's why education is so important because you'll always have options with a good education.

What do I like least? It's a struggle to find a balance between work and my personal life. This is not something that I do, this is who I am. It's very easy to put in 40–60 hours per week at work, but when you do that, you compromise areas in your personal life. I love what I do, but at the same time, it can be a struggle.

***What advice would you offer to a young attorney from an underrepresented background just starting out in the legal profession?***

Well I guess it's to always remember that a law degree provides lots of options and freedom. You're not stuck to that one job when you get out of law school. You can go into business, run for office, lobby, work in the area of public policy, or in the world of philanthropy. There are just a lot of options. I also urge new attorneys to build networks of support within the county or state bar associations because we can learn from each other.



**Hon. Ricardo S. Martinez**  
**United States District Court Judge**  
**Western District of Washington**

**"If you really want to do something, if you truly want to have an impact, if you want to make a real difference, law is the field."**

The Honorable Ricardo S. Martinez graduated from Lynden High School. He received his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Washington in 1975, and his Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Washington School of Law in 1980. His family was one of the first Latino families to stay in Whatcom County year-round, instead of simply living there during the seasons for picking crops and working the fields as most other migrant families did. He was the first person in his family to graduate from high school, and the first to attend college.

He currently serves as a United States District Judge for the Western District of Washington. He was nominated by President Bush on October 12, 2003, and confirmed by the Senate on June 15, 2004. He had previously served as a U.S. Magistrate Judge for the Western District of Washington for six years and as a King County Superior Court Judge for nine years. While a judge in Superior Court, he was responsible for setting up the first Drug Diversion Court in Washington state. Prior to becoming a judge, he worked as a prosecutor in the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

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***When did you first become interested in pursuing a career in law?***

It was in high school that I first began to think about becoming a lawyer. I think part of it was simply seeing the struggles that my parents endured in their daily lives, and understanding that a lawyer's job is to make things easier for other people. Lawyers were able to accomplish things for their clients when the clients couldn't do it for themselves. Lawyers understood the bureaucracy that permeates our entire society and were able to work their way through all of that in order to get things done for people. But it was in college where it was really driven home to me that if you really want to do something, if you truly want to have an impact, if you want to make a real difference, law is the field that you should go into.

I came to college during a very turbulent time — there were civil rights marches, Vietnam War protests. As students, we were acutely aware during the early '70s of what was going on in the world. I believe that we saw ourselves as individuals who had a place in our society and needed to do something positive. So that was when I first started looking at who runs things in our society. And it became pretty obvious that the majority of the people in power were lawyers or were legally trained. So it made sense that if you want to change the system, you can either try to change it from the outside, which historically has not been very effective, or you can try to change it from the inside. I think it was a real sense of social justice that said to me — go to law school, and that would make it possible for me to do some of the things that I wanted to do in a socially accepted manner.

***Were there any obstacles that you felt you really had to overcome to become a lawyer?***

Amazingly enough, it's not until after you go through law school and become a lawyer that you realize how many others simply don't get that opportunity that we've been so lucky to have. I've always been an optimistic person about life. Maybe a little too optimistic at times. I don't want to sound overconfident, but I always felt that if I really put my heart and soul into trying to accomplish something, that I could do it.

The other thing that I've always been able to do is set goals. I've always set short-term goals and long-term goals, and then began working immediately towards the short-term goals. I would break each goal down into smaller little chunks and say, okay, that's my long-term goal, so what do I need to do today, what do I need to do tomorrow, in order to accomplish this goal? I think a lot of that comes from my upbringing and the direct influence of my parents. They, of necessity, literally lived day to day. They had the very real concern of having to worry daily about putting a roof over their kids' heads and how much food was going to be on the table. That makes life very real. And you learn the necessity of setting immediate goals, as well as having to plan for the future.

So even now, if I come to a fork in the road, and I can't go right, then I simply go left, or go around whatever the detour is, go over whatever the hill happens to be. Thankfully, I still haven't found anything in my life that presented too big of a hurdle that I couldn't do one of these things. That has left me with the belief that the only one that can really stop you is yourself — that's the only real hurdle that you've got. So long as you're not battling yourself, hey, anything else can be accomplished.

***What experiences have influenced you the most in your journey?***

Nobody that I know has ever achieved any significant goals without the help of many other people. There are so many people in my life that have had such an impact, going all the way back to my elementary school teachers. I was one of the first Latino kids to stay in the Whatcom County area, meaning year-round, a lot longer than simply staying during the seasons for picking crops and working the fields, as most other migrant workers do. This meant that I was able to attend one school. To set roots down and become known to the teachers. There was an early recognition that I was smart and the label from my teachers meant a lot to me. And, since they thought I was smart, then I had to *be* smart in order to live up to that expectation.

The other thing that had a major impact on me had to do with the dynamics of my own nuclear family. You see, my parents could not speak English. So they had me serve as an interpreter for them in a lot of situations. It put a tremendous amount of pressure on me at a very early age, to be more concerned about the realities of life and to understand what's going on in the grown up world. At age 11 and 12, I was involved in situations that other kids would never get involved in, like negotiating for a car with a used-car salesman or translating what doctors were saying to my parents. I remember having these very, very serious discussions about life and death matters with doctors, and I'm 12 years old. I'm translating and I'm watching the impact all of this is having on my parents. They, in turn, put a tremendous amount of faith and trust in me.

All of that came together to instill a real sense of responsibility, a sense of understanding just how hard my parents were working in order to make the best life they could for our family. I truly understood the limitations that were placed on them because of a lack of resources, a lack of money, and their inability to speak English. That inability to communicate was a pretty major one. It was obvious to me that the

last thing that I ever wanted to do was disappoint my mom and dad. So anything that I tried to do after that was always tempered with that thought in mind. In other words, if I was going to do something, then I was going to give it my all, because it was more than just for me. My parents had a tremendous impact on making me the person that I am today.

***What advice would you give children of migrant families as they try to balance that lifestyle with their pursuit of their goals and their dreams?***

Many migrant parents have not had an opportunity to go to school. For them, it can be a tough leap to place much value on getting an education. Hopefully, these kids could have the kind of parents that I had — parents who felt so strongly about educating their children precisely because they had not had that opportunity. My parents understood that because of this lack of education they were working much harder than others just to make ends meet.

But what I would say to these children is that you need to work within your family dynamics, but you also need to understand that ultimately the goal is that you have a better life in whatever way you want to measure that. And it is your responsibility to dream, even if others around you cannot. Whether it's a particular job or career, whatever your specific goals are, it is up to you to work hard and have a better life than your parents. You owe that to yourself and to your own children as well.

***What advice would you have for high school or college students who are interested in law?***

I would tell them that law is an incredibly exciting field in which to work. However, every single one of us has to decide what it is that we really want to do in life. There isn't a single person that I know of that's born knowing exactly what it is they want to do. We ultimately get there, sometimes by trial and error. You should try to be logical about how you make this decision. The most important thing is that you want to end up in a profession, hopefully, where you are happy with what it is that you are doing. You need to figure out for yourself what it is that gives you that type of passion. If you have a passion for what you do, you're going to do it well, and you're going to enjoy living your life that way. You don't have to be bound by tradition.

Then the very next step, once you decide what you want to do is, how do you get there? And that's where you could use the help of a mentor. That's where you need to start reaching out. For example, if you want to become a judge — maybe you should at least go see what judges do, find out what their job really is, and maybe even contact a few and get a chance to talk to them if possible.

***What role do you think diversity plays in law?***

I think it's a critical area. The more diverse any field is, the more melding of all those different flavors you get in there, the "tastier" everything becomes. Diverse individuals bring a much wider perspective to play in making day to day decisions. Diversity also increases tolerance and understanding of others and, ultimately, it shows us how the differences amongst us are really minor compared to the commonalities that we share. I think many times, people are afraid, they simply fear the unknown, and when you work with someone of a different faith or you work with someone of a different race or a different cultural background, you begin to understand how much more we have in common as human beings and the differences melt away.

I think that diversity is good for everyone but it's absolutely critical in the law. Every single individual in our society has to believe that justice is real and achievable for all. As I have always believed, justice should be blind, but every member of our society needs to see himself or herself reflected in that system if they are truly to believe that it applies to them.

***As you started practicing as a young attorney, what challenges did you face?***

When I came out of law school and started working with the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, everything was challenging. I didn't know what to expect, how things were going to work. I had been a Rule 9 intern for the summer, but once I really got into the office and was working there full time, it was like, boy, this is a lot of work. That's something that young people today need to understand. It doesn't just come easy. If you want to be successful, it's a lot of work, no matter what kind of law you practice. You have to really put in the time and the effort to succeed. You're not born knowing how to make legal arguments or how to select a jury. So the challenges were there every step of the way, but at the same time, they were challenges that I eagerly looked forward to because of the passion that I felt for the job. I wanted to know how to do things, and the best way to do them and day by day I was learning how to be better and better at what I did.

***What role did mentors play for you?***

Well, I can't overstate how important it is to make a connection with someone who has been there. Someone who has been through everything that you want to go through or want to become. I wouldn't be where I am right now without the people in my life that have served as mentors to me, both officially and unofficially.

If it hadn't been for Justice Charles Z. Smith, who was an assistant dean at the University of Washington School of Law when I applied, I might never even have gotten into a law school. Justice Smith was also the one who suggested to me that if I wanted to be a trial lawyer, I should apply to the prosecutor's office for an externship, because it would ultimately make me a better criminal defense attorney.

All of the years that I worked in the prosecutor's office, I essentially worked for one boss — Norm Maleng, who is also from Whatcom County. Norm taught me what being a professional in this field really meant, and he constantly reaffirmed that character counts at all levels. He would make decisions based on character, principle, and justice, always searching for justice, and it always made me feel good to work for a man like that.

Unofficially, my wife has had a tremendous influence on me. We have known each other since her freshman year in college and we have accomplished so much because of our teamwork.

***Where do you think law has changed the most since you entered the profession?***

I think there have been some major changes over the last 25 years. Unfortunately, I think lawyers still get a bad rap in our society. At the same time, it's fascinating to be in this profession and to see what a tremendous impact it has, not only in our country but in the rest of the world. One of the things I do is host people from different countries through the World Affairs Council. Most of them are lawyers — many are judges. They're all coming to the United States because they want to see what we do and how

we do it. They leave, I think, with a tremendous respect for what it is that we do. I think you can literally say that we have one of the best justice systems in the world and I'm very proud to be a part of that.

I think that some of the changes that we're seeing that have been bad have been in the areas where we as lawyers gravitate more towards the money and away from things that matter such as principle. So many of us get caught up in just trying to make money that more important things go out the window. We need to make sure that every single lawyer, every single one of us, acts responsibly and always remembers that we have the privilege to practice a noble profession. So whatever kind of lawyer you are, regardless of the area you're focused on, you can still make an impact because it is a system about people.

Another major change is how much impact alternative dispute resolution has had on actual trials and trial practice. I'm afraid that, if the trend keeps going the way it is, trials may eventually vanish from our courts. I think that would be a terrible thing for society.

***When you look at the legal field, what one thing would you like to see changed?***

As a person of color, I believe that the legal field needs do the best it can at every level to increase diversity. It's one of the reasons why I became a member of the WSBA Leadership Institute. As our society becomes increasingly diverse, our justice system needs to follow suit. Ultimately, although we may argue complex legal issues or engage in fascinating intellectual discussions dealing with arcane areas of law, we must always remember that law is all about people. And those people have to believe in us in order for our system to be accepted and continue to work.



**Richard E. Mitchell**  
**General Counsel**  
**Washington State Governor**  
**Christine Gregoire**

**"Once you have earned a law degree...it is easy, if not necessary, to focus on self-promotion.... The challenge is to not lose sight of the wonderful things that a law degree allows you to do. You are well trained and positioned to help your community.... Give back, and do it selflessly."**

Richard E. Mitchell was born in London, England, to parents who immigrated as teenagers to England from the West Indies and Guyana in the 1940s. Although his grandparents lacked formal education, and his parents did not go on to college, his family's experiences provided him with invaluable life lessons. Inspired by the drive, ambition, and leadership of his grandfathers, both of whom moved their entire families under challenging circumstances to England in pursuit of a better life, Richard has not lost sight of his humble beginnings and his passion for social justice.

After immigrating to the United States at age 12, Richard successfully navigated his way through a boarding school in Maryland, college, graduate school, and law school. He earned a Bachelor of Architecture degree with honors from Cornell University and a Master of Urban Planning degree from the University of Michigan. In 1995, he earned his juris doctor degree from Syracuse University's College of Law, with a concentration in International Law and Affairs. Richard is currently serving as general counsel to Washington Governor Christine Gregoire.

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***Describe your duties as general counsel for the governor.***

There are many duties for which I am responsible, probably too many to list. Some of them are as follows: responding to all ethics issues for the governor's office; acting as the governor's designee on several authorities and commissions that issue tax exempt bonds; reviewing bills that pass both houses of the Legislature for legal issues; preparing veto messages; reviewing proposals for gubernatorial directives and executive orders; serving on the governor's Executive Domestic Security Team; reviewing and advising the governor on all appeals of agency rules; advising the governor on clemency and pardons petitions; and providing the governor with legal and/or policy advice involving certain pieces of litigation.

Probably my most important duty is to manage the judicial evaluation and appointment process. After screening all applicants, I advise the governor on a short list of candidates for her consideration. One cannot adequately prepare in private practice for the role of general counsel to a governor. The job requires quite a bit of depth and breadth of prior experience, sound judgment, and the willingness to take on and think through new tasks.

***What comes to mind when you hear the word diversity? How do you define diversity?***

Diversity is the current phrase used to describe an issue that has its historical roots in race. For the most part, America's race issues and the civil rights era have matured into issues including sexual equality, disability, and sexual orientation. As a result, the topic of diversity is broad. When discussing diversity, it is important to consider how the debate on civil rights has changed over the years. From my perspective, racial and ethnic diversity is a very focused discussion. Gender diversity is a very focused

discussion. Disability and/or limited ability is a very focused discussion. Sexual orientation is also a very focused discussion. Yet the word "diversity" encompasses all those issues and more.

***What role have mentors played in your life?***

To answer that question, I have to think about all of the people who have been pivotal in influencing my life. I grew up as a young boy in England, primarily observing the unfulfilled ambitions but strong leadership of my paternal and maternal grandfathers. My maternal grandfather in particular, Percy Adolfus Lewis, did not have a formal education. But he was able to teach himself to read and write very basic things. He (and I should note that he was an orphan) was able to find a way to save enough money to move his family from Guyana to England. His life, which included working in sugar cane fields and gold mines in Guyana, always reminded me of the drive and ambition that I had to maintain in my own life above all odds.

While at Cornell University, I was fortunate to spend a significant amount of time with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. He was my architecture thesis adviser. At that time, he was the director of the African American Affairs Program at the university. His focus on understanding and articulating the African American experience was of tremendous value to me. It helped me focus my subsequent disparate academic and professional experiences into a focused intellectual endeavor, into a purposeful sense of community obligation. In the practice of law, I have had a number of mentors. But one person stands above them all — James Hermsen. He was a little tough at times — but always well-intentioned. He made an impact because of his selfless dedication to improving my lawyering skills. Lastly, I am frequently asked what it is like to work with the governor. The answer is that there is nothing quite like having an amazing mentor as your boss.

***Did you have any prior experience with attorneys or the judicial system prior to deciding to go to law school?***

None. Absolutely none. My only exposure to the law was as a practicing architect in London in 1989 working for a British architect, Sir Terry Farrell, and a Canadian developer, Olympia York. The project was the London Docklands Redevelopment, which at the time was the largest urban redevelopment project in Europe. While discussing matters with Olympia York's American and Canadian lawyers, I realized that if my understanding of architecture and urban redevelopment were going to mature, I would need to learn more about finance and law. Whether it was European law or American law, I knew that I would need to be conversant. So my exposure was through self-realization and self-development as I developed my career.

***Which people or experiences influenced you to become a lawyer?***

My initial desire to study law flowed from realizing that certain aspects of law were fundamental to understanding urban redevelopment. It was a very narrow experience that led to a profound change in my professional direction.

***What were the greatest obstacles you had to overcome to become a lawyer?***

I think the biggest obstacle for me was just getting through the process of completing my undergraduate degree; completing my graduate degree knowing that I wanted to go to law school; preparing to take the LSAT and completing the law school applications; and going on to and finishing law school. It always

seemed like I was doing something no one in my family had done before — and therefore no one could provide me with the support that I needed. It was an odd, lonely experience. I went through my college years not quite knowing whether I was doing the right thing. The obstacle was really not knowing and not having a support network. My family thought I had become a professional student. Another obstacle was the impending sense of fear that came from the potential for failure. There was so much pressure to break the cycle of a family who did not go to college and had not achieved economic success. I tried to change that pattern in my own academic and professional life.

***What advice would you give to high school and college students considering a legal career?***

The advice I am likely to give flows from my law firm experience. I would say that it is important to develop good reasoning, analytical, and writing skills. It is important to be able to read and comprehend complex materials easily and quickly. Skill development in these areas requires some high school and college course work that exposes you to complex subjects and to different styles of reasoning and writing. I would also say that lawyers should take a direction prior to going to law school that develops a professional competency. I found that my work as an architect and my understanding of the construction industry was invaluable early in my legal career. It opened a number of doors with law firms and made relations with clients easier. So, from my perspective, an individual who has professional competency in an industry that he or she will serve as a lawyer will be more credible and will likely be more successful.

***What advice would you offer to a young attorney from an underrepresented background just starting out in the legal profession?***

My advice would be to not lose sight of the wonderful opportunity a law degree presents to you. For me and for a number of my colleagues, we were the first to go to law school. In many instances, it is frightening to still say that we were the first to go to college. But once you have earned a law degree or any professional degree, coming from very humble beginnings, it is easy, if not necessary, to focus on self-promotion, the development of wealth, income, professional status, and the like. The challenge is not to lose sight of the wonderful things that a law degree allows you to do. You are well trained and positioned to help your community in ways that require you to think about more than self. You have to give back, and do it selflessly. With a law degree, your community believes, if not expects, you to be a leader. So be one.

***Describe a challenge you faced as a young attorney and what you did to overcome it. Did being an attorney of color have any bearing on this challenge or its resolution?***

Perhaps the single most significant challenge that I faced was recognizing that my own legal career in a law firm was not moving in the direction that I expected. The path to success was no longer as clear as it was when I was a naïve first-year lawyer. While on the one hand, the reasons for the derailment could have been an issue of lack of development, it could, on the other hand, have been an issue of the failure of my environment to recognize my value, abilities, and skills. Either way, I always attempted to couch my experience while I was in the middle of it in terms other than race. It seemed, though, that no matter how I discussed it, and whomever I discussed it with, there was always a discussion about race. I guess that was inevitable, since my experience was, to some degree, consistent with all the other lawyers of color who had preceded me.

So the most challenging thing for me was to decide whether I would attempt to rehabilitate perceptions and perceived deficiencies, or whether I would prepare to move on professionally. I made the decision to do both — it seemed the only wise thing to do. I believed that if there was any credibility in the criticisms levied, I was obligated to respond to them. Similarly, to the extent there was no truth to the criticisms, I had a family to take care of and to safeguard. I could not afford to be summarily released. That was probably the most challenging experience that I have ever had. Even though I am many years past the experience, it still bothers me now to talk about it.

***If you could change one thing in the practice of law or the legal system, what would it be?***

I would change the amount of resources we provide to our court systems. There simply is not enough funding provided to support our judges; to support the representation of juveniles and indigent clients; or to fund our jury system. Our justice system still is not truly accessible to all.

***Has being an African American helped you to be a better lawyer? If so, how?***

I don't think my race alone has either helped or hindered me. I do think my experiences as a lawyer of West Indian and South American extraction, who grew up in England under very humble beginnings, have informed my sense of justice and how I wish to use my law degree.

***What do you enjoy most or least about being an attorney?***

In the private law setting, one of the toughest things to work through as a young lawyer was the billable-hour environment. Learning how to be a lawyer, develop a practice, participate in your community, raise a family, and give of your free time to other firm-related endeavors really was not conducive to a healthy lifestyle. But do not misunderstand; I do enjoy private practice, particularly the variety of matters that one can work on. The intellectual gymnastics are quite satisfying.



**Salvador A. "Sal" Mungia**

**Partner**

**Gordon, Thomas, Honeywell, Malanca, Peterson & Daheim, PLLC**

**"I believe we must be committed to serving our community, and being a good lawyer means commitment to *pro bono*, commitment to legal services, and commitment to the justice system... Knowing what it feels like to come from a powerless segment of society has made me a more compassionate lawyer."**

Salvador Mungia lives in Tacoma, Washington, where he is active in the local community. His parents are both immigrants to the United States – his father emigrated from Mexico and his mother from Japan. His father was a retired Army Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) and the family moved around the country before settling in Tacoma. After Sal's father retired from the army, he worked as a cook at Western State Hospital. Sal's parents have emphasized education his entire life and strongly supported his efforts to become a lawyer. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree (*magna cum laude*) from Pacific Lutheran University. In 1984, he graduated from Georgetown University Law Center (*cum laude*) and he was the administrative editor of Georgetown's Law and Policy in *International Business Law Review*.

Sal's community activities include serving as a director of the R. Merle Palmer Minority Scholarship Foundation, a director for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, director and president of Directors for the Legal Aid for Washington (LAW Fund), leadership positions with the ACLU, and past commissioner of the Tacoma Human Rights Commission. Beginning October 2009, Sal will be the president of the WSBA Board of Governors. His legal practice is exclusively in trial work with emphasis in aviation, medical malpractice, business, and real property and construction litigation.

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### ***How do you define diversity?***

Diversity is the need to understand and embrace different viewpoints and perspectives. I can go back to my undergraduate days to show why this is so important. I took a sociology course and we were assigned to read the book *Group Think*. The author discusses the dangers with one homogenous group thinking the same way. In those situations, voices of concern are not heard, or worse yet, everyone just agrees and goes along with decisions. It has always struck me there is a danger with everybody agreeing and nobody bringing anything different to the table. We need to embrace different perspectives and different ideas.

When you have people with different viewpoints and perspectives, people challenge one another and better decisions are made. I believe in the marketplace of ideas — the better ideas are going to win over the not-so-good ideas. But you must have people willing to challenge other people and ideas. When you have one idea, you don't know whether it's a good idea or not [until it's been challenged], and the way to bring diverse ideas is to have people with different backgrounds, perspectives, and thoughts.

I think in the long-term, the way that you get different viewpoints, ideas, values, and different perspectives is by getting people with different backgrounds, perspectives, values, and experiences. I think it's obvious that we as a society still have a long way to go in so many ways. And we as a legal society, legal organizations, have a long ways to go as well.

***Did you have a mentor and how did they help and inspire you?***

I have had a number of mentors in my life. Two mentors really inspired me at the law firm: Ronald Leighton and John "Jack" Connelly, both when I was a young attorney. I gravitated to those two the most. Ron was great. He taught me how to be a very ethical lawyer. He guided me on how to be a competitor but do so always in an honorable and respectful way. And he always said, leave the personalities out of it, you're just here to win. And keep your focus on winning. At the end of the day, you'll have the gratification of winning and don't worry about the petty stuff that goes on, keep above that. Ron was always a huge influence on me, as far as walking through any door that opens! The door opens, go ahead and walk through it, take advantage of new experiences, new opportunities.

Jack was a great mentor and one who taught me tenacity. He emphasized tenacity and focusing on the desire to win and win for your client. Jack's got a lot of passion and that shows through his practice, and I think that he helped me realize how important it is to bring that passion to the practice of law.

I recognize there are so many other mentors as well. You may have the idea for somebody really being a mentor and it was never a formal mentorship, but you can look back and see their impact on your life. I recognize that the impact of a mentor is kind of an amalgamation, an accumulation of everybody that's touched my life and impacted me. For example, I think of my parents as mentors. They taught me to never give up and the value of hard work. I came from a lower-middle-class background, and my parents were both immigrants with limited formal education. They both worked hard; my father was a cook after he retired from the Army, and my mother worked in a fabric store. They inspired me with the real sacrifices they made for me to attend college and go to law school. They never had that opportunity, but never hesitated to support my effort to become a lawyer.

***Which people or what experiences influenced you to become a lawyer?***

I didn't have any experience with lawyers or the judicial system prior to attending law school. Believe it or not, I was inspired by two television shows. People always say that TV's a bad thing, but I think in my case, TV had some positive influences, and one of them was Perry Mason. He inspired me by showing how lawyers can represent the underdog and prevail. I think in my generation, Perry Mason was huge.

Another inspiring show was "Judd for the Defense," a show about a defense lawyer. Growing up, I wanted to be a criminal defense lawyer and fight for the underdog.

Perhaps the greatest inspiration for me was just seeing and experiencing my family being taken advantage of — this is something I rarely discuss. This really drove me. At a young age, I saw how defenseless my parents were to the system. They didn't have money, they didn't have contacts, no relatives in this area. I couldn't help but get the sense that at times, they were being taken advantage of. And there's nothing, not a whole lot they could do. And so I wanted to be in a position where I could take care of my family and make sure I knew the rules and no one could take advantage of us. Which kind of goes to the Perry Mason theme, you know, it's a Perry Mason bit. Wanting to take care of those who couldn't defend themselves.

***What were the greatest obstacles you had to overcome to become a lawyer?***

I don't think they were huge, but if you look at my background, there's nothing which would lead you to believe that I'd even finish college. I have worked with economists and one of the economic analyses is

trying to figure out if a kid dies, if they would go to college or not. Statistically, if your parents go to college, then statistically, you'll go to college. It's a high probability. And if your parents don't go to college, there's a high probability you're not going to go to college. I took a standardized test in high school and the results showed that I was supposed to be an auto mechanic. Even my mom, as much as she supported me and was a great influence, whenever I told her I wanted to become a lawyer, she just kind of laughed like it was ridiculous, not believing it was possible. I didn't know any lawyers and I knew nothing about the legal system. But I always knew from at least grade seven I was going to become a lawyer. Because I came from a lower-middle-class family, I had to overcome the perceptions of people who didn't think being a lawyer was a realistic life goal.

I didn't have the financial barriers. My parents valued education. They made sure I could go to college and law school. They sacrificed a lot for me to attain my education.

***What advice would you give to high school and college students considering a legal career?***

I have a lot to share. First, I love the practice of law. It's great, but you've got to realize how hard you work at it. How much it takes up of your life. If you want to do well, and you want to have many opportunities then you've got to work extremely hard at school.

I talk to a lot of high school kids and college students, and I emphasize the importance of working hard and getting good grades. I always try to tell students, it's the first year in law school that that really matters. You've really got to bust your butt during the first year and unless you've been to law school, or have known someone who's been there, you don't realize that. The first year really sets the tone for kind of opportunities that come early in your legal career.

A lot of times students will ask, how much do you make? And I say, never do anything for the money, because you'll be miserable. I know lawyers who do it for the money and they're miserable — why do that? Life's too short. You've got to go with your passions; it's something that's going to fulfill you. And fortunately, for me, the law does that.

If a student is not sure what they want to do, I share the following advice: sample out different things. I'm not sure why, but I've always been impressed by people of my same background who went into law to do some good. That always impresses me the most, whereas people who went into law because they have nothing better to do or they want to make money — that's a lousy reason to go into the profession. If you want to make lots of money, develop real estate. You should only go into law if it's what you want to do!

***What advice would you offer to a young attorney from an underrepresented background just starting out a legal career?***

I would give the same advice I give to high school or college students, but with the added advice, we're really in a time with a lot of opportunities. Because we are underrepresented in this profession, you can get active in the organized bar, on committees because you bring that diversity element. The bar needs that diversity element. And if you are good at what you do, you can become very active and you can do a lot of good. I think the bottom line is, do you want to do good? If you're coming from an underrepresented background, you may have a stronger desire to do good because you've seen or experienced struggles in your own life. My parents were taken advantage of and there's nothing they could do about it. I think, minorities bring different values than someone who comes from middle class,

upper middle class, and upper class, and they don't have the same kind of experiences and may have stronger motivations to right wrongs. An underrepresented attorney can have a great influence and be a role model for kids who come from underrepresented backgrounds. Every time I go out to talk to a high school class, there's a lot of them that say, this lawyer's brown, and that's kind of cool because all we see is white lawyers. I go to Bar meetings, I can look around and see mostly Caucasian lawyers, there's no secret about that, but the profession is getting more diversity among its members.

I've been involved in an organization called Law Fund Legal Aid for Washington, and I remember the last meeting; we're talking about diversity and I'm saying, look, unless we institutionalize our recruiting practices, look around the room, there are two of us who are non-white. And we've been talking about this and talking about this, and you can talk about it or you can make steps institutionally to change so that that doesn't continue on. Another organization I'm involved in is the ACLU, which has a strong commitment to recruit minorities. I was on the board in the late '80s, and at that time, along came the national ACLU talking about the need to get more women on the board of directors. The ACLU as an organization made a commitment to add women to the board, but it didn't happen until they made specific rules requiring 50 percent women on the board. It worked! To recruit people of color, people with different sexual orientation, geographic diversity, all these things requires institutional change for many organizations. I served on the recruiting committee this past year for the ACLUW, and it can be done, but you can't just talk about it.

***Describe a challenge you faced as a young attorney and what you did to overcome it.***

I think the biggest challenge you face as a young attorney is being a young attorney. You are so green. And you don't know what you don't know. There are many times I'd come back from a deposition, and I'd tell them what I did. The senior lawyer would just slap his forehead because of what you did or didn't do. There are times, I'm sure, where judges give an older attorney the benefit of the doubt, during arguments or during proceedings, just because they have less trust in younger attorneys. Those are the biggest challenges.

I can remember that sometimes a more experienced lawyer would say something to the effect of "Shut up," or "You don't know what you're talking about," or generally try to put you down as a young lawyer, which is not right. I'm always trying to go over backwards because of those kinds of experiences and never do that to a younger lawyer. A lot of time, let's face it, younger lawyers just make mistakes, that's part of the learning process. You will gain skills from experience; a lawyer one to five years out will have better skills at 20 years. It's an art trying to assist a young inexperienced lawyer on the other side, because you can't trust the other side. However, I will try to guide them, if nothing else. A lot of times, younger lawyers think they have to be overly aggressive [to compensate for lack of experience] and that is not good advocacy. It defeats the purpose. Maybe that's how they've had to deal with some other older lawyers, but that's not the way it should be.

***Have you faced any discrimination as a lawyer?***

Not that I know of. Sometimes you wonder why certain things happen to you and you can't, as much as you try to push it out of your mind. Is it because of your skin color? Sometimes that thought creeps into your mind. Is this why it's happening? But I don't think so. And at least I know the Pierce County bench very well, and I would be surprised if anybody on that bench did that to a person of color. Not saying I couldn't be surprised, but I would be surprised. I'm pretty active throughout the state, and I don't get that sense in the state where the bench is going to treat you differently because you are a person of

color. Again, as a green lawyer, they may treat you worse. I certainly have plenty of those experiences, but I don't think it's because of my skin color.

***Does being a minority help you as a lawyer?***

There are some things about being a minority that I think have proven beneficial. I think everybody is helped by certain things in their background. I'm not sure whether the color of my skin has really helped me as much as knowing what it feels like to come from a powerless segment of society, which has made me a more compassionate lawyer. If being a good lawyer means commitment to pro bono, commitment to legal services, commitment to the justice system, then yes.

***Do you want to add anything else to why you like being an attorney?***

Yeah. I love the competition — I hate losing, and I love winning. I also love the creativity of being a lawyer. You know, it's really a creative process. I love the fact that when I want to take time off to attend my kid's ball games or coach their teams, I can do that. I also like being able to do good and give back to my community. If I wasn't a lawyer, people wouldn't ask me to sit on the ACLU board or the R. Merle Palmer Foundation board or go and talk to high school kids. Just wouldn't happen. So it's really opened a lot of doors. And isn't that what we're here for?

***Please share with us your most recent community involvement.***

I believe we must be committed to serving our community. I'm a director of the R. Merle Palmer Minority Scholarship Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides funding and mentoring so that minority youth of Pierce County can attend college. This is a really exciting program. We not only get the kids to college, but have mentorship programs to keep them in college! We get a lot of support from local businesses to support them once they start attending college. Intel Corporation and DuPont provided 30 new computers for \$150 each. We give out 20 scholarships a year and currently have 80 scholars attending college.

A key success factor is the mentorship program. We don't just give money, but guidance, too. As a result, the R. Merle Palmer Minority Scholarship program is highly successful; the graduation rate is 90 percent, versus a national graduation rate for colleges below 50 percent. This program is making a difference and we are graduating first-generation college students from the poorest neighborhoods in Pierce County.