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## Diversifying your portfolio of mentoring relationships



Senior Judge Kenneth H. Johnson, Indianapolis, served as the presiding judge of Marion Superior Court #2, Civil Division, for 30 years. He also served as master commissioner of the Superior Court's Complex & Mass Tort Docket and co-authored the Mass Tort Docket Rules. According to Judge Johnson, during his many years on the bench, he was "fortunate to 'employ' more than 30 interns, young lawyers and law students."



Lumi Nodit, Indianapolis, is a deputy attorney general in the Consumer Protection Division of the Office of Indiana Attorney General. She is a graduate of Indiana University McKinney School of Law. Lumi is also a graduate of the Indiana State Bar Association's Leadership Development Academy. She loves learning new languages and enjoys traveling, hiking, painting, gardening and rescuing pit bulls.

There is little doubt that mentoring relationships are assets that provide short and long term guidance and support. Like many other investments, the candid exchange of advice and insights between mentors and mentees increases in value over time. By design, all mentoring relationships are embedded with difference as it relates to tenure, pairing a more experienced mentor with a less experienced mentee. Often this distinction in tenure presents generational differences that the mentors and mentees accept from the outset, with both parties equally benefitting from exposure to different generational experiences and approaches. Mentors and mentees alike identify these generational differences as an enhancement to their mentoring relationship.

Beyond tenure, however, there is a natural tendency for these relationships to stem from general likeness or affinity, though there are tremendous benefits from mentoring relationships that are not developed out of obvious commonalities. The interviews below provide examples of mentoring across difference and feature mentor-mentee pairings who participated in the Indiana State Bar Association's Mentor Match program. Through a series of conversations, the participants share how they have successfully leveraged their differences and acquired greater access to a stream of candid and valuable insights and advice. After reviewing these accounts, it was evident that these mentor-mentee pairings considered their relationships an important factor in their personal and professional development and success.

In addition to generational differences, what other differences were present in your mentoring relationship – e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, LGBT, disability, religion, socio-economic, geography, type of practice, education?

Senior Judge Kenneth H. Johnson (paired with Luminita Nodit): Our mentor-mentee relationship contained elements of nearly all of the above. I am male; she is female. She received her J.D. from what was then known as the I.U. School of Law-Indianapolis in May of 2010. I received my J.D. from the same law school in May of 1972. She earned a bachelor of laws degree from Alexandru Ioan Cuza Law School in Romania in 2000. She studied for her masters of laws (business law) from West University of Timisoara, Romania, completing most of her course work before leaving Romania. She was a new lawyer, looking for employment in a public or private law firm. I, on the other hand, had been on the superior court bench for more than 35 years, so my knowledge of the inner workings of private law firms, when we began, was very meager.

Lumi Nodit (paired with Judge Johnson): When I graduated from law school in 2010, I was somewhat reluctant to talk to male judges, especially trial court judges. My previous interactions with the judiciary were mostly with women appellate judges. Reflecting on the power paradigm – an experienced male judge and a job-seeking young woman lawyer with an accent -- I was a bit intimidated before my first meeting with my mentor,

the Hon. Kenneth Johnson. Preparing for our first meeting felt somewhat like preparing for a hearing, trying to anticipate the judge's questions and hoping to deliver.

**Marion Circuit Court Magistrate Marcia J. Ferree (paired with Brandon M. Kimura):** *Geographic, cultural background and gender.* Brandon was comparatively new to the Midwest and Indiana, while I have lived in Indiana my entire life. Brandon was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai'i, and moved to Indiana as an adult a few years ago. Our practice areas varied. Brandon was gaining tremendous appellate experience as an intern with the Indiana Court of Appeals, and he was looking forward to obtaining an associate position at a civil law firm. My experience has mostly been at the trial level as a solo practitioner and now as judicial officer.

**Brandon Kimura (paired with Magistrate Ferree):** *Geographic and cultural background.* I was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai'i. I was on the west coast for my undergraduate degree and back in Honolulu for law school. As we began our mentoring relationship, I had been in Indiana for about one and a half years. Magistrate Ferree helped me adjust to the social and professional culture of the Midwest and Indianapolis. Our "practice" also varied because as a new graduate clerking for the Indiana Court of Appeals, I had a lot of ideas about different practice areas and working environments, but little experience. Magistrate Ferree was helpful in explaining to me her personal experiences in a variety of areas.

**What were your concerns (if any) about your ability to fulfill the mentoring expectations and execute your role effectively when you realized you would be mentoring or be mentored by this particular person?**

**Samuel R. "Chic" Born (paired with Aimee M. Gong):** Concerns included big firm "guidance" v. small firm "on your own"; issue recognition; and mentoring across gender differences (e.g., if a situation arose where a female attorney needed advice on professional dress, etc.).

**Aimee Gong (paired with Chic Born):** I had been informed that Chic was (and still is) a well-known and much respected attorney. I was concerned that I wouldn't have anything to contribute to the mentoring relationship.

**Judge Johnson:** I was greatly concerned how I could assist Lumi in the challenges of private practice, having been on the bench for so many years. I discovered that a "view from the bench" is neither a bad nor necessarily limiting approach. Matters concerning how to act in a courtroom, how to get matters into evidence, the benefits of civility to the court and opposing counsel were topics we were able to cover.

My son is a deputy prosecutor who practiced in a mid-sized law firm; he proved to be a wonderful resource. I also counseled with a number of other private practitioners to gain a perspective I could share with Lumi.

(continued on page 16)



*Magistrate Marcia J. Ferree, Indianapolis, serves in the Marion Circuit Court, Paternity Division. She previously had a private practice and worked as a public defender representing indigent parents in CHINS and termination of parental rights cases. Magistrate Ferree serves on the Civil Benchbook Committee of the Judicial Conference of Indiana and was chair of the ISBA Young Lawyers Section.*



*Brandon M. Kimura is the special assistant and counsel to Chief Justice Mark E. Recktenwald of the Hawai'i Supreme Court. He was previously an appellate and trial attorney at Schultz & Pogue LLP in Indianapolis and a judicial clerk to Judge Margaret G. Robb of the Indiana Court of Appeals. Brandon is a graduate of the ISBA Leadership Development Academy.*

*This article is published as part of the ISBA Diversity Committee's efforts and in consultation with fellow committee members Prof. Carlton M. Waterhouse and Renee A. Skeete.*

## MENTORING *continued from page 15*



S.R. "Chic" Born, Indianapolis, is a civil mediator with The Mediation Group LLC and formerly a longtime partner with Ice Miller LLP. Chic served as president of the Indianapolis and Indiana State bar associations, and was a member of the ABA House of Delegates for 10 years. He enjoys golf, travel, fly fishing and amateur auto racing.



Aimee M. Gong, Indianapolis, is an associate with Schultz & Pogue LLP and a graduate of Valparaiso University School of Law. She focuses her practice on medical malpractice defense. Aimee is chair of the State Bar's Animal Law Section and a graduate of the ISBA Leadership Development Academy. She is also active in the American Bar Association.

**In order to mentor/be mentored effectively across difference, what formal or informal preparations did you make, or what resources or other experiences did you consult or draw upon?**

**Magistrate Ferree:** I reviewed the Mentor Match materials provided by the ISBA, and I reviewed the Rules of Professional Conduct.

**Judge Johnson:** Mentoring Lumi showed me once again how different our system of laws was from Romania's and other systems around the world. The volume of materials provided us was a terrific aid to our accomplishing all that we did. We used many of the recommended online resources, which, in turn, led to the discovery of other materials to which we referred. I thought it was important that Lumi quantify her growth and changes throughout our relationship, so I asked her to keep a journal of her journey throughout this process. She did so faithfully, emailing me copies after our meetings.

I also thought it was important to see our mentees outside the mentor-mentee relationship. I would recommend taking them to dinner with their spouse or significant other along with your own. It provides a time of personal sharing where great discussions of family, backgrounds of growing up in a foreign country, aspirations and concerns are more easily brought to the fore.

**Lumi Nodit:** Before my first interaction with Judge Johnson, I called some lawyer friends with litigation experience to inquire about him. I was overwhelmed with their positive responses. The materials provided by the ISBA truly kept us on track. As our mentorship relationship developed, I discovered how much I enjoyed our discussions and meetings. Our discussions spurred my interest in new areas

of law. I wanted to learn more about Judge Johnson's asbestos work, so I signed up for asbestos updates on *JD Supra*. I was truly delighted when Judge Johnson extended an invitation to bring our spouses to a dinner meeting. I learned so much about mentorship, life, legal careers and differences during our dinner conversation.

**What was the most challenging aspect of mentoring/being mentored across difference? How did you address it?**

**Lumi Nodit:** Before our mentorship started, I was concerned that Judge Johnson might not relate to my experience – trying to pursue a legal career in a foreign country in the tough legal market of 2010. But the most challenging aspect of being mentored by Judge Johnson was my unsound concern that he would lack the patience to get used to my accent. During our first meetings, I tried to speak louder and slower, and I tried to listen more.

**Judge Johnson:** Probably the most challenging aspect with the language: Not that Lumi couldn't speak the Queen's English, *she could*. In just about any other profession, pronouncing words with a heavy accent would be characterized as cute or charismatic, but when speaking quirky legal terms before a legal tribunal, you have to be more spot-on to be sure you are understood. Lumi has also experienced some gender-related issues in legal situations that I think were exacerbated by her accent – by what others who had not heard her speak before characterized as a lack of knowledge. We addressed it head-on. Lumi has an inner drive that causes her to want to be the best person and lawyer she can be, so she worked very hard at everything we did. The challenge would have

been so much harder had she not had such a positive, "can do" attitude. We shared a "whatever it took" vision of immersing her into the American/Indiana legal system and community.

**Magistrate Ferree:** I did not find it challenging. Our common interest in the profession of law – and how we could positively influence the profession, financially support ourselves and our families, serve others and live well-rounded, healthy lives – impacted the mentoring process far more than any of our innate differences. The impact that our differences had on the mentoring process was unremarkable.

**Brandon Kimura:** I did not find it challenging. Our schedules were a little difficult to coordinate at times, but we worked it out and made the most of the time we had together.

**Did you have any occasion to place yourself in your mentor/mentee's shoes in order to understand a particular perspective?**

**Magistrate Ferree:** Yes, I placed myself "in his shoes" when thinking about how professional connections are often made over time and/or through mutually known third parties or family members. Many Indianapolis lawyers have deep roots in the area and in the legal profession. As someone fairly new to Indianapolis, Brandon had the challenge of making connections and building relationships that would serve him throughout his career.

**Brandon Kimura:** I'm particularly conscientious, sometimes more than I should be. A side effect of this "condition," though, is that I often place myself in others' shoes in an attempt to understand their perspective. I find that doing so often helps me glean far more

information from a meeting than simply what is said.

**What are the most important attributes of your relationship today?**

**Chic Born:** Friendship and trust.

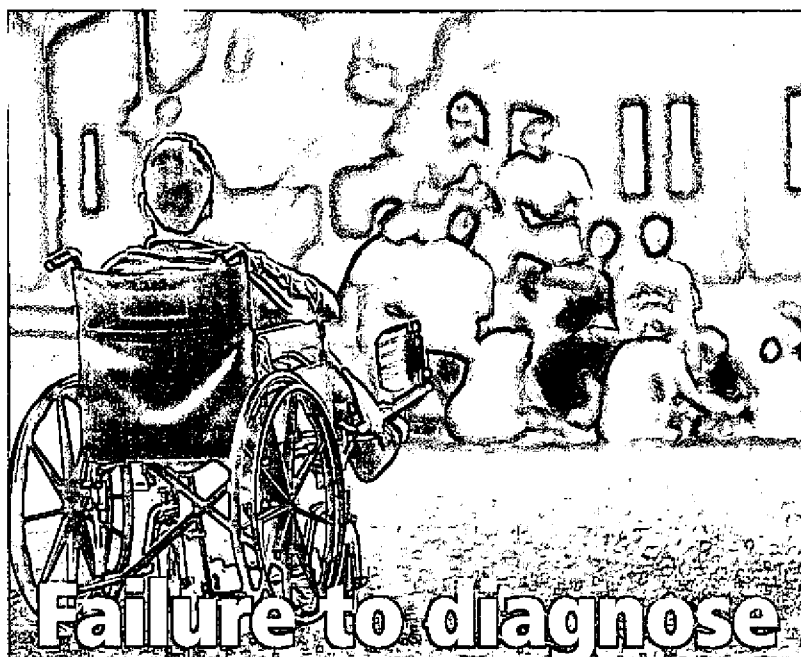
**Aimee Gong:** Having an experienced attorney, mentor and friend from whom I can ask for advice

and insight. I also enjoy continuing to get to know Chic as a person.

**Magistrate Ferree:** Trust, mutual respect and comfortableness are important attributes of our relationship.

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## MENTORING *continued from page 17*

**Lumi Nodit:** The ability to call or email Judge Johnson and ask him for his advice is a gift.

### **What have you learned about mentoring across difference?**

**Judge Johnson:** One of the most important things for me was keeping an open mind – remem-

bering Lumi's life experience. Seeing the world and the world of law through her eyes was very broadening for me. We spent a great deal of time talking about the whys, whats and hows: Why was this law enacted? How was this case decided? What purpose does this law have in how we enforce it or

how we help clients deal with it? And another important lesson learned: remembering that mentoring is a two-way street.

**Lumi Nodit:** I learned that everyone brings their own cultural lens and experience into the relationship, which can challenge and trigger growth.

I learned once again not to prejudge. All mentors and mentees enter into relationship across differences with information and misinformation, often based on individual fears, stereotypes and prejudice. I feared that experienced male judges would lack the patience to get acquainted with my accent. I was proven wrong.

**Chic Born:** To be imaginative. To be more open.

**Aimee Gong:** I have learned that while there are differences in practice backgrounds, age, etc., there is still common ground that can be discovered. Chic has been a great mentor, and I value his advice.

**Brandon Kimura:** Mentoring relationships with people of different backgrounds and experiences are powerful and memorable, and can be more eye opening than a mentoring relationship among those who are similar.

**Magistrate Ferree:** We have more commonalities than differences.

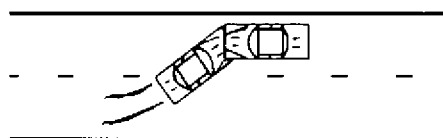
### **What benefits have you gained from this mentoring relationship?**

**Aimee Gong:** I have had the opportunity to learn about different aspects of the legal practice and met some very respectable lawyers and judges.

**Chic Born:** Insights into thinking – viewpoint of a lawyer 40 years my junior. Optimism for Aimee and her career.

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**Judge Johnson:** It broadens your horizons to see the law from another person's viewpoint, especially one so different from our own. After a short while into our relationship, I realized I needed to be better prepared to cover the materials on our agenda.

We had occasions to discuss the challenge of managing one's time, balancing the challenges of family, practice and personal growth. At the end of our time, Lumi gave me an hourglass that I treasure. It sits in a prominent place on my desk, reminding me to pay heed to my own advice.

**Lumi Nodit:** Judge Johnson taught me to be self-confident, to do good work and to never lose my passion for the practice of law. His encouragements helped me along the way, and his praise boosted my confidence. Most of all, he taught me the importance of staying true to yourself and your uniqueness. I praise Judge Johnson for his caring commitment to inspire me to successfully navigate my uniqueness (my Romanian accent) in the courtroom.

If a colleague is contemplating a similar relationship and asks for your advice, what advice would you share?

**Brandon Kimura:** Seek a mentoring relationship with someone who is as different from you as possible. Then be quick to listen and slow to speak.

**Aimee Gong:** The colleague should be open-minded and humble. As a young lawyer, there is a lot to learn about the legal community along with the requirements of the mentor program.

**Lumi Nodit:** Mentoring is the art of making the most of a given situation. Both mentor and mentee should keep an open mind and welcome the gifts and opportunities

that mentoring across differences provide.

**Judge Johnson:** *Do it! Do it! Do it!* Not only is mentoring a great honor, but it's also a fantastic experience and a real contest as to whether you as mentor will learn as much or more than your mentee. It causes you to sharpen some of your own legal skills: how to interpret a statute or case holding; what are the measurable effects on our community of laws that impact our personal conduct; lawyers need to be leaders – what skills do I need to be a great one; what contributions can I make to my community (e.g., providing pro bono legal counsel or being involved in civic organizations); and what contributions can I make in furtherance of the rule of law and how others view lawyers, judges and others in the justice system.

It doesn't really require that much of a time commitment, and the benefits far outweigh the time and energy you invest. And that word "invest" is so appropriate in this situation because you will get more out of this experience

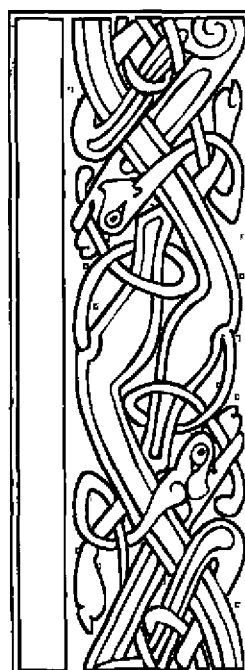
the more you invest in the life of your mentee.

*One cautionary note:* It is vitally important that you, as mentor, are prepared when you meet with your mentee. Those answers that come off the top of your head and descriptions of how you've always done it, sell you and your mentee short. Plus, most of the judges and attorneys I know tend to be lifetime learners. You will be amazed at how much you learn engaging in this experience. The Army's catch phrase, "Be all you can be," should be your guide when you look to contribute to the experience and preparation of our young attorneys.

**Would you do it again?**

Unanimous response:  
"Yes, without hesitation." ☺

*Brita A. Horvath, Indianapolis, manages all aspects of Faegre Baker Daniels' diversity programs. In her role as manager of diversity & inclusion, she develops initiatives and strategies to further the firm's ongoing commitment to diversity through its recruitment, retention, development and advancement efforts. She can be reached at [brita.horvath@FaegreBD.com](mailto:brita.horvath@FaegreBD.com).*



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