Interviewer: yeah, you got it, okay. To get us started, do you mind just introducing yourself and telling me a little bit about who you are and your education and employment background, a little bit?

Participant 26: Sure I’m [Participant 26] and I'm a lawyer by trade, although now I'm retired and I graduated from the University of Southern California law school in 1981. Before that I went to undergraduate uh at the University of Illinois in Champaign Urbana because I'm from Chicago so, and then I made my way West. So 1981 was kind of a hard time finding employment, so I kind of worked as a contract lawyer sort of ad hoc for the first year, doing civil estate planning. And then in 1983, I worked for somebody to do some criminal law, and then I ended up becoming a public defender in Riverside County and then 1985 I moved to LA County so I was public defender there until 2001, and then from 2001 to 2020, I was a court commissioner for LA County.

Interviewer: gotcha. Okay wow so that's quite a lot of different roles that you've had in your in your career um. Can you tell me a little bit more about your time as a court commissioner, and like what that looked like day to day?

Participant 26: um well I don't know if this is outside the scope, but I have to say, probably because of the Asian background thing you always think, oh, you know, education and position you know, being a judge that's a position, you would think of honor and you know require great skill. So I always had sort of an elevated view of people and sort of that profession, and it was kind of eye opener because even though as a lawyer, you see all that judge doesn't seem to know so much that judges isn’t um, you know, as competent, as you know, I might think one should be. You know there's still that sense of oh, but you know as a profession, people must really be top notch to get to the top of the legal profession, you know judges being that, so I guess the eye opener was when I became a court Commissioner it's like looking around it's like well um no, judges are like any other profession, um some people are not very good at all [laugh] or some people lack ethics. And other people are, you know, excellent, both in their people skills and there you know legal document. So that was an eye opener from that standpoint. In terms of what I actually did, there was a part that was sort of a day-to-day thing, doing what they call the criminal calendar. So you're assigned a certain number of cases, you know, either because that's your portion the alphabet or numerically and then there are what's called the arraignments, so a lot of people come in to enter their pleas or get assigned an attorney. There was pre-trials that try to settle cases and then the actual you know jury trials, where you, you know, impanel a jury and then you know rule on objections and then, if somebody's convicted, their sentence, if they're acquitted, then you know they're either released from custody or you know or case is over. So that was all part of the day-to-day mix then sometimes I would do traffic cases or small claims cases or unlawful detainers and what I guess I liked about the most is that whatever setting you were in, it was very people-oriented. Of course, if they're lawyers, you have to speak with the lawyers, but a lot of times there are opportunities speak directly to witnesses or to the litigants and, you know, when I did juvenile law there were delinquency cases, so being able to speak directly to the kids and the families with the hope that some little part of what you say may be a benefit was rewarding.

Interviewer: Sure yeah. Um, so were there other people that you interacted with on a regular basis or were they just different people every time?

Participant 26: When you do delinquency law or criminal law, there are you know um people that you regularly have like the lawyers are assigned to your court for a particular period of time, sometimes years, and then sometimes the private lawyers are there, you know throughout your time in that particular assignment because they're just regulars so—and then your staff is always you know somewhat constant you know generally your colleagues don't change that much, that's kind of a constant. So it's nice because you develope certain relationships, you know, hopefully good, sometimes not always but.

Interviewer: Sure. With your colleague than with the people that you were seing on a fairly regular basis, what would you describe your relationship with them? Was it like just collegial, were they your friends, were these people that you would ever see outside of work?

Participant 26: Um I guess it’s just like in life, there are certain people that you just interact with professionally and that's it, there's certain people that you're kind of a little bit more friendly with maybe just go to lunch, but nothing you know extra after that. And then there are a couple of people that, you know, even after I've retired, are my my core people you know and there's only a couple you know, maybe two people that I still interact with even though I live in the Bay Area now, you know they're in LA. So, you know those are valuable friendships like anything else, and just because—not only with the profession—but with outside life you kind of click and you know have similar views.

Interviewer: Sure. To what extent did you feel like you could be yourself when you were at work, and to what extent did you have to act a certain way?

Participant 26: You know, I think um there's a lot more than I expected of that, okay here are the set rules of who you are required to be and then here's who you are, so you're always kind of pushing back over the required part. Where I worked, and it's interesting because where I worked there's a lawyer and I worked there's a commissioner. When I was when I was you know thinking becoming a commissioner, I thought I'd have a lot more of my personal views and input, you know out there, and there was a lot more pushback than I had expected on that. But you know you try to stay true to yourself in terms of what you believe is right. You know, there are times you go ‘Gee I guess I failed that one,’ there are times when um sort of the bureaucracy pushes back on you, and that was a real eye opener because I thought, well you know you're supposed to just do within the bounds of the law, what you believe is the right thing to do for each individual case, not institutionally say well all these cases should be treated all this way. And there were a lot of higher people on the bench who thought, oh no, you know, we have to agree that all these cases should be treated in a certain way, and then, what would happen is that they feared that the lawyers would do what's called form shopping where it's like ‘okay let's go over there, because we're going to get a better deal’ or ‘let's not go over there, because the prosecution might say, because you know they're going to give a lighter sentence,’ and so it really is kind of disappointing in some ways, that the institutional pressure, sometimes push you in a direction you don't want to be pushed.

Interviewer: yeah, can you tell me a little bit more about the sort of rules of how you were supposed to be in terms of, you know, doing your job and following the institutional rules?

Participant 26: For instance, of a real common thing that you know, certainly not just in LA County or in the particular court I worked with is that certain judges were of the belief that every—say a person is charged with a driving under the influence case should receive a certain sentence, like everybody goes to jail on their first time or, you know, everybody has to do this, or whatever the case might be. And while there's, you know, some merit for that belief of you know, equality across the board, the law does you know permit the discretion for us like well, maybe this case is that individual case where we should recognize there's a hardship, just like when there's an individual case where like it's so bad that you know somebody should get more than what the general minimum would be or what people would consider the standard. So that use of discretion, a lot of times, because there's a lot of people who were I thought pretty unyielding what they thought should happen. But that part wasn't necessarily as bad because you can see that there's some merit to that, on occasion of you know, across the board certainty, you know, everybody gets the same thing, it's simple versus you know complicating it by the ‘well this case might be different’ stuff. One of the practices I really didn't like was that the system is really based on people settling their cases early, which essentially means they plead guilty early. So there was a lot of pressure under what they call this ‘early disposition’ program to offer somebody a plea bargain and then expect that they would take it, and if they didn't take it, it was like a coupon where the offer expired. And then, when they came back to court and we're ready to take the, you know, plea bargain that had been offered before they go, ‘Oh no, because you didn't take it when we wanted you to take it, we got to add an extra lump of punishment to it.’ And you know, I thought that was really unfair because some people just aren't psychologically ready, you know, after all the trauma of like you know you were a person, even if you've committed a crime, that was walking on the street one day, three days later in court, and they go okay ‘Well if you don't take these three years it's going to be more when you come back,’ in, you know, four weeks, and so then after you finally kind of get used to the fact that okay you're not getting out of the jail, maybe the three years is the best that you can hope for in terms of settlement, you know, talk to your family you're getting ready to you know prepare yourself for this, then you know this deal is gone already. And I thought that was one of the harsher things so that was something I didn't really care to do, or at least care to do too often, you know a lot of times, though, with judges it's different now, it used to be the judge really had a lot more power, now it's the prosecution because the charges the prosecution will file determines oftentimes you know what the punishment range is. So if they file a certain charge, the judge is without power to you know sentence less or the penalty is so high, they charge a different charge, then there's more flexibility. So since they're in charge of that, then they're really in charge of sentencing too because they can change the sentence by changing the crime that they charge, so.

Interviewer: Interesting. Um, sort of related to this, did you ever like vent or complain to your colleagues or listen to them vent or complain to you about some of these different things, or you know, even about personal stuff?

Participant 26: Oh yeah I mean that's definitely um—but you know that also would be guarded discussion. I guess it's just like in any other employment situation, okay, you're not going to vent to the guy who is a snitch, you're not gonna vent to the person who's sympathetic to, you know, the thing that you're complaining about so you do try to recruit people who you find have a similar mind, and you know talk to them about it. I have to tell you, a lot of times, if there's something big and you go through official channels to deal with it, you know, things can get kind of whitewash.

Interviewer: Sure.

Participant 26: So, I mean it's sad because you think. well shouldn't there be justice within the justice system, you know, shouldn’t the judges have a higher degree of um I guess acuity for what's right and what's not right and have a higher standard, but you know, I guess, I found out, you know people are people no matter how lofty their positions may seem or their titles might be. And institutions are much the same way, you know we expect you know, maybe more trust in certain institutions, and then they just I guess they're the same as everyday things.

Interviewer: Interesting, yeah, yeah. Can you tell me a little more about the demographics of the people that you were working with, in terms of you know, gender, race, age that kind of thing?

Participant 26: Well, and that's another thing to maybe, you know, depending on where you are in the courts, there are some places are definitely more liberal, there are some places that younger people, more diverse but, you know where I worked was definitely the bastion of older white men who, you know, I mean they may not have grown up with privilege—maybe some people did—but you know there's that sort of mindset, I think, that doesn't necessarily... Since they never experienced having been treated as quote unquote different, or what. You know I don't think they had the empathy to understand. So it was rare when you find the older white guy who actually could have some empathy for you know the immigrant who didn't speak English or had no education. Or for the you know drug addict who, you know, had a long record, but maybe this was the time that, you know, things were going to turn around you know so. And, of course most of the people that I worked with at the beginning of the time as a commissioner were, I think most of them were X prosecutors, so being an ex-defense attorney, you know it's a complete flip, so what they looked at as important was kind of different from maybe what I looked at.

Interviewer: Sure yeah I can imagine that. Yeah what was it like being a former public defender and also being an Asian woman in that setting?

Participant 26: Oh well, yeah being a former public defender, they always expected that you would um side with the defense. And it's not that um I thought that um. Well, I guess that's hard, because you know your former colleagues think that you're going to side with them, your new colleagues think that you're maybe gonna side with the prosecution, the prosecution lawyers are skeptical of you. But you know really that becomes a hard line to tell because it's like look I'm not that—I don't have that job anymore it doesn't mean that I'm not sympathetic to you know defendants and their issues, but you know, I have a different standard to look at. It's like okay well sometimes I'm going to have to be harsher than what the defense likes, but maybe a lot of times I might be more lenient than what my colleagues the ex-prosecutors and the you know prosecution wants and so that's a big rub. Especially because as a commissioner, they don't have to necessarily agree to you for most cases, then it becomes a real struggle to, you know, stay true to what your beliefs are and at the same time, you know, you have a duty to try to serve. You know, if you become too extreme then you don't get to hear any cases which kind of takes away the whole point of you being there. The other thing is that you know I think pretty clearly that um, maybe times are changing now, but the bastion of white male supremacy in the law in general, and especially on the bench, means that Oh well, if you say it and you're this Asian woman it's not going to be taken to the bank like some white males might be, you know. So you have to work—you know, not surprisingly, like most people—that much harder to show, no, there's this position. And then also being, you know, quiet, not being a table pounder, and then I'm a more... You know I want to be right, I want to be thoughtful, I just don't want to say something and find that ‘Oh my God I've given the wrong answer.’ So a lot of times you know people who are more off the cuff or a bigger loud mouth, but maybe more popular will get—their opinion will be adopted, even if it's probably not the right one, so you're always pushing up against that.

Interviewer: yeah sure. Did you feel like it like it mattered what your race was or your gender was with how you were viewed at work, or how you were treated at all?

Participant 26: yeah I mean, I think there was—it offered for a lot of the lawyers, you know, they felt more comfortable in being disrespectful or in you know um—yeah I think that would be a good way of saying, just more comfortable being disrespectful than they would, if I were a white man. You know, the fear is not there of you know ‘Gee something might happen.’ And then you—

Interviewer: Can you think of any examples of that?

Participant 26: Oh yeah I’ve had ones where—and you know granted, it may not have totally been about being a female and the race, but, you know mixed in with the fact being commissioner versus you know, being a judge—but yeah I've had one lawyer just get up there and start talking over me, and you know saying I was the most passive aggressive person. I mean this lawyer, I mean you expect it from litigants because, you know, they don't necessarily know how to act, or they think too much Judge Judy. Had that; I've had um you know, a lot of instances where you know the people disagree with something and they're supposed to stay, you know, in the courtroom not just bust back in the chambers and tell me, you know that I ruined their case or something like that. It's improper for a lot of different reasons, but I think, you know, because I was the yeller, the shouter on the bench, and then you know the whole Asian woman demeanor—it made them feel more comfortable in acting poorly.

Interviewer: yeah wow.

Participant 26: But then, you know, you're stuck with okay well you know, Michelle Obama, you know, we gotta go high so, you know, how much are you going to do, you know? Sometimes I wish I had been more forceful and, you know, sort of taken the aspect of pushing the consequences of what these people could get. But there's part of me it's like okay, you know, it's going to ruin their career, maybe ultimately they're going to ruin their own career, which is sort of the better uh quote unquote not revenge, but the you know Karma, the Karma of it all.

Interviewer: Right right.

Participant 26: But yeah.

Interviewer: How did you react when when these things happen, did you did you tell them that they were being disrespectful did you call them out on it at all or?

Participant 26: One, when the woman busted back, I think I was just so shocked it's like ‘I can’t believe you’re saying this,’ and it was earlier in my career, so it didn't necessarily occur. I was like oh my God, you know. With the other person, I did push back, it didn't really do all that much, but there was some minor consequences from his office. And then you know ultimately you figure like okay well you know this guy can go on, but at some point, you know, it's going to catch up with them. I mean, I think what happened to me was the most egregious thing he'd probably done but, you know, he had kind of a reputation for being, you know, for lacking manners, I guess is the kindest thing to say.

Interviewer: Sure yeah.

Participant 26: And then the other time, the other thing I have to say is that sometimes when we do push back then the table gets turned, it's like ‘Oh well, you must be the problem then,’ so you know it can go both ways. You know, like I've had an employee situation once where, and this is like a nepotism thing, where the court reporter was the wife of a judge who worked in the same courthouse I worked in and she was assigned to me, but then I didn't really want to anymore so you're allowed to let her go. And so I thought I'd let her go nicely, because I was being transferred and she just went crazy, not in front of me but later, and you know appears that she had damaged some parts of the courthouse and the courtroom and you know it was kind of a thing, but then it all ended up being a cover up because, you know, she was married to this judge. So that kind of taught me it's like, oh well, you know, so much for justice it's for the other people not for the people that are on the inside. So you know that kind of really squelches your desire to you know, try to go through channels and you know you write these memos and people do their little faux investigations, but ultimately it's just a cover up, so. And nobody got fired, I think the judge got transferred and the court reporter got transferred to a different location—I mean they really shouldn't be working in the same courthouse. But you know it was kind of telling that when the judge found out that I had let his wife go and, you know, all this stuff happened he wasn't concerned about, like oh look at the damage that his wife had done. It was ‘Gee, she needs a job. Where’s she gonna work now?’ I mean, you know, was just sort of totally self-interested, so kind of lost respect for the system there.

Interviewer: yeah yeah I can imagine that. That would be very disappointing. Did you ever experience any like outright discrimination or racial comments or stereotyping at work?

Participant 26: Oh, I mean the litigants a lot of times you know 'chink,’ or you know, whatever.

Interviewer: Really, they would say that? About you or to you?

Participant 26: No sometimes it would—I mean, you know, people's emotions run high you know, I’ve had F-bombs in the courtroom. And I wasn't the only one. I think a lot of it was sort of they thought that the court was sort of, you know, this open forum where you know they could get up in the back and say their piece, it's like well it’s not really supposed to be like that. You know, you're supposed to let the lawyers do the talking, you're supposed to respect the proceedings, but you know general society and also some of the lawyers could’ve use some work on what the etiquette is—you know, just kind of made it sometimes just a rolling circus. Luckily, it didn't happen too often. I've had some people after, they say stuff like parents who come back and apologize, which you know, I appreciated. Because, mainly in juvenile court, it wasn't so much—it's like, you know, I've been called worse. Mainly in juvenile court it’s like look we're trying to set a model for the kids that, maybe on the street or at home you can behave a certain way, but in these other settings, you know, you're supposed to behave differently. And so many of the kids were there for things they did in school, you know, and that could have been probably prevented by just being polite. Or you know, using some self-restraint. And that was what we were trying to model, sort of like correct behavior. Now of course, if parents don't do it, then you can see where that's not going to work with the kids too well, but yeah. That's what I would tell the parents. It's like look, you know you're entitled to your opinion, but you know, this is what we're here for and everybody will get their chance to voice an opinion at the right time, so.

Interviewer: Sure yeah. One of the things that I'm interested in is how people feel and express their emotion in the workplace. So it'd be helpful to know first of all, do you consider yourself an emotional person and are you the kind of person who is sort of openly expressive about what they're feeling, or do you tend to keep that more reserved or private?

Participant 26: I'm probably more reserved. You know, I guess, because growing up it's sort of like be the stoic, don't let them know it's going to hurt you because you know, sort of the WWII anti-Japanese feelings were still there—I was born in 1958 so I mean it wasn't, you know, right after the war, but you know everybody's dad served in the service. Even my dance served in the service for the US army, but people don't, you know, think of it that they see your face and go ‘Oh, you're one of those people!’ So my parents were always like ‘Okay, you're not gonna win by getting into this shouting match with them, you know your course is to just ignore it, or you know just take it, and then your revenge quote unquote is to do better.’ You know, study harder all the other kind of more typical Asian things to do. So, the people that were more at home with it, kind of pushing back just shouting out, you know, being spontaneous were generally the people who could better afford to do it in the society, which is the white males, right? So you're not that, you're a minority or a woman. It's like okay well you could go there, but you're making your path you know kind of singular because you're not gonna have a lot of people there for you and you're making it harder so, you know, keeping the emotions in check. But you know, sometimes it's just you need to use your emotions, or you just can't help it, so I mean, especially on the bench, you're trying to keep a calm demeanor but, if things got out of hand, you're going to raise your voice. On the other hand, it's like sometimes you know these cases are so sad, people are going to cry, and that's kind of okay. You know you could cry, other people in the courtroom could cry. Because, you know, you do want to convey that there’s still humanity, even though you know we're in this whole kind of stiff court proceeding, maybe.

Interviewer: Sure. Can you think of any times when you felt particularly emotional at work?

Participant 26: Well there's one case, when I was a lawyer as a public defender and it was the first case where my client that 25 years to life under the three strikes rule. And it was um you know, I guess, I always thought I know too much about this person, because what we did back then in those cases is that, you know, you would try so hard to try to settle them because normally you're going to lose, so you know work really hard to try to find any kind of mitigating evidence. And, you know, I dug up this guy's he was probably 50s maybe, but you know, and had a really bad criminal record, so I can understand why under the climate at the time, people thought he should just go away forever, he’s not going to be redeemable. But you know I got these records from um juvenile court, he was 1 of 11 kids, he was in foster care, you know he had all these traumas as a child, and then, you know, the things that he had to overcome, you know, we would go and visit him in the jail and you could see that there were some, you know, positive parts and yeah the drugs taken over, he wasn't quote unquote an evil person, and so the more you get to know somebody on a human level the more about him, you know, there’s more at stake because it's like oh, it’s a real person that's going to really be hurt by this. And then, when he got to 25 to life—well, he didn’t get it—but the jury came back guilty, and I knew was going to get the 25 to life, I just couldn't help it. I'm just kind of like I'm trying to hold it in but it's like I'm crying it's like oh it's an ugly mess. And you know I think the client felt worse for me, you know it's like, ‘Oh that's terrible, you're the one that didn't get all this time.’ You know, and so, sometimes that’s just so sad because you're the only one in the courtroom who recognized what's at stake for this person, and he could probably do the time, but you know, having seen his whole sad life and felt that there was, you know, something in him that was redeemable was just—I don’t know. You know, it's me trying to be professional and it all came out. So there you go. So.

Interviewer: Did that seem okay?

Participant 26: You know it kind of was what it was, and then later on, I guess, the one thing is that the DA who was in charge of the courthouse I mean, I guess, he found out. And then, so when I went to try to settle a different case he goes, ‘Oh, I think you had enough.’ So he kind of gave the next client some you know mercy and I said, ‘Oh, thank you.’ So I mean there some level of humanity within the system. So, and those are the things you kind of remember. It's like well as bad as it was, you know crying and all this other stuff, and it was genuine and I couldn't help it. You know like I’m trying to snuffle up, be professional you know, I’m gonna look down. You know, maybe it is good, because, you know, somebody else found out and they found that there was a room for the next guy to have a chance so.

Interviewer: Sure, yeah. What about as a Commissioner, were there any times that you felt like a strong emotions at work?

Participant 26: Well, I mean the emotions of you know, trying to get the courtroom in control stuff that’s sort of the more yelling and stuff. But the ones that, you know, it's like okay everybody like hold back your tears because I mean the kids sometimes leave these horrible lives, they'll be in foster care or being you know bounced from home to home, from relative the relative and, you know, no wonder they can't read when they're in high school. And you know they've been to so many different schools, and you know just instability of life, you know living in the car, and so even if they've done something bad, quote unquote, you know, just feel for them. And then, you know, the opposite thing, which is the joy when sometimes you've sent them away to a placement or a camp, and maybe this is the first stability they've had you got to get up at this time meals, you have people who actually praise you instead of you know, tell you you're a POS. And so then those real happy moments we would all celebrate together, and you know will stand up when they get the high school diploma. Or the whole court room claps and you know give them good things. On the other hand, I mean like we probably all cried when this one kid who, he was kinda a handful because you know he was angry and you couldn't necessarily get close to him, but he was finally rounding the corner. He was in a gang but he'd gotten out of the camp, he was getting older right, you know I think he was on the verge of making some positive changes. Had a girlfriend and then he went to this like a junkyard or something where these kids were having a party, but he didn't go you know for a gang purpose, that was just a place where they get together. And then, of course, I don't think they were after him, they were after his friend, and then the other side set fire to the junkyard and then he dies in this fire. And yeah that was tears.

Interviewer: wow, yeah.

Participant 26: Because you weren't reading it in the context of the court It was like oh I haven't seen [name], he must be you know, things are doing okay he’s still on probation. The next thing, somebody comes in with the newspaper, or whatever something from the Internet, saying God, you know, this whole fire that people had heard of involved somebody that, you know, we all in the court knew, so that was...

Interviewer: yeah that would be really upsetting. Um did you ever feel like emotionally exhausted or experienced burnout from all of these different cases?

Participant 26: You know, definitely as a public defender and I can't imagine who wouldn't experience burnout. Because it is sort of like you're absorbing everybody's traumas, either in the context of trying to find out their background to you know, maybe help them on mitigation. Or a lot of your clients are not nice people, in the sense that they make your job difficult, they don't trust you, they're demanding, they're unreasonable and yell and shout, you know. And so then you just, you know, try to get through those cases, and after a while you wish you could just be numb because you know if you're numb or you don't feel anything for these people, then it's a measure of self-preservation. And maybe some people could do it because um it appeared that there's some people who were able to do their job, but not be engaged with the clients. I just never really could and so that was the burnout where it's like I would like to be you know where I could keep everything at arm's length and you know go oh that’s too bad, but you know you’re way out there and your troubles are way out there and it's like okay, well, next case. But I mean I never could, you always kind of just in some way end up having some compassion for the person in their situation. And even if you didn't have that compassion for them, maybe then you would like second guess yourself like, ‘Okay, even though that was a stinker, maybe I could have done this better, that better when we go to happen.’ And so yeah there is that total burnout there. And then um as a commissioner, there are certain assignments that I think people shouldn't be in long term, for instance, like traffic. There's so many people with the same excuses over and over that you don't want to get to the point where it's like, ‘Oh, you know, it's just that, okay next case.’ And you know you still want to have some um room, although probably not that much, but some room for like ‘okay this case might be the different case’ not like ‘oh they're all this, they’re are all guilty or that you know, everybody has this excuse is you know going to get this fine,’ or whatever so yeah. If you have a change of assignments, sometimes it can be helpful, because at least to me, it's like too much traffic was like you were working at the complaint department at Walmart you know. Nobody's happy, everybody's got a reason, everybody’s got an excuse and you know. And then that's one of the places where people complained to your superiors the most. Because you know they're average citizens and it's like well ‘Why me? I don't think I should pay this money.’ Okay well, who do you want pay, so you know.

Interviewer: Sure, yeah. When you are working at the public defender, how did you build trust with your client?

Participant 26: I usually tried to, you know, be honest, up front. You know, like some of the private lawyers, we used to dislike because what they would do is they’d promised their clients the moon and the stars, and then they would dump them when the money ran out and then the clients would become public defender clients. And then we would tell them the truth about their case, and then they were, you know, disbelieving and unhappy and so forth. So I figured well like I don't need to raise expectations, you know, I’m going to tell them what I think. And you know it's always subject to change, you know, maybe something good will happen, maybe some bad will happen, but you know, this is why I'm seeing things right now. And then I would try to tell them specifically what I would do. So, you know client X, if you give me the list of witnesses that you want me to talk to, I'm going to go and have the investigator talk to them. Of course, if they don't want to give them the witnesses and you know it's well, we didn't get there. And then you know, try to be prompt about calling them back or visiting him, like visiting people who were in jail in person back then was the thing to do, so it's like oh here's another two-hour, three-hour, you know trip to the jail. But hopefully, just trying to be honest and then doing what I said I would do—working hard.

Interviewer: yeah. How did you balance between you know kind of being enough that the job didn't completely tear you apart, but also being empathetic so that you could still do your job, you know, in an ethical way?

Participant 26: Well, the good thing is that there are certain opportunities for vacation and the even the better thing, there were opportunities to rotate to different assignments. So if you were like in a high stress felony assignment—I know some people would just love to stay in there and they'd stay there for 10-20 years or something—but I needed out like every year, or something or maybe every eighteen months. Like you know I need a change to do something different, and then it's like okay, if I come back to that fine, so at least that was helpful in sort of increasing the longevity of the whole public defender experience, being able to move around something different, less stress.

Interviewer: Sure, sure.

Participant 26: Like being a supervisor or doing cases that weren't as time consuming. Because usually at least for me, doing a bunch of cases. you know, that were kind of more routine made it easier to just kind of maintain sanity, then you know, having several big cases that had lots of moving parts and then you're going to eventually go to trial and that's going to have its whole um other stresses.

Interviewer: Can I get ask, when did you retire from your position?

Participant 26: 2020, August of 2020.

Interviewer: August 2020, so you were working a little bit when COVID happen?

Participant 26: Oh yeah that was a very interesting time too, because when it hit, you know, where everybody's trying to figure out how to do things. And so a lot of things were remote, orders came down that you know we were doing a lot of cases that just you know we continued as much as we could in the hope that you know things get better after the initial, you know, alarm bells were rung in March of 2020. But yeah, there were a lot of logistical challenges and then one of the things I really um regretted about how we had to do things is that everything was like, ‘Okay, we have to minimize as much contact, we have to do things as fast as possible.’ And so the idea of having any extra conversation was out, so when we did these like zoom calls with kids from the juvenile hall or something, like, ‘Okay bring him in, hurry up and just do what we're going to do, don't have any extra conversation, and done.’ And so I've kind of lost out on the ability to, you know, just have some chitchat to see how they're doing, what's going on, so the personal touch. And then sometimes it was uncomfortable because the lawyers hadn’t really had a chance to talk to them so they didn't necessarily want to go with the case being continued or so forth, so on and, but that was kind of like what the marching orders more.

Interviewer: yeah, yeah that sounds really difficult. In the last couple of years, there's been like an increase in news reports about violence against Asian Americans. Is that something that has affected you at all and is that something that you were aware of?

Participant 26: Oh, I mean definitely up here in the Bay Area, in San Francisco, there been a lot of very big cases and news where they're older Asians, you know, men and women, but you know the ones that I think were most memorable were the women just because, you know, they were old and frail and not doing anything and, you know, were severely injured. I mean I've been fortunate not to have any of those kind of experiences, but you know I definitely see it out there. You know there's just such general anger in the world. Why it's targeted on Asian Women, because, you know, there's a certain segment that were so upset that COVID came from China or, I don't... But you know there's something more beyond it. Yeah, I don't know if it's just that certain people feel more at ease in beating up, you know, Asians because they think you know there's less political blowback in beating those people up or they're you know, going to be easier to beat up. Um, it's terrible I don't I don't know what the genesis of all that is.

Interviewer: yeah sure. Um is there anything else about—switching gears a little bit—about your workplace that we haven't discussed or about your job that we haven't discussed that you've been wanting to talk about?

Participant 26: just that, overall, you know you always have regrets, I wish I had done this different that different. But you know I do hope that it's a positive contribution to be, you know, Asian woman in the workplace, that you know, as I was leaving the job there were definitely more diverse appointments made to the bench by you know the governors—Brown and Newsom—to make some changes. So and I, you know, I think that only improves the bench just because you know, you're Asian or woman or, you know, whatever your background is doesn't necessarily care that you're going to be, you know, good at your job. But it definitely helps people, I think, have more confidence in the bench when they see people like themselves there. I think it definitely changes the ideas. And even if people in the Court have, you know, their secret prejudices, they're definitely going to be less likely to voice those if they go, ‘Oh well, that person's Asian or this person, you know, has risen to a position of power, so if I you know mouth off my usual you know ignorance stuff it's been hurt me and come back to me.’ So you know I think there's positives. Hopefully there's more than that, that the people who are there are actually being educated, you know, the white people are being educated to you know other ethnic and social and racial backgrounds. And you know that there are willingly absorbing it, as opposed to some of the people who are just doing it because, you know they're no longer as powerful as they were.

Interviewer: yeah. How did you decide that you wanted to be a lawyer and then become a court commissioner?

Participant 26: yeah, it wasn't sort of like this is what the path is laid up to be necessarily. Um so you know growing up when I did, and in the Midwest, you know, there was a lot of Asian prejudice and where I ended up, going to school I think there was like maybe one other Asian family in the whole community, and you know, when one Puerto Rican kid came in, that was like big news. It was like pretty much working-class white people. So there's always that sense of like ‘Gee there's a lot of justice here, maybe, and you know something should be done.’ So when I went to high school, they offered this kind of dual last year high school first year of college thing, so I actually went to high school for three years and then I went to the university and then my first year of university also, if I went you know past it, then I got my high school diploma so that's how. And so I thought I was interested in sort of sociology, political science, I mean there was a lot of stuff going on. And you know the Vietnam War had kind of just wrapped up and then the troubles in Ireland and so all that was kind of interesting, the struggles of people. So, then I finished college early in three years and, while I was in college, I think the last year, I did an internship in Washington DC. So I worked for the DC office of consumer protection. And also took this undergraduate class about law and poverty and so you know I kind of found it interesting, so the I thought I’ll just go to law school and you know why wouldn't you want to go to law school in somewhere different. So I applied different places, but you know California’s a nice place, so that's where I went. So, then three years later, I actually wanted to be a consumer protection lawyer, but I think looking back, that would have been a bad job, because it's kind of all paperwork, it's not a lot of people. And so the public defender job was very well suited because you got to work with people. And then you know, whatever the feedback was, good or bad, you know you were there for it, as opposed to working on a case and not finding out what you're little part of it did till you know years later. And a lot of times there's not that satisfaction, because when I worked as a clerk you know here's a little piece on this big lawsuit, and the lawyers would go, this is what we're gonna do, it's going to be this, and here's our legal theory—and then they settle it because, of course, you know, it's just money and then so, you know, you don't really get to see the vision throughout. So with representing individual people, right there and then, you're making probably the biggest impact on them, so you get the feedback and hopefully it's rewarding in some fashion.

Interviewer: yeah yeah sure. Well um that's about all my questions, and I know we're coming up on time. I did have a couple of demographic questions for you, I think some of these have already come up, but you are located in the Bay Area, and can you remind me again where you were born?

Participant 26: Chicago, Illinois.

Interviewer: in Chicago, okay that's right. And do you mind telling me your age.

Participant 26: I'm 63

Interviewer: 63. And you go by, she/her gender pronouns?

Participant 26: Yes.

Interviewer: and then your ethnic background is Japanese American.

Participant 26: Japanese American, yeah.

Interviewer: gotcha and what generation? Your parents, were they...

Participant 26: Okay I'm a Sansei so, my parents were born here, grandparents were born in Japan and came here. So in the weird way of how we all ended up in Chicago is that my mom and her family lived up in and Floren, which is like now part of Sacramento, and so they got sent to camp in Arkansas. My dad's family didn't get sent to camp because they lived in Utah, so my dad was drafted, he joined the army, but he stayed stateside. But he was discharged from Arkansas and so, not that they knew each other, then, but then my parents both landed in Chicago in that great migration where all the jobs, after the war. And so that's where they met, and so that's where I was born and lived till you know I came out here for law school.

Interviewer: Right right okay great. Well, thank you so so much for agreeing to interview with me, it was really interesting to hear all of your story, so I really appreciate that.

Participant 26: Well, good luck on this study and you know, hopefully, it was helpful.

Interviewer: Yes, it was very helpful, so thank you again yeah i'm looking for more people to interview also if you if you know anybody that you might want to recommend to would maybe be willing to do that definitely feel free to give them my information.

Participant 26: Okay um I don't know if you would have a list of anybody, I mean I know [name] has already interviewed but. Did he maybe give you the name of [name] or maybe. yeah yeah. yeah. OK, I will.

Interviewer: See you guys all know each other.

Participant 26: yeah we're all we all kind of withdrawn and I went to school together and then. (Name) and I met each other, and then the three of us so we're friends so but yeah i'll definitely keep that in mind and. Just people with recent legal experience. Okay.

Interviewer: yeah yeah yeah that would be great um. Also, do you have venmo or PayPal or zelle or anything like that that I can send you money for for your time for today.

Participant 26: Oh that's okay I don't have any of those things, but you keep it, I mean i'm sure, there must be something helpful, you could do with it, or you want to donate it or some that's Okay, too.

Interviewer: Oh, are you sure.

Participant 26: Oh yeah yeah.

Interviewer: i'm okay well, thank you very much.

Participant 26: yeah I mean it's more trouble for us to you know do all that technology, and I was. You know very happy to participate in this. (Name) was telling me how you're working so hard so i'm glad to be a little help.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much, I really appreciate it and yeah I hope you have a great weekend. yeah yes Thank you so much.

Participant 26: Okay, take care bye bye.

Interviewer: bye bye.