

## Justice Yu Transcript

**Cloie Chapman** Welcome to Voices That Move Us. This podcast is hosted by the 2025 Fellows of the Washington Leadership Institute. WLI is a leadership development program in Washington state that seeks to recruit, train, and develop traditionally underrepresented attorneys for future leadership positions. We are celebrating 20 years of the Washington Leadership Institute, a visionary collaboration between the Washington State Bar Association and the three law schools in Washington. Each episode features compelling stories from WLI alumni, diverse attorneys who have gone on to lead in powerful, sometimes unexpected ways across law, policy, business, and community. These are the stories that build legacy, fuel change, and inspire a more inclusive future. Today, we are joined by Washington State Supreme Court Justice Mary Yu. Justice Yu is an integral member of the Leadership Institute, having served as a co-facilitator for most of the program's history. Upon joining the Washington State Supreme Court in 2014, Justice Yu became the first Asian, first Latina, and first member of the LGBTQ plus community to serve on our court. Justice Yu also served as a trial court judge for the King County Superior Court for 14 years. She has dedicated her career to public service and still finds time to mentor attorneys throughout the legal community. Justice Yu embodies the spirit of justice and rule of law, and we are thrilled to be speaking with her today on topics including her personal journey, experience in legal leadership, and her legacy and hopes for the future of the profession. Justice Yu thank you for joining us today.

**Justice Mary Yu** Thank you, Cloie. I have to say that it's a special treat to be interviewed by someone like you. You have a special relationship to me as a former clerk, former extern, and somebody that I greatly admire. So, it's fun to be here with you.

**Cloie Chapman** Thank you. That's always very nice to hear. So I'd like to start a bit with your background, maybe some influences from your family and your early motivations for entering the law. So I'll start by asking if you could share a moment from your early life or upbringing that planted your seed for the journey into the legal profession.

**Justice Mary Yu** Well, you know Cloie, I grew up in a lower working class family on the south side of Chicago, and there was never a seed planted in my mind about the legal profession. I mean, we didn't know lawyers. I wasn't really around anyone who had a professional degree other than my teachers. So I didn't come to the idea of the law until much later as an adult and after working as a community organizer in Chicago, the value, however, the values that I am driven by that perhaps ultimately led me to the law were certainly values that came from my family and that was a sense of injustice. My mother and father were both immigrants to this country and didn't have access right to what we have access today to in terms of education and opportunities. And so my mother was a farm worker originally. My father worked in a factory all of his life and it is their story of their lives that then led me to really embrace the notion of social justice, right that everybody ought to be treated equally, that my father should have had opportunities, that my mother should have been respected.

So those underlying values that drove me to the law were planted by family in the sense that I know what I care about, I know what's really important in life, but the idea of going to law

school only came after working for the Archdiocese of Chicago for 10 years. It was an office that was really implementing a vision that the Catholic Church had at the time to not only look at direct services, but to look at systemic causes of poverty, to look at racism, to look at larger questions that contributed to injustices. So after doing that for 10 years, I thought to myself, I need another toolkit. I need to figure out how to use the law to really further the goals of justice. And then I decided that going to law school so much, much later.

**Cloie Chapman** And it sounds like you also had some firsthand experience in your community organizing. What did that entail?

**Justice Mary Yu** You know. It really entailed, again, working to try to recognize power. And that is we worked in communities of poverty and the whole focal point was to empower local voices and local communities to really foster self determination and participation at every level. Because we were working for the Catholic Church, things like fair housing were important to us and it sometimes was as simple as trying to invite people to reject racism. That sounds so easy. And yet it's not so easy in a white community on the south side of Chicago in the early eighties and late seventies, it wasn't easy. And white families who were good Catholic families did not want to sell their homes to Black families. And no matter what we said about how sinful and wrong that was, we couldn't get people to change their minds. And that continued, that really rubbed me the wrong way.

I kept thinking, how is it that people can't come to the right place? And it was then that I decided, you know what? Sometimes no matter what, you have to force people to do the right thing. You can't just motivate them by trying to persuade them for some higher value. That works for some people, but not everyone. And so for me, the law became attractive as a mechanism to advance that. So I thought, okay, you don't want to do the right thing. We'll just sue you to make you do the right thing. That's what the law is about in terms of trying to create a more just society. So that too is the place where I began to see the injustices that spoke so loudly to me. But the one thing as an adult is I also saw that there were avenues for change and there are remedies and those remedies were in the law.

**Cloie Chapman** Yeah, I love thinking about the law as a leverage for change. It can work both ways. People can push the law in different places. The law can push people. So I really appreciate that. Were there any people in the legal community that you met growing up that showed you this path?

**Justice Mary Yu** I never met a lawyer until I went to law school. I just, again, growing up where I grew up, we just didn't have professionals available, accessible or anywhere. There weren't such things as career days. I think the most that anybody expected of us from my neighborhood was just to stay out of trouble. People didn't have expectations. People didn't challenge us to be something other. And not that there's anything wrong with working in a grocery store or working maybe in an office as a secretary. There's nothing wrong with those jobs, but nobody ever invited us to do anything more. And that's just the way life is for some kids. Nobody's motivated to spend time with those kids.

**Cloie Chapman** Wow. I mean, it sounds like even just completing an undergraduate degree was not something that was expected. It was something you really had to work for.

**Justice Mary Yu** Absolutely. I would never even have thought about going to college if a high school teacher hadn't come to me in my junior year in high school and said, gee, Mary, did you ever think about going to college? And I just said, no, kids like me don't think about going to college. We don't have the resources. I wouldn't even know where to go to college. And this teacher was good enough to say, let me help you. And she came to visit with my parents to convince them that it was okay for me to go to college. And then she took me to her alma mater and helped me fill out an application. And I'm convinced to this day, Cloie, that it was sheer luck that I got in, for perhaps an affirmative action program, I don't know. I don't know how I ended up there, but I ended up going to this small liberal arts college right outside of Chicago and it transformed my life. But that's again, not something that we dreamt about or thought about. If it weren't for the intervention of this teacher, I wouldn't be here today.

**Cloie Chapman** Did you recently receive an honorary degree from that college?

**Justice Mary Yu** I did. I did. I'm pretty impressed that you know that. I was just invited back. The place is now called Dominican University. At the time it was called Rosary College and again, small liberal arts place. And I did just receive an honorary doctorate from them. And you know what? They are still a bridge institution. Their focal point now is Latine students from Chicago and they are a bridge university. They're still reaching out to kids from the inner city and providing opportunities, and it's just remarkable. So I have to say it's pretty humbling to be acknowledged by that university.

**Cloie Chapman** What a full circle moment to get to come back and then maybe be the inspiration for people just starting out on their education journey. That's very cool. So if I've done my math right and I can't say that I'm great at math, I think you've been a public servant for about 40 years or more at this point. Can you tell us about how you got into public service?

**Justice Mary Yu** Right. I mean, public service was also working right out of college for the archdiocese, for the bishop. So that was 10 years of doing that organizing. So once I went to law school, the thing that happened to me is I went to the University of Notre Dame and fell in love with the barristers, the trial advocacy. That just really was something that seemed so exciting. And I was part of the barrister team. And then I have to admit, I was convinced that I needed to be in the courtroom. I wanted to be a trial lawyer. And the place that you have the opportunity to be an actual trial lawyer then and now is prosecutors or defenders. Right? They were in trial. And so I ended up with an internship opportunity in the King County prosecutor's office, and it's just coincidental. I had moved to Seattle shortly beforehand, and the Notre Dame alumni network is a very strong network. And there was somebody in the prosecutor's office who said, you should come and intern in our office. And that's how I ended up there. I mean, it was just relationships and connections, and then I just stayed.

**Cloie Chapman** So while you were at the prosecutor's office, did you ever think about how you wanted your career to, or what you wanted your career path to look like? Did you see yourself joining the bench as a prosecutor?

**Justice Mary Yu** You know Cloie, I did not think about being a judge at all. I saw what I saw, and of course in the back of my own mind, I thought, I would do this differently or I would do that differently. But I never thought about it because it just didn't seem something that was reachable for someone like me, right? That little voice that always says, no, no, no, no. And it wasn't until a judge who was retiring came to me and said, I'm retiring and I think you ought to apply to be a judge. I was a very young lawyer when that happened. And she said, I still think you should apply. I think you have a lot of life experience and go ahead and do so. So I did. And the person who was sitting in the chair opposite of me who had the power to make me a judge was Governor Gary Locke, right?

The first Chinese American governor on the mainland. And I had known Governor Locke because he had worked at the King County executive, and I knew him from the community, and I didn't know what I was doing when I was sitting there. And it wasn't until Governor Locke said, Mary, I need to know from you whether or not you really want to be a judge. I need to hear that from you. And I looked at him and he said, I need to hear that. It dawned on me that he needs an answer right now. And he just said, if I were to appoint you, he said, I need to know that you would accept it. And I looked at him in for probably was just maybe a minute. My whole life flashed in front of me and I thought, you know what? This might be one of those opportunities that if I don't say yes, it may never come back again.

I may never have this chance to be sitting across from the governor of the State of Washington who's saying to me, I'm going to take a chance on you, but I need to know you want to do this. And then I just thought, I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm going to say yes. And I would have to say, Cloie, that changed my whole life and my whole perspective on the possibilities of where I might go with my career. And I didn't plan steps out, but before I knew it, the governor had appointed me. I had to stand for election. And it was remarkable, a remarkable job. I didn't know what I needed to know, and it was really important to acknowledge that and say, I'm going to learn and I'm going to be the best judge that I can be.

**Cloie Chapman** I have to ask maybe personally, but also for listeners, you talked about this little voice that tells you, you can't do that. That's not for you. How do you get that voice to be quieter? Has that voice gotten quieter for you?

**Justice Mary Yu** No, it hasn't. Cloie. I think it's in my makeup and I, I've talked about this with others, I use it frankly now as sort of a two-step process. One, it keeps me in check because sometimes you can think you can do everything and you can't. But the other is it motivates me to work hard because I still at our table at the Supreme Court feel like I don't belong there. I sit there and I think, oh my God, I'm sitting there with these eight brilliant people. I look at Justice Johnson or Justice Madsen who've been there 30 years and they know so much. And I think I am never going to know that much. And it's okay to say that, it's okay to have that little voice back there because you know what I do? I work really hard. I really work hard. If I have to read a brief two times, I don't apologize for that. I really want to comprehend and I really want to understand. So I think it's part of my DNA, it's just the makeup of feeling like maybe I don't really belong here, but here I am. And then given that I am here, what am I going to do to make sure that I do it well?

**Cloie Chapman** Yeah, it's like that little voice is just challenging you to do better. I love that! Can you tell me, I think this is a big question, but when you transitioned from the prosecutor's office to the bench, what were some things that stood out to you in that transition?

**Justice Mary Yu** I think what stood out to me is how much I didn't know and how important the job was in terms of presentation. It's not like it's a theater, and yet it's like a theater in the sense that you're running the courtroom and your job as a judge is to make sure that it's a fair forum. And I didn't realize how important that is from the smallest little thing, the artwork in your courtroom, how you address people, how your bailiff addresses people. Is your courtroom welcoming? Are you as fair as you can be? Can you work at communicating decisions that people can understand? It used to bug the heck out of me when some judge would just say, granted. No reason, no rationale, no anything. And I thought, how important it is for me to actually explain why. How I got to where I did was really important for the parties win or lose. I decided I have a lot to learn and I'm going to perfect this. I really want to be a judge who's transparent, but who also people get the sense that she works for me, right? Me, litigant. Me, who comes in here, we're going to have a fair shot at my case because this judge is going to let me do that. And I tell judges now, a mentee of mine, a WLI fellow who was just appointed as a Superior Court Judge, BJ Santos. And I said to him, what I was told, it takes five years to learn this job as a judge, be patient with yourself. And I had to say that to myself because a mentor had said that to me. It takes five years and there's so many little parts of the job. So that's what I learned. I learned what I didn't know, and I think that's a good thing.

**Cloie Chapman** Did you feel that you knew even less transitioning to appellate court?

**Justice Mary Yu** That's a great question. I learned once I came here, what I didn't know and that I should have known and that every trial judge should know, and most trial judges do not know how the Supreme Court makes decisions. And part of it is because it's the Supreme Court's fault. We keep the mystery about ourselves. And I don't think that that's necessarily good. And on the other hand, when I came as a trial judge, and I still believe this, I always felt trial judges know more than anybody in the world. We're in the trenches. We know. We see, and I still try to be deferential to trial court judges because they are in the trenches and they're working hard, and they do know a lot of things firsthand.

So I would say now sitting here, I realize how difficult the job is to really decide questions of law. We're not resolving facts anymore that's been done, and we're shaping the law. So it's not like it's a bolt of lightning that comes down and somebody says, this is the law. Hand it down to everybody else. We're hammering it out and fighting it out, and I didn't know that I needed to be an advocate. Again, I have to be an advocate in that room because everybody's fighting for their principles and how that comes into play. And I finally learned, right? I have to be the advocate too for my values for the people that never had space at the table before. So sometimes I feel like I got to speak for people of color. I've got to speak for all of the queer community, or I got to speak for all women. I have to speak for the voice that never had one or the farm worker. I feel like I have to bring that into the room. We weren't there before, and that's hard work to figure out what's the space, and then how do you debate other people to say, yeah, the law should include

us. The law should pay attention to how we construct our families and respect it. So it's been a learning process, and I would say I'm still learning.

**Cloie Chapman** So you'd say it takes more than five years to learn the state Supreme Court justice job?

**Justice Mary Yu** I'd say it takes a lifetime.

**Cloie Chapman** We could talk a long time about your experience on the Supreme Court. I always wonder how you navigate the tension between when your values don't line up with the law or there can't be, the law can't be changed to align with those values. Are there cases that keep you up at night about that?

**Justice Mary Yu** Yeah. Yeah. But the one thing, there are many cases, but the one thing that we didn't have at the trial court, and that is at the appellate level, you can write a dissent. There's always room for the voice of disagreement or concurrence or putting a fine point on it or taking the majority and interpreting it in a concurrence. We have the power to do that, and there's power in dissent. I know that there were some cases where I wrote a dissent because I wanted the parties to know that I heard them. I wanted, especially juveniles who were going to remain incarcerated. I wanted them to know, I hear you. I see you. This might not be it, but I hear you. So you don't always get to have your way in the sense of how the law should be interpreted or applied, but we have avenues to express it. The trial court, you got to make that call the way the law is given to you, regardless of whether you like it or not, you just do it. But for us, it's a matter of writing that concurrence and Cloie, you know as a former of clerk, wrestling with, do we have something to say that's going to be worthwhile? And somebody will read.

**Cloie Chapman** And sometimes they're persuasive enough to flip the opinion.

**Justice Mary Yu** That's right. That's right.

**Cloie Chapman** It's very important work in those concurring and dissenting opinions. Where do you see your career going next?

**Justice Mary Yu** I see my career going next into the world of volunteer work. I am not going to be a person who stays forever. I don't want to retire and then die. So my next career will be volunteer work, and it will probably be maybe teaching a class at one of the law schools, teaching young people to read, because so many, especially kids of color in our communities lag behind in terms of reading. And if you can't read well, you're not going to do well. I think maybe, I don't know, get re-engaged with some community groups. Again, I have given up my first amendment rights to political opinion for a long time. So once I step down as a judge, I get to do that all over again. And I'm looking forward to it.

**Cloie Chapman** I'm looking forward to seeing what you do off the bench, but I would like you to stay on the bench for as long as you can. I'm very happy to see the current makeup of the court. It's really great to see and what the court is doing with that set of values and that experience.

**Justice Mary Yu** Yeah. Well, I never thought I'd see a court where the majority of people on the court are people of color. I didn't think I'd see that in my lifetime.

**Cloie Chapman** Yeah, that's incredible. And it shows we are a leader in the nation in that, and I think that's so cool. Well kind of related, you yourself have been a first of many things. You've broken a lot of those barriers. How has that experience, being the first to do a lot of things, shaped your approach to leadership and your leadership style?

**Justice Mary Yu** I don't spend a lot of time thinking about the fact that I'm the first. I spend time thinking about how important it is to break barriers for others as well. All of us face them every single day. Sometimes those barriers are within ourselves, that little voice there or that imposter syndrome or fear of not knowing. And there's nothing wrong with admitting you don't know. So for me, when I think about myself, but more importantly thinking about leadership style and what I can show others is to have confidence, right? That's why I got involved with WLI and other organizations that would help, especially women of color, build confidence, trust yourself. At the end of the day, that little voice that says, you're worth it. You belong here, and all you need is a nudge of support. You need a cohort. You need people who believe in you, and then you need to have the ability to take that one step forward.

So, I think I've spent most of my life trying to encourage others to do that. I personally know how hard that is. I know how hard it is to walk into a room and nobody looks like you, and you don't know whether you're safe in that environment or you don't know how to step across the room to meet people you've never met before. I've never seen, that's hard stuff. And so I feel like the more we can break those barriers down for people, the more successful others will be. And I don't know, again, it's still hard. It's not easy. And once you do it a thousand times, it's a little easier. But deep down, it's still a battle all the time. And I just believe that my leadership style is to try to make people feel included as much as possible.

**Cloie Chapman** I can certainly attest to that. You have instilled a lot of confidence in me so you are on the right path here. You are doing what you set out to do. So I'd like to talk a bit more about your involvement with WLI. What first brought you to that program?

**Justice Mary Yu** It was an invitation by the founders to get involved, and it was really Ron Ward and James Williams who really were the people who said, you got to get involved in some way. And when James was going to then assume the facilitator role, he said, I'll do this if I can convince Mary to do it with me. And then when he came to me and said, I need your help, and James and I had known each other beforehand as young lawyers, I thought, okay, I don't really know where we're going to take this, but I'd love to get involved and love to figure out a way to help other young lawyers. And it really just, it evolved. I mean, James and I had the same work ethic, the same values. The two of us have lived in similar ways in terms of having to sort of prove to yourself and to the world that you're capable and competent and you can do the job. And for us doing that together, it was just really magic or a special sauce that the ingredients came together. And then each fellow that we selected just seemed to have that special sauce as well. And it just worked. And before, I have to say Cloie, really before I knew it, 17 years had gone by where we had these incredible groups of people who came through.

**Cloie Chapman** Yeah. You have helped shape the WLI alumni community. I'd love to hear more about what that role did for you and shaped your experience as you were a trial court judge at the time, right, when you started.

**Justice Mary Yu** I was.

**Cloie Chapman** Yeah. So what did your experience in WLI do for you?

**Justice Mary Yu** It just gave me a lot of hope. I mean, it really said to me, there's a lot of talent out here. Number one, and all of us who achieved any positions of power should always be looking for our replacement. I mean, we really should. It's not that I take these positions and hang onto them. You have to be thinking, who's going to replace me? Who's going to be the next person, who will be the next generation that steps up and takes our society or our courts or whatever it is, in a different direction or in the same direction? But we always have to be looking to the future. So WLI was the formal way to do that. There were so many lawyers of color who were lost, people who were leaving. And we not only had the data nationally from the ABA that said, right, the biggest group exiting the practice of law were women of color, in particular Black women.

And you have to stop and ask yourself, my gosh, these are accomplished people who've come through law school who make it, but why are they leaving? And the constant, the studies continue to show after interviews is right, not feeling welcome, not feeling a part of this community, or you go into a place and despite the fact that people tell you, we want you to be successful, there's nobody sponsoring you to success. It just doesn't happen overnight. You have to have mentors. You have to have sponsors. This is a traditional method of how lawyers have taught other lawyers. But if we don't have our own teaching our own, it just doesn't happen because people are not comfortable around us. They're getting more comfortable in Washington and in Seattle. But generally, people are not comfortable with people who are different than themselves. And so how could we create that community or lawyers of color or lawyers who were marginalized in some way?

How do we create it so that people feel safe enough to succeed, safe enough to rely on their incredible talents to say, I can do this. I can do this, and I want to do it. And we looked for people who were not at, if you will, at the primary stage. We were looking for people who were established, leaders who needed that extra bump, who needed the extra push in terms of a cohort. We knew they're on the path to success. That's the place where people either stay or go. So we're not developing leaders. We're actually taking leaders and making them great.

**Cloie Chapman** Well, WLI turns 20 this year. I am part of the 20th class. What do you feel is necessary to keep programs like this going for another 20 years?

**Justice Mary Yu** Well, I would hope an investment by the legal community. I think that's really important is we always felt that we had the Bar Association backing us and the three law schools. So that was important. I think you have to have facilitators who the primary purpose of their existence for this program is the fellows, right? That the fellows are the number one thing that it's important. I know for James and I, it was in our inbox, if anything had to do with WLI, that

was the first email that we answered all the time. It was such a high priority for us to make sure that fellows were heard and had access to us. The second was to have staff that also had that same degree of commitment to the fellows. It was about making everybody successful no matter what.

I think once you have it, all of you take care of yourself. I mean, it's not like we're doing something for you or to you. We create the environment. We make you a priority. But we really believe that the mixture of 12 coming together would find ways to offer support. We would offer the stimulus. We used to offer the promise that we'll introduce you to leaders that you would never meet otherwise. And then it's up to you to follow up on that. And I think this program could go on forever provided there was a need. If there's no need because nobody applies, well, then it should just fizzle out.

**Cloie Chapman** What do you hope that fellows take away from the program each year?

**Justice Mary Yu** I hope they take away a sense of community. That's probably the most important thing, that they have a cohort and that they have a community that really cares about who they are and what they're doing. I would hope they would take away a sense of justice that you're not a fellow who is just successful, but that you're really going to temporary your success with justice. That's the ultimate calling for every lawyer. So I don't know of many fellows who just do it for blind ambition or for resume building. It's too much work to do it for that reason. You got to really care about yourself and you got to really care about your community. Those are the things that I hope will last forever and that people get out of it. And just community.

**Cloie Chapman** This is an interesting question. I think it's another big question. Looking back on the past 20 years, how do you think the landscape of the practice of law has changed?

**Justice Mary Yu** Well, the practice of law has gotten so specialized that really is a very radical departure from the old days of being a generalist and being an expert in one area deprives you, in my opinion, of seeing how rich the law is across the board and how it touches people in so many different ways. And yet we all know that you need an expert because law is complicated. So it's always good to have somebody who really is deep, deep, deep into thinking about the law in a particular area. But I would say it's changed for that reason, is we just don't have the cross-fertilization sometimes of ideas and practicing together that we used to have. I would say technology always changes everything. We should be more efficient, but we're not. I think that we find ways to fill the time, and that's a little bit of a worry because we're more efficient because of technology.

You would think that that might free up the time to do other things that might make us more interesting, like read non-law books or do non-law things, but we keep filling it up and filling it up. So I would hope that we might at some point reflect on that a little bit more. Finally, I think the thing that has changed is who we are. And again, I can only speak for Washington state. We are much richer because of our diversity. More women have entered the profession than ever, and then more people of color are coming to law schools and graduating and staying in the profession than ever before. So that rich diversity changes how we look at the law and changes the priorities. And I would say in the last 20 years, that has been monumental.

**Cloie Chapman** I think we're even seeing a shift in more support for attorneys with disabilities, which is really meaningful. I think historically, there's been a lot of stigma around attorneys with mental health issues or other disabilities, and I find that at least there's more of a conversation happening about the value of people who have disabilities and that it doesn't take away from their ability to be advocates. It enhances their ability to advocate.

**Justice Mary Yu** Yep. Agree.

**Cloie Chapman** Yeah. Speaking of non-law things I would love to hear about non-law things that you do for fun or otherwise.

**Justice Mary Yu** Gosh, I have to say that there's not enough time to do the fun things, and so that's always a problem in terms of the volume of work and committee work. We love to dine out. I mean, my partner and I love really good food, good wine, and so enjoying a really nice dinner frequently is important, and I think it's good to sort of step back and do that. I'm a big baseball fan, so going to a Mariners game, there's nothing better than going to a baseball game. I like pickleball, I'm not great. I am not as competitive, I think, as others are. I like to play pickleball, but I don't like playing with people who just want to slam dunk and beat you. So I enjoy it. I enjoy it because it's just fun. I like reading. I don't get to do that often enough. So which is why I'm looking to the long lasting career of retirement at some point so I can finally read the books that are all stacked up that interest me and that I can actually get them read.

**Cloie Chapman** And of course, taking walks with your adorable dog.

**Justice Mary Yu** Charlie, Charlie, Charlie is everything to me. Taking care of Charlie is almost a full-time job. We are his attendants, that's how we see it. He gets to live in the world. I think he's a human in a dog suit because he can communicate his every need, and he is intelligent and sweet.

**Cloie Chapman** That's so sweet. So it sounds like you don't get as many opportunities to be involved with organizations, but you're looking forward to that. But are there any organizations that are close to your heart right now?

**Justice Mary Yu** Obviously as a judge, I can't be endorsing any particular organization right now. I would say the work of Northwest Immigrants Rights Project becomes a really important effort, and it's one that has brought support in our community because our community really supports immigrants regardless of one's documentation or legal status. We recognize that immigrants built this country and we welcome and want people to come from everywhere and anywhere in the world. So that's one particular effort that comes to mind. Northwest Justice Project has always been close to my heart. When I was a trial judge, they've represented people in some awfully difficult family law cases that were really important, but that nobody else cared about other than NJP. I was on the board of Fare Start for the longest of time in Seattle, and with one of the few entities that really works on training formally incarcerated individuals to enter into the restaurant business. It's a tough industry right now. So it's entry, a good entry place for people. And Fare Start always was about training for life skills, not just to look but write. It was

learning about yourself and building confidence and learning skills while you're doing that. So those are organizations that just come to mind off the top of my head.

**Cloie Chapman** Yeah. I know you've also been such a huge supporter of Seattle University School of Law. Are you still teaching?

**Justice Mary Yu** I am. I am. I took a year off, but I had been teaching probably, gosh, also some 20 years or so, a transition to practice class. But I will be teaching in January a state constitutional law class to try to wet the appetite of those students for state constitutional law.

**Cloie Chapman** Oh, that's very exciting. I am not going back to school, but that's attempting class to audit.

**Justice Mary Yu** There you go. You can audit.

**Cloie Chapman** Yeah. So when you think about your legacy, what do you hope that future lawyers will take from your experience in your story?

**Justice Mary Yu** Gosh, I would hope that people would look at investing in others. That accomplishment for the sake of accomplishment has to be for a purpose. And I would hope that people would see that this is for the purpose of empowering others. We do what we do because you hope that it opens the door for somebody else. And for me, I guess a legacy project was the WLI. That was more important to me than anything else was to enable and empower young lawyers to take control of their lives and for them to recognize how much they have to give. It is just tremendous, the influence that we all have as lawyers, but to really be an outstanding lawyer and to serve others is such a calling. And I'm convinced that everybody who comes to WLI has that in them.

**Cloie Chapman** When we think about future lawyers, lawyers starting out in their profession, what do you see as being some of the bigger challenges that they face, and how might they overcome those?

**Justice Mary Yu** I think at the end of the day, it really has to do with confidence. Confidence and belief in yourself. And sometimes it might mean the courage to move to a different practice area or to do something different. To have the courage to be happy is a good thing. And so, yeah, life is complicated. The law is complicated, and there are so many challenges that we have today, but if you have a singular sense of yourself in terms of your values, I am convinced you will find joy in the law. If you just have the courage to say, I need to be happy in what I'm doing, and you will find it in the law. It doesn't mean you stay where you are. It means you're free to move around, free to find it, and when you find it, you find joy.

**Cloie Chapman** Courage dovetails very nicely into my final question. Former Chief Justice Fairhurst I know is a very dear friend of yours, this quote that she has shared with the WLI class over many years, what would you do if you knew you could not fail? What does that mean to you? How have you maybe relied on that quote? Just tell me what comes to mind.

**Justice Mary Yu** It's so funny because I think I lived my life under that little umbrella without ever knowing about it in that sense, because Justice Fairhurst would say that to many young lawyers. When I look back at my life, I don't have any regrets. Number one, I've never planned my life. So it's not like I had paths and I chose one over the other. It was almost a reckless accident every time something happened to me, and it just was good, right? It was always good. It turned out okay. I took the risks, and I think that's what's really important. I took the risks of failure and, and if I did, I turned them into successes. I may have failed in so many ways, but failure is a way of learning. It's just sort of the first try at something. And I never treated it as the no, right? If I fail at something, well, I'm going to try it again, or I'm going to do it. Somehow I learned and I'm going to do it differently. So I have to say to Mary Fairhurst, that's exactly what I did. I just did it all. I did it all, and it turned out okay.

**Cloie Chapman** That's so wonderful. I always learn so much from you every time I get to talk to you or hear you speak at events, so I just thank you so much for sharing all of your thoughts in this episode. Yeah. I just cannot say enough how much I have learned from you.

**Justice Mary Yu** Oh, well, Cloie, I hope you know that it is mutual and there's nothing that makes me happier than seeing you happy. This has been great. I love that you're the person who did this interview.

**Cloie Chapman** Thank you. I think the fellows determined that it could not be anyone else. Happy to do it. Thank you for listening to Voices That Move Us. Check out our other episodes featuring prominent leaders in the Washington legal community.