

*This month's family connection features the Tom family. **TERRANCE TOM** (Bar No. 1353), and son **MARK TOM** (Bar No. 9219). Terry is a former legislator, with his own law practice, now focusing on advocating for children who have been harmed or abused, as a guardian Ad Litem. His son Mark is with the prosecutor's office and is always in court, much like his father used to be during his days in the prosecutor's office. Unlike most Family Connections pieces, where the interviewees write their own responses, I met with this family in person at Terry's request. You would never guess from Terry's career and conversations with him, but Terry is a blind attorney; in fact, he was the first blind person in the Nation to take and pass the Bar Exam in Braille!*

Q: What made you want to be an attorney?



Terrance Tom: Growing up blind, there were a lot of assumptions about what I could and could not do, but I didn't want to be a stereotype and make hula skirts or be a musician. But I was realistic enough to know that I couldn't be a blind surgeon. When I was young, I really enjoyed watching Perry Mason, I would get excited when Perry Mason would grill the bad guy on the stand and get them to admit to their crimes. I thought I was a pretty good talker so I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer. I didn't know exactly what it meant to be a lawyer, but I wanted to be a lawyer just like Perry Mason. This decision stuck with me and I went to law school after completing my undergraduate studies. Law school was challenging and my entire road to becoming an attorney was full of challenges. But these challenges continued to fuel my desire to persevere, to prove to myself and others that despite my blindness I wasn't going to ever give up. Sometimes I think that if I knew how hard I would have to work to do some of the things I have done, I might not have done it. But whenever I achieve something that might seem impossible like trying a jury trial without ever seeing the evidence, opening up my own law practice, becoming a legislator and making laws, all the work seems worth it.

Mark Tom: My dad didn't really want me to be an attorney. He wanted me to be a doctor, but I'm not into blood and needles so I didn't listen to his wishes. Growing up, I saw my dad in the legislature and I also got to be his eyes when he would investigate cases. Through helping him in his practice and observing him as a law maker, I became interested in becoming a lawyer, so that I too could work for the greater good of the community. I actually grew up in the public eye as the son of a legislator, and being exposed to the impact that the law has on the community was inspiring. In some respects, I am following my father's footsteps almost too closely. After graduating from law school, I've been in the prosecutor's office in two different



jurisdictions doing trial after trial. Here in Hawaii, judges recognize me as Terry's son. Despite the difficulty in establishing my independence in the legal field I am so blessed to follow in such large footsteps. I'm always humbled to think no matter how hard I might think my work is, my dad did this all before me, and he did it with his eyes closed.



Q: How did you discover your artistic side?

Terrance Tom: I started to play the piano as a child, but I was really bad until I sat down and got lessons from my uncle. He was a great musician and really taught me how to play. Music became a passion for me. I also love performing and piano was something that I enjoyed doing and doing in front of an audience. Even better, piano allowed me to bring in a little extra income. I would play at dinner clubs and other venues. It was fun and a creative outlet that helped both to balance the rigors of the law and also to fund my education.

Mark Tom: when I was younger, I always enjoyed working with my hands, it was fun to create and design art. But I was an obedient and dutiful son and ended up pursuing a profession that would provide me more stability. Fortunately for me, my decision to pursue the legal profession has not required me to close the door to my artistic side. I was given a chance to pursue photography and videography. Currently I work on weddings on the weekend doing photography and videography. I love the law, but I also enjoy helping people memorialize their most cherished memories.

Q: Is there anyone in your life that has influenced you?

Terrance Tom: My wife, Penny. My wife has made everything in my life possible. From our challenging beginnings when she helped me get through law school in San Francisco; to being tolerant of me while I was in the legislature and barely around. Through all that, she has managed to hold down her own full time job as a school principal. She has been my support and our family's cornerstone. She is my best friend



Mark Tom: I agree that my mother has definitely been the glue that has held this family together, she puts up with three very strong willed and stubborn men at home and managed to do so with ease. My dad and I can butt heads at times but my mother has kept us all together. My father of course has been a huge inspiration in my career. And of course my wife, Noele, I'm grateful that she is not an attorney; I think it creates a more balanced home life (she actually listens to me), perspective and support (we supported each other through professional school).