



Left: Hiking to Angel's Landing at Zion National Park

Revolving Around the World

A Conversation With CBA Award of Merit Winner Fay Matsukage

BY HALEY HEMEN

Please join us in recognizing Fay Matsukage as recipient of the CBA's highest honor, the Award of Merit. Matsukage is an experienced corporate and securities law attorney who has dedicated her life and career to furthering gender and racial equality. A true pioneer, she helped found the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Colorado (APABA Colorado) and its charitable and educational arm, the Colorado Asian Pacific American Bar Foundation.

Matsukage explains that before APABA Colorado was created, there wasn't much visibility or support for the Asian Pacific community in the Denver area. "Denver was not a very welcoming place in those days," she says, recalling her law school days at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law. She was one of only three students of Asian descent in the law school at that time. "I remember trying to get lunch at the café

in the Denver Art Museum for a special occasion and never getting served. I also remember getting hassled when I tried shopping for an interview outfit at a nice women's clothing store."

She continues, "I was greatly impacted by my early days in Colorado when persons of Asian descent were few and far between. It was such a stark contrast to growing up in Hawaii. I didn't believe and still don't believe that people should be judged based on appearance. I helped to establish this organization to give members of the Asian Pacific American community a place where they could belong, support each other, and have a voice."

Since she began her career, Matsukage has seen the Denver community slowly become more diverse over time. "While there are many more Asian attorneys in the Denver area now, there are still preconceived notions and biases to be overcome," she says. "In some

ways social media has caused more polarization and resulted in people putting labels on others, rather than having them take the time to really know the individual person. Organizations like APABA Colorado remain as important as they ever were, with much the same mission."

Matsukage left law school unsure of exactly what area of the law she wanted to pursue. Her father, who graduated from the University of Chicago in 1955 with MBA and JD degrees, had talked to her about going to law school starting from fourth grade. "For me, going to law school wasn't a dream—it was an expectation." But it was in her first year of practice that she started to gravitate to the kind of transactional work she is known for today. "While I went to a liberal arts college, I emphasized business classes—accounting, marketing, and so on—so the transactional work fit in nicely with that background."

"At one point, I thought about getting a master's in accounting or taxation, but that would have been in addition to a law degree," she says.

"I had originally planned to return to Hawaii after a couple years of practice. But in my second year of practice, I got to work in the area of securities and loved it. I found out that no one in Hawaii practiced in that area. Securities work was referred out to firms in California. So I ended up staying in Colorado."

And staying in Colorado meant that soon enough she became a member of the Colorado Bar Association. "Back in 1980, luckily everyone in the law firm was a member, so I joined. Later, I became active in the Minorities in the Profession Committee and loved working with the other members on that committee."

Matsukage says that some of her earliest cases made a great impact on her understanding of the nature of her work and her approach to it. "The few litigation matters I worked on during my first year taught me that litigation is costly and does not necessarily lead to satisfactory results. I made it my goal to structure transactions so that the parties would never have to resort to litigation."

“And,” she adds, “because my father was in business, I knew that attorneys and legal services were just another expense line item on the profit and loss statement to most businesses. I wanted to be a line item that brought value to a business.”

Matsukage’s current firm, Doida Crow Legal, has the same philosophy, and that’s what drew her there in the first place. “For a time, I had my own firm that focused on corporate and securities work. While I enjoyed my colleagues at Dill Dill Carr Stonbraker & Hutchings, I wanted to return to a business-focused firm. In 2017, I met Stan Doida through APABA and found that we had the same approach to the practice. The firm’s entrepreneurial spirit and fixed fee offerings are key to their clients’ success.”

She continues, “I think our firm in particular clearly sees the role of lawyers within a business. Lawyers can help businesses solve issues and achieve their goals, but lawyers should not be directing their clients’ businesses. I think sometimes attorneys get caught up in themselves and their work and forget that the rest of the world doesn’t revolve around us.”

This echoes one of Matsukage’s favorite pieces of advice she’s received, this one from an older colleague: “The world doesn’t revolve around us—we revolve around the world.” Another favorite comes from her father, who advised her to take at least one day off each week. “He also encouraged me to try new things—keep an open mind.”

Nothing has challenged the concept of keeping an open mind more in recent years than the pandemic, and Matsukage was able to roll with—and embrace—the changes. “I never returned to the office after the pandemic, as I needed to care for my mother beginning in the spring of 2020. Prior to the pandemic, working from home sometimes carried a negative connotation—not so after. While I miss the informal conversations and interactions that take place in an office with colleagues, I was ready to eliminate the daily commute.”

Outside of work, Matsukage enjoys cooking, gardening, golfing, visiting extended family in Hawaii, and traveling in her RV with her family. “One of my favorite trips was one where we had no itinerary. We packed the RV with lots of



1 Fay and her 16-year-old cooking buddy.
2 Horseback riding at Cuchara Pass.



food and our golf clubs. Each night over dinner we would decide where to go next.” The family also traveled during the pandemic, but quickly found out they weren’t the only ones with that idea. “Traveling in the RV during the pandemic was not as enjoyable because the RV parks were crowded with everyone else who wanted to get out of their homes.”

Matsukage shares more than just her adventurous spirit with her husband—the two met while they were both working on the same corporate client. “The work was often frustrating, so I guess we enjoyed commiserating together.” They complemented each other well, and she attributes her success in getting clients to her husband. “He is very outgoing and nurtured that part of me that I never knew existed. As a child, I was introverted and had a stutter,” she reveals.

“My husband has also been very supportive of my career. During his prior marriage, he never had a chance to stay home with his children. When we had our son, he volunteered to do that and loved it.”

When the subject turns to her son, it’s clear Matsukage couldn’t be prouder. “Our son has taught me so much. He has some learning issues. Because I had always done well in school, I didn’t realize that reading and writing can be very difficult for some. He was often picked on in school because of his speech and the way he looked. But despite the challenges, he still remains one of the most compassionate and kind human beings I have ever known.”

Matsukage is worthy of a few superlatives herself. Her long list of accolades includes receiving the Minoru Yasui Award from APABA Colorado, the Trailblazer Award from the National APABA, and the Mary Lathrop Award from the Colorado Women’s Bar Association. She is known within the legal community not only for her groundbreaking contributions to furthering the rights of women and those of Asian Pacific descent, but also for her longstanding record of professionalism and integrity. The CBA is proud to honor this well-deserving and outstanding leader with its 2023 Award of Merit. 