

HSBA Family Connections

Highlighting and profiling family ties within the Hawaii State Bar Association

This month's interview features **Sidney K. Ayabe**, managing partner at Ayabe, Chong, Nishimoto, Sia & Nakamura, and daughters **Lisa Ayabe**, associate at Cades Schutte LLP and **Sara Ayabe**, legislative attorney for the House Majority Staff Office.



Sidney K. Ayabe is the managing partner at Ayabe, Chong, Nishimoto, Sia & Nakamura LLLP. Mr. Ayabe began the practice of law in 1970 serving as a Deputy Attorney General. In 1972, he joined the firm Libkuman, Shimabukuro, Ventura, Moon & Kekina, which is now known as his current firm. After graduating from Iolani School, he attended Lawrence University where he received his bachelor's degree in 1967. He thereafter pursued his law degree at the University of Iowa graduating in 1970. Mr. Ayabe is a past President of the Hawaii State Bar Association and served as Chair of the Hawaii State Judicial Selection Commission. He is also a member of the American College of Trial Lawyers and volunteers his time by serving as a board member on the Volunteer Legal Services of Hawaii as well as The Mediation Center of the Pacific.

When did you first become interested in the practice of law?

Sidney: My lifelong ambition was to become a politician and I felt that having a law degree would serve as a good foundation. After graduating from law school, I returned with thoughts of going into politics. However, the state representative in my district was the late Hiroshi Kato. He hired me as a summer research assistant for the 1968 Constitutional Convention. Adhering to the philosophy that you never bite the hand which feeds you, my thoughts of entering the political arena was put on hold. While at the Attorney General's Office, I was blessed with having the opportunity to handle a trial where I met Ronald Libkuman who represented a co-defendant in the case. He offered me a position and I commenced private practice in June of 1972. I have truly enjoyed the insurance defense practice. As you can see, the rest is history. There is also some truth to the adage that if you hang around long enough, you may rise to the top. Well, I did.

How has the practice of law changed since you were admitted to the Hawaii State Bar in 1970?

Sidney: I have seen major changes in the practice of law since my admission in 1970. Motions in limine and trial briefs were not common place. Expert witnesses were not typically called to testify at trial. Most trials were relatively short. Today, trials are much longer with a barrage of pleadings filed by the parties to the lawsuit. Although I hear comments all the time that the practice has changed with more attorneys exhibiting lack of civility, I personally don't find that type of comment totally true. Yes, there are a number of attorneys who can be rude and abrasive. However, for the most part, the majority of attorneys in this state continue to exhibit civility in the practice of law. I have also noted more filings of lawsuits today than in the past. That is certainly evident by the fact that

when I joined the firm, there were six attorneys. Today, we have twenty five. Although we continue to hear about lawyer bashing, I have learned throughout the years that we do serve the community well by attempting to right the wrongs committed in our society. The legal profession has been the pioneer of many social reforms much needed by our society. I still maintain that ours is a noble profession.

What advice do you have for recent law school graduates?

Sidney: Law graduates must understand that the practice of law can be very demanding. Having practiced in the litigation area, commitment, dedication and passion are a must. Otherwise, that area of practice may not be fulfilling. I am sure that this advice applies to other areas of the law. Also, your word should be your bond. Trust is an important factor in your interaction with fellow attorneys as well as members of the judiciary. Otherwise, your credibility will be lacking.



Lisa Ayabe attended Punahou School and obtained her bachelor's degree summa cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania and her law degree from the William S. Richardson School of Law, where she served as a casenote editor for the University of Hawaii Law Review. From 2008-2009, Ms. Ayabe clerked for the Honorable Mark E. Recktenwald, who during that time was the Chief Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals and subsequently Associate Justice of the Hawaii Supreme Court. Ms. Ayabe is currently an associate at Cades Schutte in the Finance and Real Estate Department.

How has your family influenced your decision to pursue the practice of law?

Lisa: Growing up, my dad was always excited to discuss the law with me and my sisters, but never pressured us to pursue a legal career perhaps because he understood that the practice of law can be very demanding. It wasn't until college that those discussions really struck a chord. I knew I wanted to pursue a career that would be meaningful. My dad reminded me of the versatility of a legal degree and dynamic nature of the legal profession both of which appealed to me and influenced my decision to pursue a career in law.

What are your specialty areas?

Lisa: I am a transactional attorney at Cades Schutte. My practice includes drafting and negotiating contracts involving leases, subleases and amendments and assisting in all phases of the transaction process, from the negotiation of purchase and sale agreements and performance of legal due diligence, to the coordination of closings.

What advice would you give to recent law school graduates?

Lisa: The transition from law school to the practice of law can be challenging. Having a good

mentor during this time certainly helps. Following law school, I was fortunate to serve as a law clerk to then Chief Judge Mark E. Recktenwald of the Hawaii Intermediate Court of Appeals. He provided me with valuable support and guidance throughout my clerkship. His unwavering commitment to justice, compassion for others, and remarkable work ethic inspired me to excel.



Sara Ayabe attended Punahou School and Wellesley College where she double majored in Psychology and Japanese Language & Literature, graduating magna cum laude in 2005. In 2011, she graduated from the William S. Richardson School of Law summa cum laude. She subsequently clerked for Chief Justice Mark E. Recktenwald at the Hawaii Supreme Court from 2011 through 2012. In January, she joined the House Majority Staff Office as a Legislative Attorney.

When did you first become interested in the practice of law? How has your family influenced your decision to pursue the practice of law?

Sara: Growing up, I always admired my dad's passion for law and his strong work ethic. However, it was not until I graduated from college that I seriously considered pursuing a law degree. Upon graduating from Wellesley, I taught English in Fukuoka, Japan for three years through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. My experience on the JET Program inspired me to pursue a career that would be challenging and meaningful. I appreciated the problem solving aspect of the legal profession and the opportunity to provide a valuable service to others.

What were some of the highlights of your law school experience?

Sara: The faculty and staff at the William S. Richardson School of Law provided unlimited support and inspiration. The faculty members were accomplished in their respective fields and had a genuine desire to help students succeed. There are too many exemplary faculty members to list by name, but I am deeply grateful to the late Jon Van Dyke for advising the law school's Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Team and Professor Eric K. Yamamoto for giving me the opportunity to coauthor a law review article with him. In addition, I truly enjoyed my externships with the Honorable Barry M. Kurren and the Honorable Gary W.B. Chang, who served as excellent mentors. The experiences allowed me to apply the skills and knowledge that I learned in the classroom in real-life settings. Finally, I had an incredible class, one which celebrated each other's successes and supported each other through hardship.

You recently finished your clerkship with Chief Justice Recktenwald at the Hawaii Supreme Court. What did you learn from that experience?

Sara: Clerking at the Hawaii Supreme Court allowed me to develop and refine my research and writing skills and gain insight into the innerworkings of the judiciary. In addition, I was able to learn from an amazing boss and mentor, Chief Justice Recktenwald, who graciously shared his wealth of knowledge with me and taught me through his words and actions. Moreover, my clerkship exposed me to a number of noteworthy initiatives undertaken by the judiciary to promote access to justice in our community, including the opening of self-help centers in each circuit. I hope to become more involved in these types of initiatives.

- *Compiled by Lynn Shizumura*