

HSBA Family Connections

Highlighting and profiling family ties within the Hawaii State Bar Association

This month the HSBA is introducing a new feature that highlights HSBA family member connections. This month's interview features longtime attorney **James Kawashima** and his two children, **Jim Kawashima** and **Emily Kawashima Waters**, who are both practicing attorneys in Hawaii.



James Kawashima, partner at Kawashima Larusso LLP, has been practicing in the State of Hawaii since 1972. Kawashima grew up in Maili, between Nanakuli and Waianae, where his parents moved in 1946 to open a gas station. He attended Waianae Elementary and Intermediate before matriculating to 'Iolani School. Kawashima graduated from 'Iolani School in 1960 and attended Lewis and Clark College. After graduating from Lewis and Clark College, Kawashima attended law school at George Washington University and graduated with honors in 1972.

As a civil litigator, Kawashima has represented many clients and tried more than 50 cases to jury verdict in both State and Federal Courts. Kawashima has served the legal community as a commissioner on the Judicial Selection Commission among other contributions to the legal community. In 2012, he was the recipient of the HSBA President's Award for distinguished service and outstanding achievements that best exemplify the mission of the Hawaii State Bar Association.

When did you first become interested in the idea of attending law school? What interested you in the practice of law?

James: I'm having difficulty pinpointing a date or even time period as to when I became interested in becoming a lawyer; I believe it was while I was in college, but as far as individuals from whom I sought advice and who are responsible for my final decision to pursue a career in law, there are two that stand out: (1) my late cousin, Associate Justice Edward Nakamura and (2) a person to whom I owe a debt of gratitude that will never be repaid, Senior United States Senator Daniel K. Inouye. I consider it an honor and a privilege to have personally known these two great human beings.

Thanks to the G.I. Bill, and my working part-time at the Capitol under Senator Inouye's patronage, and my wife Melvia working for G.W. University, completing my formal legal education was very manageable.

What were the most valuable things you learned in law school at George Washington University?

James: Of course, we learned black letter law and about "The Rule of Law," a concept to which I have always subscribed, but the one thing I noticed that stuck out very quickly was the meaning of the saying: "The law is a jealous mistress," as the transformation of my classmates (and myself) from being somewhat reserved, courteous and mostly quiet young women and men to advocates who exuded self-confidence and displayed an uncommon need to argue every point possible was evident.

What have you learned during your career as a litigator?

James: I have learned that it is extremely important that you develop and maintain a level of credibility with fellow counsel, judges and even opposing counsel; if you do, the practice of law will be much more enjoyable.



Emily Kawashima Waters attended Punahou School and received her undergraduate degree from UC Berkeley. She completed her law degree at the William S. Richardson School of Law, where she served as author and managing editor for the Hawaii Law Review. She has clerked for Federal Judge Samuel P. King and is a former Deputy Prosecuting Attorney. Ms. Waters has more than 10 years of litigation experience in the State and Federal Courts of Hawaii and today is in solo private practice.

When did you know that you were interested in practicing law? Did your father's experience influence your outlook on the profession?

Emily: I don't recall ever making a conscious decision to practice. I think it was always in my DNA. Growing up with a trial lawyer for a father was a huge influence. I saw from an early age how passionate he was about trial work and upholding the profession. After law school, I was undecided about actually practicing law as a litigator and spent a few more than the typical one year clerking for the late Judge Samuel P. King. Like my father, he had a deep regard for ethics and justice and he was also a significant influence on my decision to practice law.

What did you study at UC Berkeley and how does that help you as a litigator today?

Emily: I was a history major at UC Berkeley with a minor in medieval studies. I don't know that my major specifically helped me as a litigator, but going to Cal gave me a great liberal arts education and experience at a very diversely populated university.

What advice would you give to recent law school graduates?

Emily: Take your time figuring out what area of law you want to practice—or whether you even want to practice at all. My dad always said that the JD degree is the best liberal arts graduate degree you can get. He's right, as usual. A JD provides such a broad background that can be applied in so many professional areas. Whether you want to be a litigator, a transaction attorney, an estate planner, in-house counsel or something totally unrelated to the law, there are so many ways to apply the education.



Jim Kawashima attended 'Iolani School and obtained an advanced bachelor's degree in English from Princeton University and a law degree from the University of Southern California. Kawashima is a commercial litigator in private practice. He is also the founder and chief instructor of Prestige Learning LLC, which offers SAT and LSAT prep courses.

This year you've celebrated 20 years since you were first admitted to the Hawaii State Bar. What have you learned in the past 20 years in practice in Hawaii?

Jim: Early on, my father told us (and kept telling us) that we live in a small town. Small actions can have large repercussions over a span of decades. That's the most important lesson that I've learned and relearned over the years: the legal community is small and has a long memory. Remembering that fact kept me from being too conciliatory at times, and at other times from being too aggressive.

Growing up, did your father have an impact on your decision to later attend law school and practice law? Or was it an interest cultivated on your own? When did you know that you wanted to pursue the practice of law?

Jim: I originally wanted to be a doctor, and both my parents strongly encouraged me in that pursuit. But I was ultimately drawn to the law because it felt natural to me, and more consistent with my own interests and strengths. I suppose my father had to have influenced me, just by being who he is. He's a natural litigator, so much so that he probably couldn't avoid passing it along to his children.

But while I studied a wide range of legal fields, it wasn't until I sat through a session of Ewa Traffic Court that I realized I had to be a lawyer. Two years later, I was working that same courtroom as a deputy prosecutor. Twenty years later, I often preside over that same courtroom as a per diem judge.

- *Compiled by Lynn Shizumura*