Justice Jenkins: I am Martin Jenkins, an associate justice of the California Supreme Court. I'm here this afternoon as part of the California Court of Appeal Legacy Program entering — interviewing rather, Justice Halim Dhanidina, retired, of the Second District Court of Appeal, Division Three. And we're going to have a conversation about his amazing career both pre-bench and bench and get to know him — get to know him better because he's worthy of it. Why don't we start at the beginning? Welcome. Can I call you Halim?

Justice Dhanidina: Yes. Absolutely, Marty. I'll call you, Marty.

Justice Jenkins: Perfect. Why don't we talk about your formative years, where did you grow up in?

Justice Dhanidina: All right. So, I grew up in the suburban — North Suburbs of Chicago. I was born in the city of Chicago on the South Side, and I grew up in Evanston, Illinois, which is just on the north border of Lake Michigan. My parents immigrated to the Chicago area from East Africa, from Tanzania, shortly after they got married. And so that's where I was born. That's where my older brother was born and most of our extended family settled there.

Justice Jenkins: Just the two of you? The two children, your brother?

Justice Dhanidina: Yes. Two of us in the immediate nuclear family. My older brother is about two years older than I am.

Justice Jenkins: Okay, okay. And Evanston, is that where Northwestern is?

Justice Dhanidina: It is. In fact, we basically grew up in the shadow of Northwestern University and it was a nice experience being in a college town.

Justice Jenkins: Right. What did your parents do for a living? Pre-immigration and post-immigration.

Justice Dhanidina: So, both of my parents were trained as teachers.

Justice Jenkins: Okay.

Justice Dhanidina: Different types. So, my mom specialized in early childhood education. She was a Montessori school teacher. And my father came up as mostly a middle school age or high school age teacher. And so, education really is in the background of our family.

My dad transitioned into more of the administrative side. He got a degree in school finance. And so, in the Chicago area, when I was growing up, my earliest memories are of my mom teaching at her preschool and my dad

taking the train for hours to the Chicago public schools' headquarters where he worked for most of his career.

Justice Jenkins: All right. And were you educated in public schools?

Justice Dhanidina: I was. So, I had the good fortune of attending a magnet school, which was basically from kindergarten through eighth grade. It was the — the full name, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Laboratory Experimental Schools. We all refer to it as King Lab. So, I was lucky to go to King Lab pretty much all the way from first grade through eighth grade and then I went to Evanston Township High School, which was our local public high school through 12th grade.

Justice Jenkins: And you — the title of your K–8 school, Experimental Martin Luther King. But what was experimental about? What was that component like?

Justice Dhanidina: So, as I understood it — and for me, this was my reality. So, I didn't — I saw it from the inside. It was, a very significant component of the education at that school had to do with learning about living with people who are different from you and the importance of diversity, the importance of equality, and it didn't even occur to me at the time that other children didn't have that type of education. I just thought, that's how everybody was educated. But a huge part of the curriculum and the mission of the school centered around Dr. King and his legacy. And so, that was, I think, very important to me in my formative years.

Justice Jenkins: And did you discuss, sort of, that — those curricular expectations that infusion with Dr. King's philosophy. How did that manifest in your coursework or extracurricular activity?

Justice Dhanidina: You know, it's interesting because thinking back on it, I realized that it was always there. So, for example, I remember at a very young age, first grade, second grade, there were always major components of the classroom activities that included experiences from different cultures. So, there were days where people would come in and they would bring like potluck food items from their family, and we would all share them.

My parents, I remember, were really happy about the fact that our second-grade teacher, her name is Dr. Fisher, had a huge unit on African culture, which my parents were not expecting to see and they themselves, being from Africa, I remember really enjoyed the fact that one of the things we learned how to do was to paint African face masks. And these weren't things that I think were occurring in other public schools but it, sort of created within all of us there at King Lab an appreciation for people who are different and the cultures that are different. So that you didn't have a fear of it, you have more of a curiosity.

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Justice Jenkins: Really interesting. I'm wondering as I sit here, talk to you, how diverse was that school?

Justice Dhanidina: For Evanston, it was actually quite diverse, and Evanston is an interesting community in the sense that, like a lot of the Chicago area, there is diversity from 30,000 feet in the air, but then when you get on the ground, you start to lose that a little bit. And I noticed that in particular at my high school, where 40 — around 40 percent of my high school was not white, but it didn't really feel mixed in that sense because of tracking and honors and AP courses.

A lot of the classes that I was in didn't have anyone that looked like me and were predominantly white. If you looked at the school as a whole, it looked diverse. King Lab was a little bit different in the sense that because it was a magnet school, it intentionally recruited and admitted students from the different parts of the city so that all of the classes involved people from every background that was represented in Evanston. So that's in Caucasian, African American, Latino, even some Asian, which, for the time, you know, late 70s, was not that common, but I definitely gained a lot from that.

One of the things that — one of the ways it made me feel I think comfortable as someone who is different from the majority was that there wasn't so much of this idea that you had a funny sounding name, for example, because there were all kinds of different names in our classroom during attendance and during roll call. You would hear people with names that are coming from many different cultures and so it wasn't as stark of an impact on you that you were different from everybody. Everybody was different from each other and that was normal.

Justice Jenkins: In this neighborhood that you grew up in, I mean, you said South Side of Chicago, and one thinks about the variance is you're going to lose you that that exists in the South Side of Chicago. What were the sort of cultural competencies or values that your parents sort of infused? And then how did that interface with respect to schools you went to and children you got to know?

Justice Dhanidina: You know, it's interesting because it's a certain extent, my parents, when they would talk about their experience as immigrants. You know, you have to understand our family, we are almost perpetual immigrants in the sense that my parents grew up in East Africa, but they are of South Asian ancestry. Their parents also grew up in East Africa, but their grandparents and my great-grandparents immigrated from India, from South Asia. And so, even my parents before they immigrated to the U.S., lived in a community that

was the minority community. And so, when they came to the U.S., they sort of bought into the whole melting pot ideology, and I think maybe expected that this was a country where you would go and some of the older aspects of your identity -- your racial identity, maybe even religious identity -- didn't matter.

You came here to forge a new identity as an American that made you sort part of the cohesive unit of society. And I think they were surprised that that wasn't always the case when they got here. I remember specifically my dad making comments regarding, I guess biographical information he would have to fill out in certain governmental or employment forms, and there was always the question of race, and it's interesting how this has evolved over the years because back then, you had a couple of choices when you were filling out your race. It was white, Black, and other. That's how it started. Then there was sort of the Hispanic or non-white Hispanic, but there was always that other bubble and that was a bubble that I just assumed was my category because I was always an Other.

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And my dad would sometimes express frustration. Like, why? You know, I should be able to just fill in a bubble that says human. Why am I putting myself in this type of category? And I remember that, at a very young age, but Other became my identity. It was decades later before I filled out any type of biographical form that had Asian or South Asian in it. And so, in that sense, I feel like we always sort of felt like we were part of society but not fully included in the ways that maybe people who are in the majority would be.

Justice Jenkins: Right. Interesting. Really interesting. Who would you say were your role models? Folks that influenced you pretty early on we're talking about?

Justice Dhanidina: Honestly, probably it's going to sound like a cliché, but it really was my parents, because they I think tried to help my brother and I navigate what it was like to be in a community where — again, you're part of everything that's going on, but you're not really fully included. And I think they wanted to help us try to be okay with that, because I think maybe when they first came to the United States, they thought all you have to do is assimilate, as they say, right? And once you've assimilated, you speak English, you're going to be treated like everybody else. And that was never the case.

And what's interesting is that I always looked to them for guidance, but then I also soaked in some of their experiences. And sometimes, their frustrations would also come out and I would let that resonate a little bit in ways that maybe wasn't unintentional on their part. I remember specifically as I was growing up, we lived mostly in modest accommodations.

My parents had us in apartments and then we graduated to a slightly larger condominium. And then when I was in high school, they were able to buy us a single-family home for the first time. And I had this memory of my parents going out house shopping, and I didn't always go with them. And they found this one house in particular that they were — my mom in particular was so excited to be in. It was only a few blocks from where we were living.

And I only found out after the fact, once the deal was done and we had this new house to move in to, my mom explained to me that when they had first come to Evanston, before we were even born or maybe shortly after I was born, this very same house was a house that they had identified, that one that they wanted to buy. And at the time, the owners of the house would not sell to them, because it was in a fairly affluent and all-white part of town.

And so, the fact that all these years later, that same house became available and this time they were able to buy it, and they were able to move into it, it's sort of, I think, made my parents feel like we've been knocking on the door for a long time and now we finally have made it through, and that had an impact on me. I was young, I was maybe 14 at the time.

But even as a 14-year-old, the gravity of that moment was not lost on me that this was something that sometimes you have to stay at it and persevere and not give up, because ultimately the things that elude you will become within your grasp if you just stay with it. And so that was a lesson that wasn't taught to me. I think it wasn't taught to me intentionally as the way a parent might give their child advice, but it was something that I — that experience was something that would inform I think the rest of my young adulthood.

Justice Jenkins: Powerful. Yeah. So, it's pretty clear to me, knowing you, and I've known you for several years now, that extremely bright thoughtful, you were a good student.

Justice Dhanidina: I was and it's funny too, because in some ways I was a pretty mischievous kid. I liked to goof off and I was not studious because I just enjoyed the school atmosphere. I would try to get away with doing a little bit less.

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I didn't always live up to my potential academically, I don't think, but you have to take that within context. I grew up in a household where if you got an A-minus in something, there was going to be an explanation as to why you didn't get the A. And so growing up, in order to avoid those conversations -- I didn't like having those conversations with my parents --

that's what motivated me to always try to get the top academic scores that I could. And I think I'm a different kind of parent to my kids, but I can't complain, because I think my parents held those standards out for me, because those are standards, they held for themselves.

Coming from a relatively poor part of East Africa, they knew that they weren't going anywhere to improve their station in life unless academically they hit every mark. There wasn't going to be any opportunity or the type of opportunity they wanted for themselves and for their family. They weren't going to get those opportunities unless they achieved everything that they could through education, and they imparted that on us at a very early age.

Justice Jenkins: It's an interesting point, because we read now quite regularly that they're sort of a move in the country, college is not for everyone and it's so expensive and why spend that money. Do you have any thoughts about that?

Justice Dhanidina: I think I understand where it comes from, but I think it is a short-sighted way of looking at a humanistic education. You don't go to college and choose an undergraduate major because there's a straight line to be drawn between that course of education and a particular career and a particular income. I think right now because there is stress, economic stress on society, people are looking for those straight lines.

How do I make the kind of living that will allow me to support myself and my family? And I think that's a logical way of looking at education, but education is not just about helping you accumulate things, material things. I think education is about your development as a person. And from a very, very young age, I remember the message that in life there's ups and downs, things will come your way, things will be taken from you, but education is one of those things that will never be taken from you.

So, no matter what happens to you, when you educate yourself, you will always have that. And I think a college education, frankly it's going to be controversial, but even a liberal arts education is something that reinforces who you are as a human being, and it helps you understand your place in society and understand your place in the world and in the universe and I think aids the way in which we interact with each other. So, I think that I'm a big supporter of the college education dare I say for everybody, because I think it can improve the lives of anyone who seeks it.

Justice Jenkins: So, we've sort of had quite naturally migrated to college for you. And you're a good high school student, you've talked about AP courses and things. What were your passions in terms of subject matter courses and how did that track or how was it relevant to your decisions as to where to go to college and what to major in?

Justice Dhanidina: So, those are actually really interesting questions, because when I was growing up, you always hear about the same big-name schools as being the schools that the academically inclined students gravitate towards. And I discovered almost by accident, I guess it's a theme that gets repeated with me from time to time, things kind of get on my radar by accident a lot.

But a tiny little liberal arts college out here in Southern California called Pomona College caught my attention. And I had discovered it, as I said, unintentionally. The high school that I went to, being in the Midwest, had mostly graduates that would go to midwestern schools. A lot of Big Ten schools, Northwestern, Michigan, University of Illinois, those types of places.

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And we had this program in 12th grade where you could skip one class per day and the same class once per week in the fall to go attend a presentation of various school representatives. And so, I had a friend in my P.E. class, and he knew about the school called Pomona College. I had never heard of it, and he said, "Well, you want to come to the presentation with me?" And I thought, how badly do I want to go to P.E.? Probably not that badly. "Sure. I'll hang out with you and go." And so, I went, and I sat there, and it was a very small group. Maybe about five or six of us there, learning about the school.

And I remember thinking, okay, well, I hadn't heard of it, but it seems pretty interesting. And then I was really taken — this is going to sound so superficial, but I remember there was a slideshow and the slideshow they were showing the campus with snow-capped mountains and people in shorts and palm trees and for a Midwesterner I thought, hmm, maybe this was probably worth a second look.

And then it turned out that it was on the common application. And so, I don't want to say it was a shortcut, but kind of a shortcut for me when I was applying to college was to apply to as many on the common application as possible so I wouldn't have to reinvent the wheel over and over again. And I didn't really start researching the school until after I got in.

So, I got into Pomona and a handful of other schools, and I really started to ask myself these introspective questions because it was very different from many of the other schools where I applied. It was small, no one had ever heard of it. It was really, really far from everything that I knew in the Midwest. And it felt like it would be taking a major leap to go to a school like that because I didn't know anyone who had gone there.

Even most of my teachers hadn't even heard of the school. But the more I read about it, the more I could see myself there. It felt like it was a way to really find out more about myself, to get out of my comfort zone, to move geographically and in some ways reputationally to move far from my comfort zone. And I'm so glad that I did that because I ended up at this school, which was really the perfect school for me.

And I'm a strong believer, by the way, in the fact that -- I do some mentoring of high school age kids and during this time of the year, this is the fall, right -- they always are focused on the same very small set of schools. And there's this idea that maybe based on U.S. News and World Report or various rankings, that's how you should consider where you should go. And I don't really believe that that's true. I don't even believe that that's true for my school, but I loved it there.

And so, what I always tell kids is that I don't think you go to a school that I love or your parents love or that your teachers love, but you should go to a school that you're going to love as much as I loved mine, because you want to look back decades later and have fond memories of it.

And that's what it was for me. It was like, again, small liberal arts college. I was surrounded by people who were placed there, I think, with some degree of intention, representing different backgrounds, geographic, racial, socioeconomic, religious. All crammed together in this one tiny little school.

And so again, I guess similar to King Lab, there was this mission of having the educational environment include diversity. People from different backgrounds that that is — you're not just learning in class from your books, you're learning from each other. And I found that to be the case at that school.

And so, to get back to the original question, what piqued my curiosity, honestly, I didn't even know. I went to college thinking initially, maybe being a lawyer, but the only reason why was not because I knew anything about the law, and it's going to sound kind of funny too but, from the youngest age I can think of, my family, an extended family always used to say, "You know Halim, you should be a lawyer." And we didn't have any lawyers in our family. You know, my parents were teachers and people in other careers, no lawyers at all. And I realized where that came from.

Among all of the kids in my generation, I was probably best known for being especially talkative, or maybe even argumentative. And so, in their minds they thought, well, that's what lawyers are, they talk a lot, they argue a lot.

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This is the kid who should do that because he already has those skills. And so, then I went through this period when I first started at Pomona where I thought, You know, do I really want to be a lawyer or is this just something that everyone's always told me? Maybe I should think about something else. And right around that time my parents also, they kind of latched on to that opportunity, of my indecisiveness, and I kind of joke with them that their South Asian gene kicked in.

So even though they were both teachers, all of a sudden from the first time in my whole life, they started talking to me about medicine. "You know Halim, you should probably be a doctor. Maybe you should try being pre-med." I had never — I mean, science did not come easily to me. I did okay but it wasn't a subject I was passionate about.

But then I thought, okay, well, being a doctor is a way I can help people and I wanted to choose a profession where I can help other people. So, I thought, All right. Sure. Why not, I'll be pre-med. And that lasted until my first chemistry midterm. I got that back and I realized, one, I'm glad that I have the option to go pass-fail in this class, and two, I tried it, now I'm going to do something different.

And so, I changed my major five times as an undergrad, and I just kept changing it until I ran out of time. So, at one point I was a philosophy major, biology, politics, government, and then finally I landed on international relations. And I'm glad I did because ultimately, that was the subject matter that I was actually the most curious about. I was the most passionate about it. I found it to be really, really interesting and it appealed to my ideas of, kind of understanding my place in the world and understanding how people from different areas interact with each other and how conflicts don't have to be intractable, how there are solutions to some of these problems.

And so, I thought, this is what I was meant to do. I'm going to study international relations. But then I will go to law school, study public international law, and maybe work for the State Department or United Nations or an NGO or something like that. That's kind of where I saw myself going.

Justice Jenkins: Interesting. Because as I listened to you, I was thinking a career in the Foreign Service. Perhaps as a diplomat, something of that nature. But there for you was a connection to the law. Can you say more about how that came together?

Halim Dhanidina: Yeah. No, absolutely. So, the way I thought of it was, if you understand how different — if you understand conflict, generally, the law provides a

framework through which conflict can be resolved and also resolved in ways that is not necessarily the result of a zero-sum game, right?

If you think about civil law in particular, civil litigation, which is something that I've experienced very recently, this is an area of the law that has this reputation for sort of people fighting tooth and nail over the smallest details. And the adversarial process at its most extreme. And yet, an extraordinarily high percentage of those disputes are resolved. And how are they resolved? Well, they're resolved through this process of making decisions that aren't based on passion but more an analysis of what your best interests are, pros and cons, benefits and burdens. All of those components within the framework of the law help people find a way to a resolution.

And so, in the context of international law, that's sort of how I saw it. I would study things like the Israel-Palestinian conflict, or at the time, conflict that was going on in the Balkans or with the break apart of the former Soviet Union. And there was conflict in all parts of the world. And in my mind, I thought, maybe this is a little bit of arrogance, but I thought, there are solutions to these problems.

All of these problems have solutions, and it just takes the right approach and the right perspective to bring people to a point where they could see what's in their best interests. And so, that was sort of how I saw a legal education being the pathway to making people's lives better on this larger international scale.

Justice Jenkins: All right. So, the interest in law then began to take shape?

Halim Dhanidina: Yes.

Justice Jenkins: As you went through Pomona. And how about outside of the academics and outside of what your sort of life goal might be? What was that experience like for you from the social standpoint?

Halim Dhanidina: I'm glad you asked that because this is another reason why I really wanted to get out of my comfort zone and to go to that school. I grew up in a very tight-knit family, but I think, not unlike a lot of immigrant families, there was this feeling that your safety is with your people. And you know, you can interact with people outside of the family and the greater society but you — you're not really welcomed there with open arms in the same way you are at home.

And I think I already had sort of a natural inclination to being introverted, I was already a little bit shy, and so I stayed within my safe space. I did not have a terribly active social life in high school. Most of my kind of fun activities were with family, with my brother, with my cousins. And I didn't

really like that about myself. I thought, you know, there's so much more out there and I think my parents were — they were just very protective of us and they — sometimes they would betray just through their use of words a perspective that I didn't always — that I didn't really find appealing. They would say things like, "We do things a certain way, the Americans do things another way."

And in my mind, I thought, well, that's an immigrant mentality. I was born here. So, when you're talking about the Americans, who are we talking about? Because I know I'm not from anywhere else, this is really where I'm from. And they — you know, I don't think that was intentional on their part but that was just sort of how they understood their place in society. And so that also kind of made me feel like I needed to stay inside of — like, stay in my lane, stay inside of my comfort zone.

And so, I went to Pomona, and I thought, You know what, I want to go somewhere where I don't know anybody and nobody knows me because now I can reinvent myself if I want. I could show up on day one, I can be whoever I want and no one is going to think, Why is this person acting this way all of a sudden, because they don't know me. And so, I took advantage of that. I made a leap, I think socially, going to Pomona College, and while I still sort of had that inclination to being introverted, it was a lot less pronounced than it was when I was in high school.

And so, I got involved in a lot of student activities. I got involved in a lot of mentoring. I was a resident advisor, I was a mentor to first year students and towards the latter part of my college career, people started to look at me as kind of a leader in a certain sense, that would then show up later in my life, and that had to do with my religious identity.

Right around the time that I started college, that was when the first Gulf War occurred. And so, there was a lot of curiosity about the Middle East, about the Muslim religion and what it meant. And I — it was interesting because I was raised as a Muslim and I felt like I had a pretty good understanding, if not theological, but a pretty good understanding of what that meant. And also, I had people coming to me and asking me, "So, um, you're Muslim. What's that all about?"

And there was even one huge article in the L.A. Times that was — the headline was What the Arabs Think. And without any sense of irony, one of my fellow classmates came to me with that article and said, "Take a look at this, is this what you think?" And I thought, okay, well first of all, I'm not Arab, but it made me realize that there are people with questions and questions, mind you, in good faith. Not meant as a way of being offensive or stereotyping, but they just wanted to know about this whole other segment of the world they had never thought about before. And so, Pomona

College at the time did not have a whole lot of Muslim students. I mean really, we're talking about a handful, maybe between five and ten at all grades, at any given time.

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And I remember there was one particular year where during the month of fasting, during Ramadan, I had gotten together with a bunch of other Muslim students and we decided we were going to try to fast together, and that usually involves getting up really early to eat something before the sun comes up and eating together after the sun goes down. It's not easy to do. Easier to do in college than as a regular working person because your schedule's a little more flexible, but we noticed that that particular year — because Ramadan moves around the calendar since it's based on a lunar calendar -- because of daylight savings and when sunset was, there was one day a week where the dining halls would close while the sun was still out before we could get anything to eat for dinner. And so, we thought, you know what? Let's see if we can contact the school administration and see if some accommodation could be made for us. And so, we got together as a group, kind of laid out the explanation for why we were requesting this change.

The administration was wide open to the idea, and we thought, you know what? Maybe there's more we can do together as a group, not just to help ourselves out, but there is this curiosity on campus. Maybe we can band together, form an organization that can be part of the educational fabric of the community where people can learn about us and our background, and we can sort of participate and be part of the extracurricular student group universe there at the school. There was a chaplain's office that had groups representing a lot of different religions, but there was no Muslim group affiliated with that.

And so we thought, let's just take the formal steps and organize. And so, we came together, a very small fledgling organization. We called ourselves the Muslim Students Association. We just kind of came up with it because it had a ring to it. That name would later appear in a negative way, later on in my professional development, but it seemed innocuous and innocent to us.

And we actually started creating programming for the student community. We would bring in guest speakers, we would have panels where people could learn about Muslim beliefs, Muslim culture. And really one of the best things about that whole experience was that, when you start a new student organization you have to be sponsored by members of the administration or the faculty, and we were actually sponsored by a rabbi that was the head of the campus Hillel organization, the Jewish organization, and it was a beautiful thing.

We had — I remember there was one of our first events where we had Muslim and Jewish ritualistic prayer kind of side-by-side that people could participate in and experience and it was really my first introduction into the world of sort of interfaith organization, which is something that I would continue later on.

Justice Jenkins: Right. Really interesting. I just want to ask you before we move to UCLA Law School. You saw the opportunity that grew from world currents, what was happening in the Gulf War. Did you see that as, in the organization, as a way to foster inclusiveness? There are individuals who might have viewed, bringing the article to you and asking you, "Is this the way Arabs think?" as a micro-aggression of some sort. Explain how you processed that in a way that fostered inclusiveness.

Halim Dhanidina: A lot of that I think comes from an intuition that I developed over the years because I would be lying if I said that I didn't experience micro- or macro-aggression growing up. I most certainly did. I've been called a variety of very bigoted names growing up, in the way that I think a lot of young people — that happens to a lot of young people.

And I could tell from a very young age, whether somebody was coming at me with that type of malicious intent or if it was born more out of curiosity in good faith. And I think I've honed my ability to distinguish between the two because I think it's important. It's important not to have your defenses up so much that, when there's an opportunity for conversation, you cut it off, because that doesn't do anybody any good.

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And also, I've never been one of those — I've never been the kind of person who is offended that easily. So, I could kind of tell, when that student approached me with that newspaper article, he just really wanted to know, that's why he was reading it in the first place. And those opportunities are valuable, right? You don't always get them.

So, I feel like there's so much conflict in the world and in society between people who feel that they are in one camp or another and they define themselves in so many ways by the group that they belong to as well as the group that they are in opposition to. And so, we do less talking to each other now, probably, than when I was a student because everyone is always on that war footing.

And it's a sort of, to borrow a phrase from the international relations world, when people are talking, they're not fighting. And so, I wanted to identify opportunities to sort of educate people and to give them information that

they otherwise wouldn't have. Because if they don't get it from me, they're going to get it from somewhere, right? There's this information vacuum that's out there and it will get filled and if it gets filled by people who actually have that type of malicious intent, that doesn't do anyone any good.

So, if you have the opportunity, and this is -- I would encourage anyone, if you ever have an opportunity to have a conversation with somebody who was approaching you out of curiosity and in good faith, you should take it. And the worst thing that could happen is not that bad because you've at least provided an example to that person of who you are and what you represent.

A perfect example of this happened very shortly after I became a judge, and then we can rewind, but I remember that I was invited to speak at Trinity Law School in Orange County on the topic of Sharia law, which is something that I would be confronted with a lot after my appointment to the bench. And I told one of my friends that, hey, I got invited to speak on this panel on Sharia law.

Obviously, I don't know anything about Sharia law from a theological perspective, that's not my training. American law is really what I studied and what — the area that I practice in. And my friend told me and said, "Don't go, this is a setup. Don't go. They're asking you there so that you can be sort of a target for whatever negative views that they have." And I thought, you know what, on the chance that maybe people — some people there will really have questions, I want to be the one to answer them because if I don't fill that seat on the panel, who else is going to fill that seat? And what are they going to say?

And I don't put too much pressure on myself, even from my Pomona days and all the way up until now. I don't put too much pressure on myself to be the spokesperson of a billion people and very diverse points of view within the Muslim world. All I can really do is be myself, and I figure if I am reasonable and logical and polite, respectful, the worst-case scenario is, I don't change anyone's mind but I've at least provided a counter example to what they were expecting, and that's been my experience throughout the years.

Justice Jenkins: Wow. Very interesting. We talked about the overlay of conflict resolution and the backdrop to conflict resolution that law as an overlay can provide, your interest in international relations, and so I know you went to UCLA School of Law and that when you graduated you end up becoming a district attorney. So, what happened on the way to the Foreign Service so far?

Halim Dhanidina: It was a major shift and it happened pretty early in my stay there at UCLA. So, UCLA was a great law school, and I still stay very connected to my own alma mater. But at the time that I went, there wasn't a very well-developed

international law curriculum. I think there was one class that was more on the private sector commercial international law angle, nothing about public international law at all. And so, I remember my very first summer, I was in the career office looking through different brochures and places I could apply for my first internship.

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And I applied to a lot of places on the East Coast and the Foreign Service international law realm. But the school wasn't terribly connected to any of those potential employers. And so, I sent out cold resumes, never heard anything back. The best opportunity that I actually have for my first summer to do anything in the law was an internship at the public defender's office and I was encouraged to apply because a friend of mine, a very close family friend, had just graduated from Hastings Law School and had been working as a public defender in San Francisco.

And she said, "You know what, check this out. I think you'll enjoy it." And at first, I wasn't sure I was going to do that because going to law school — as I've discussed, I was very interested in studying international law, but I wasn't sure that that's what I was going to do. One thing I was fairly certain of was that I didn't really want anything to do with the courtroom and certainly not criminal law. And so, that was my feeling going in.

However, I enjoyed the criminal law curriculum in my first year. It was something that was very interesting to me, and I thought, Well, okay. And if my friend does this, let's just see what it's about. Because really, at that stage in your career, there are no bad experiences, right? You can either rule something in or rule it out, you're ahead of the game either way. So, I started this internship at the public defender's office here in Los Angeles and I was blown away.

It hooked me in right away because I was assigned to two different courthouses. I was at the arraignment court in downtown L.A. connected to the jail and then I was also at East L.A. court, and I got to have very meaningful interaction with clients, people who are charged with crimes. And I could see sort of firsthand how their experience really was very disorienting for so many of them. They'd had no familiarity with the criminal justice system. They are scared. They feel like they have to trust people and entities that they have never had to trust before, and the work seems especially noble to me.

You can represent people who don't even have the money to pay you. They have no resources and you are truly the last line of defense for them — the only thing standing between the state and these individuals who come from more humble means, where liberty is at stake, and I thought, this is what

being a lawyer is about, like, if you can amass a skill set to help people like this, in this circumstance, that's worthy of attention. And so, I loved it. And the people that I met, the public defenders that I worked with, just were fantastic and great role models. And I thought, this is something I could really, really do.

My second summer and I'd already decided, Okay. This is what I want. In my second summer, I thought, well, let me just — for comparison's sake, now that I see that I am enjoying the courtroom and I'm enjoying criminal law, let me see what's what the other side is like. And so, I applied for a position with the district attorney, they had a summer position. And I went through that whole process, and I remember they said, "Well, we've got some good news and we've got some bad news.

The good news is we would love for you to be an intern for us this summer. The bad news is we are no longer offering this as a funded position so you would have to do it on a voluntary basis." And this is after working my first summer for free also, and so I thought, well, let's call that plan B and I took it as a sign that I also had an offer from the federal public defender, which was paid. And so, I thought, okay. This is the universe telling me that I should be a public defender.

I've had a lot of conversations with the universe over the years, not always as reliable as I would like. But so, the universe said, okay. This is what you should do. And I did it, and it was another amazing experience. It was different on the federal side obviously. It was a lot more research and writing based. But I learned about the federal law and federal criminal law, I got to second chair, not appear, but sit at counsel table during a criminal trial and I thought, okay. This is — I can see myself doing this. So, my plan was to go through my 3L year, I didn't participate in any on-campus interviews because I thought, I'm meant to be a public defender, this is what I'm meant to do. And at the time, they wouldn't offer you anything or even interview you until you'd passed the bar.

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So, I thought, okay, let me just get through the 3L year, pass the bar, interview, and start working as a public defender. So, most of those things were accomplished, I did graduate, I did pass the bar, went in for my public defender interview and, somehow, I found out that the universe now had, was getting second thoughts. I had kind of a mediocre score on my interview and I was a little bit surprised because I thought, if anyone has shown the commitment and aptitude to this area, it's me. What is the deal? And I was really kind of shaken inside when I wasn't offered a position. And for the first time, I thought, what am I supposed to do? This is the only thing that I wanted to do. The only thing that I think I know how to do. And it was a

very disorienting experience for me, and just out of pure necessity, right around the time, the UCLA Law School career office launched their webpage for the first time. So, I remember I got this dial-up modem, and I would check the webpage to see what listings there were. I was a licensed attorney and I had nowhere to work, and the universe now changed its perspective and identified for me a position at the district attorney's office, which was a volunteer law clerk position.

And so, I thought, Okay, well this is better than nothing. It's criminal law, let me see what that's all about. So, I went down, they took me as a volunteer, and right around that time the D.A. opened up an application for new hires. So, I thought, okay, well, you know at some point I need to start earning a salary. Let me just apply. And at the time I was applying, I think the D.A. had about 900 applicants. They were going to hire five people right away. And then another 20-ish people within a few months of that. So, I thought, you know, what the heck, let's just see what I can do here. And with no D.A. experience at all I applied, and it was the strangest thing. It was almost as if the D.A. could not hire me fast enough, I would have a round one interview. They called me the next day for my round two. I have my round two, they call me a few days later for my round three. My round three interview goes, I'm meeting with the D.A. himself and the next afternoon, I get a call, "Can you start on Monday?" I didn't even have an opportunity to really think about what it would be like to be a prosecutor, and just like that I was a prosecutor.

So, I thought, okay, well, here I am, let's see how this goes. And what's really interesting too about that whole process is, the D.A.'s office has a pretty, back then and even now, pretty robust training program for new prosecutors but because my class was a class of five, they didn't want to have a full training class for five people. So, within a few days after they filled out all of my personal information, they sent me to a courtroom, they said, "Okay, here you go, here are your files, be the prosecutor." And so, I kind of had to learn all of that on the fly.

Justice Jenkins: Interesting that you talked a lot about the universe here and universe certainly speaks to you with different voices at times. I think that's true of all of us, but it's disorienting as your interview with the federal public defender was and as affirming as your interview, with the district attorney was. Did you have any notions about sitting on one side of the table versus the other that you had to work through?

Justice Dhanidina: Absolutely. Absolutely, because when I was a public defender, I spent a lot of time thinking of the prosecution as the voice of oppression. You know, these were the folks that came in, you know, looking all sharp and clean cut, holding all the cards, and just relentlessly going after the little guy. And that was difficult. That was difficult for me. But I think what ended up

happening was, my experience as a public defender law clerk in so many ways made it so much easier for me as a prosecutor because I had been in that seat, and I knew sort of what the mentality was. And so, I was never the kind of D.A. that felt like, oh, I could never do what's on the other side. Because for the longest time, that's all I thought I was going to do. And so, I could see and appreciate the opposing perspective in ways that I probably couldn't have if all I'd ever wanted to do was be a prosecutor, and I embraced the opportunity to be the kind of D.A. that I wanted to be. You know, maybe others --

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Justice Jenkins: Which is?

Justice Dhanidina: — which is someone that uses their discretion and uses their power in a way that advances the cause of justice. And my understanding of the cause of justice was not maximum time on maximum charges in every case, it was really to utilize my own perspective to see what was right, what's right? And what's wrong? And I was lucky that early in my career I was supervised by D.A.s that encouraged that. They would come to me. Sometimes there would be a dispute over an offer in a case, and the attorney on the case would go over my head to my boss and say, "What do you think about this offer?" And my supervisors would basically say, "Look, you've got a D.A. in that courtroom, they're going to decide what's right." And I understood that as being, not just, you know, license to do whatever I want, but that this was a major responsibility and, it's actually a privilege, because there are very few roles that you can play in the legal system where you're not beholden to the interests of a particular person, right, of a client -- you are beholden to a more esoteric idea of what is right and what is wrong.

Sometimes, when I speak to law students about the career path, I would tell them that, when you sit as a D.A — and that this is the way I view the job — the chair next to you is empty. And it's not empty because there's nobody in it. It's empty because everybody's in it, you represent everybody and that includes the defendant and includes all of society. When you go in there, you identify yourself as the People -- that's who you are. You are the People's lawyer representing the People's interests, not any one person's interest. And in that sense, I would always tell people that, when you're a prosecutor, your client is your conscience and that is who you answer to. And I embrace that part of the role, I think, in ways that made me in so many ways easier to get along with. I think on the other side, you know, these defense attorneys were people that were doing the job I had always wanted to do. And so, I didn't see any reason to make them feel bad about the positions that they were taking or treat them like criminals or anything like that because I understood, I understood why they were doing what they were doing. And I had the utmost of respect for it because that's how I saw

myself. And so, on a fairly regular basis I think found myself doing things that a lot of other prosecutors weren't comfortable doing.

Justice Jenkins: For example?

Justice Dhanidina: For example, I had such a good relationship with one of the public defenders that was assigned to one of my courts very early in my career. He would routinely ask me to sit down and interview his clients — the ones that he thought maybe had some real mitigating information, or even the ones that he thought maybe had not committed the crimes that were charged — because he trusted me to make a fair assessment of that. Because I would occasionally look at a case and reduce it or dismiss it because I was just going to call it like I see it. You know, later on in my career when I was handling very serious cases I remember there was a murder case that I handled where the defense attorney asserted an alibi, but they didn't really develop any evidence of it, and something about that case made me really curious to look into that assertion.

I wasn't satisfied with the evidence that I had and so I did my own investigation and developed the alibi evidence that the defense attorney had not and realized that at the very least, I had a reasonable doubt as to the defendant's guilt and dismissed that case. That made me not particularly popular with the homicide detective on the other side, on my side of the case. But I didn't see the benefit of pursuing a murder charge against somebody who may not have done it, it just didn't register with me. There was a — I had a conversation actually very recently within the last few weeks with a prosecutor who I respect, and we were talking about what the appropriate role is of the prosecution, because I'm on the defense side now. And so, this is something that I'm very sensitive to, and she expressed the belief that the role of the prosecutor is to charge the most serious offenses that could be supported by the evidence.

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And I disagreed with that, that's not how I ever did my job, because prosecutors have discretion for a reason, right? Well, they're not supposed to be computers, and it reminded me of a case that I had where there was a defendant who was charged in a special circumstance murder case, she absolutely was dead to rights on the evidence. I mean, that would have been a life without parole case easily without much effort.

So, it wasn't a question of proof at all, but she was an individual who had some really interesting things in her background. She did not have a criminal history. She was a victim of domestic violence and was actually shot in the face in a domestic violence incident. She testified for the prosecution in that case, which is very, very rare. But because of the

disfigurement that was caused by those injuries, fell into a depression, became addicted to drugs, started hanging out with her drug dealer and some of the people that he was associated with, and started acting as a lookout in a variety of armed robberies.

So, under aiding and abetting law, potentially, she would be guilty. But I had to ask myself, what is served by taking this woman and putting her in prison for the rest of her life? What legitimate goal of criminal sentencing is advanced by that outcome? And so, I made special petitions under my office policy to get permission from my director to allow her, even being charged with first-degree special circumstance murder, to allow her to be diverted to women's re-entry court where she did not face criminal prosecution at all, went through a variety of rehabilitative services. And that's the case by the way that I've checked on for the years since it's happened, and her life has turned around. She graduated from that program. She doesn't cause harm, doesn't involve any — is not involved in any criminal activity.

That to me is the essence of what it is to be a prosecutor because society is safer because of that leniency and that's how I always saw my role. That's what I think is the appropriate role of a prosecutor in a criminal case. And so again, I think my experience as someone who wanted to be a public defender, who at least came up in that environment, informed my perspective of how I did my job as a prosecutor.

Justice Jenkins: So, very interesting. I know that you tried misdemeanors, you tried felonies, you tried very heavy felonies, I think gang prosecutions. Could you talk a little bit about the different assignments that you had and how that impacted your decision to apply for the bench, if you did?

Justice Dhanidina: Yeah, no absolutely. You know, so I was not one of those D.A.s, as you can imagine that, you know, took the job and decided, you know, I need to be a homicide prosecutor and prosecute the most violent offenders. That was never really anything that was on my radar. I kind of got recruited into the gang prosecution unit at the D.A.'s office. And I think I was very grateful for that assignment because it really drove home ways -- the things about the D.A. job that actually were in common with the public defender job. And by that, I mean the community that is served. You know, I was interested in being a public defender because I wanted to use my skill and my ability in court to help people from traditionally underserved communities and people from communities who are not accustomed to being treated well, certainly by members of law enforcement, if not just members of the government.

So, as a D.A. handling gang crime, I found myself in that same role because I would interact quite often and quite intimately with victims of these

violent crimes who, they don't come from affluent parts of society, they come from those same communities, those same underserved communities where they're not used to being treated well by law enforcement, by prosecutors, by police officers, and I wanted to show them and to demonstrate that I actually really cared about their loss. And you know, when someone has lost someone to a violent crime, you're very limited about, you know, you're limited in what you can do for them.

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You're not going to ease their pain; you're not going to ease their suffering. There's one thing you can give them and that's justice, accountability for what has happened, because to suffer that kind of loss and have there be no accountability at all, I think is, I mean, I don't even know how you can go on, you know, carrying that weight.

And so, I thought if there's — finding the responsible party, prosecuting them, so that they are accountable can give some measure of whether it's peace or I don't know what you would call it for the victims' families, I wanted to do that. And I took that part of the job very seriously. It was not uncommon for me if someone had lost a loved one to spend time at their house to go through family albums, to just talk about what kind of person they were, not in any way that made me — to turn me into an advocate for them as an individual, because I don't believe -- you know, prosecutors do not represent victims in court. They represent the People as I've described, but it gave me a fuller understanding of the loss.

I almost feel like I owe it as a representative of the government. I owe it to them to stay there with them and give them an opportunity to talk about who this person was that was taken from them, and that's hard. That was very, very hard on me, emotionally. And so, after several years of doing those types of cases, I started to feel like that was accumulating and it was not something that I was going to go on and do forever. I understood my limitations. And so, there was one distinct moment actually, when I was, my second child had just been born and he was maybe four or five months old. I woke up in the middle of the night and I was changing his diaper and as I was changing his diaper, in my mind, I started thinking about my cases, you know, which detective I have to call, which discovery motion I have to address, which witnesses I have to try to contact, and all of that was happening as I'm changing this diaper at four in the morning and I thought, you know, if this moment here with my infant child is not fully private because my work is invading my mental space, that maybe it's time for me to just pass the baton and sort of let the next generation that's coming up do it because maybe I would be doing a disservice to have that kind of divided attention.

So, I spoke with some of the kind of higher up managers in the office and was able to get a management position and shortly after getting that position, I realized management is not for me. It was excruciating, as someone who really enjoyed the courtroom, to be stuck in, you know, meetings all the time, you know, and drafting proposals and memos. I mean, I made the most of that position. I was very proud of the fact that I authored the D.A.'s first protocol for dealing with prosecution error or prosecution misconduct. So, I felt like that was a very important accomplishment, but I missed the courtroom. I wanted to get back into it.

And so, talking to some of my mentors in the office, they encouraged me to apply for appointment to the bench, which honestly kind of surprised me because I had never in a million years thought that that path was even available to me. There were a lot of judges that I respected that I appeared in front of, but not a lot where I saw commonality in my experience and their experience. So, it just, my mind was closed to that avenue until I was basically prodded into applying.

Justice Jenkins: And what did you do on the run-up to applying that gave you a glimpse that supported your view that you would take the time and effort to apply, given what you just said about maybe it wasn't quite the right fit? You didn't see yourself. What did you do?

Justice Dhanidina: You know, I started to engage in a lot of self-reflection, because at that point in my career I had done countless trials and I'd been in front of so many different judges that I kind of was keeping track of things that I thought that judges did that I admired and things that maybe I would do differently. And I began to wonder, well, rather than being critical, maybe these are things that I can actually do.

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And this is a way that, the criminal justice system at that point had given me everything in my professional life. And I thought, maybe this is a way I can give back to the system and use my experience and my knowledge and perspective in ways that sort of advances the judicial branch, the branch that I had never been a part of. And the more I thought about it, the more I was really encouraged. And I thought, you know, why not? Why not me?

I feel like there's too often we sort of take ourselves out of the conversation. We take ourselves out of the game. Even if we feel like the odds are insurmountable, why would you take yourself out of that? My wife criticizes me for using inappropriate analogies all the time, but I like to use sports analogies. I'm a huge sports fan and it's how I communicate ideas to my children.

So, I would tell my son, who is in Little League, "When you're up at the plate and you're nervous about hitting the ball, remember, there's only one pitch that the pitcher can throw to you that it's impossible to hit. There's only one type of pitch and that is the one you are not swinging at." So, you have to go for it sometimes. And I thought, you know what, I have the ability to do it. I think I would enjoy it, especially since I thought I was going to be a defense attorney. I ended up being a prosecutor for 14 years. I felt like I had good balance, and I could see cases from multiple points of view, which at the end of the day in my opinion is the most important thing. It's the most important skill for a judge to have, even more than intellect, honestly, is the ability to have an open mind and to see different perspectives and just to treat everyone fairly and equally, and I felt like I had that skill. So, it encouraged me to go forward with the application process.

Justice Jenkins: So, you apply, you get the appointment. I'm interested in, having had a robust career as a trial lawyer and litigator, what surprised you when you landed in a judicial role that was not quite what you thought it would be?

Justice Dhanidina: You know, I will say that the most challenging thing — and I don't know why this would have surprised me — but it wasn't anything that I had anticipated. I was always a person, as an attorney, with a great capacity to care about the individuals and the circumstances in the cases. When you're a judge, you really have to get good at not caring about that stuff because your focus, in my opinion, is on the process and not the product. You can't get caught up in what you think the right result should be because that is going to bleed into your protection of a fair process. And I think that happens unintentionally often times.

We talk about implicit bias in the courtroom. But that type of bias is not always tied to identity factors, right? The background that people come from or race or religion or gender. Sometimes, implicit bias also stems from the results that the judge wants, or the results that the judge thinks are just and warranted under the circumstances. It's funny that we instruct the jurors, keep an open mind. Don't discuss the case. Don't think about it. Don't make any decisions prematurely. That's not that easy. That's not that easy. You have to constantly remind yourself of that, right?

Am I feeling like I want a particular result? If one side is performing in a way that is counter to what I think should happen, should I get myself involved in that? As someone who was very involved in the courtroom, in the presentation of evidence and arguments, as a judge to stand back and to not only not involve yourself in it but to not care about it, that took me a while. It took me a while. But I think because I was aware of it, it helped me get better at it over the years and that did surprise me. I wasn't expecting that to affect me in that way.

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Justice Jenkins: What would you say if you had to choose, maybe your one or two most significant cases? And as a follow-up to that, are they cases where you were able to walk the line, this dichotomy you've talked about of distance and at the same time process concerns?

Justice Dhanidina: Yeah. You know what, I'm going to borrow a case from the trial court and then one from the Court of Appeal. So, on the trial court, there was a case that came before me when I was sitting in Long Beach and it was a misdemeanor, indecent exposure case. I don't want to say garden variety, but nothing on the face of the facts that jumped out at me as being a case that was going to require any kind of special attention. The allegations were that the defendant went into a public restroom and basically solicited the attention of another man and exposed himself, and the other man was an undercover police officer, and he was arrested and then charged. And typically, these cases would come through, they would be resolved for not necessarily any jail time but probation, some sort of counseling, but not insignificantly, mandatory sex registration. And that's usually how those cases were processed, from what I could tell.

But on this case, the defendant was represented by a private attorney who wasn't even from the area, he was from Northern California, and he had come down and he had dropped on my tiny little misdemeanor file a 2-inch-thick briefing and a motion on discovery. And he was seeking the discovery of all sorts of police records as it related to these types of sting operations that were being run in Long Beach. And in my mind, I thought, okay, someone is getting paid by the word here. They're trying to make more of this case than it really warrants. What is really going on?

So, like obviously I wasn't going to rule on it right then because I needed time to read it, so we continued the case. I went through it and as I was reading the motion I thought, you know, maybe my initial impression was wrong here, just from a conceptual standpoint, because what they were trying to establish is the selective prosecution for this type of offense in the gay male community. And what they wanted was police records of these types of offenses, these types of stings, complaints that they are based on, and what they result in — whether they result in criminal charges or not. And the prosecution was adamantly against it, this is overbroad, this has nothing to do with the case. But in my mind, I thought, well, clearly if their allegation is correct, then we could be looking at a due process equal protection violation, right? Constitutionally deficient prosecution if it is based on the identity or membership of a discrete and insular minority, the gay male community.

And so, if we assume that that could be the basis for dismissal of the case, how else could evidence in this area be developed, right? Because the whole point of that type of case — and I've taught advanced criminal procedure, so I understand — the whole point of that type of a motion is that the person who is being prosecuted is being treated differently from other people who are similarly situated. Being treated completely different by the police or by the D.A. And the only way you can figure out that difference is to look at those other cases.

And so, I thought it was inappropriately dismissive to say it was overbroad, this has nothing to do with the case. It actually has everything to do with the case, so I granted the discovery motion. Still, mind you, not expecting anything to come of it, because in my mind I thought, of course the police are going to prosecute these cases if they've had all these complaints of these types of offenses, and they are finding these offenses are committed. They're doing what they should be doing. That was my thought, my assumption, as someone who was a prosecutor for 14 years, and then a judge at that point, for a few more years. It seemed like, you know what, what's the harm? Go ahead and get your records and come back here and let's see what we've got.

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The end result was surprising to me. We ended up having a full week evidentiary hearing in the case. It was almost like a trial. And evidence was presented of numerous other sting operations, how they were conducted, and then also the records of the complaints that the police department was asserting was the basis for these things. At the end of receiving all of that evidence, and now I say that as a fact-finder, in that kind of emotion, I was really, really disappointed and a little bit shocked to see that the defense motion was well taken, that the police actually had singled out this particular community, and that there was evidence, actual evidence of animus, in how they were investigating the cases and in the conduct of the officers in ways not supported by any other evidentiary principles.

I also noticed that another big surprise, that the police actually had been receiving these types of complaints in other parts of the city, but in the context of male-female sexual relations, and that not one sting operation was ever done in any of those other locations. It's just in the location where the complaint was male-male. So, that surprised me.

Also, the police officers that were undercover would act in a way — and in fact, they were trained to act in a way — as to basically create the atmosphere under which a crime could be committed. By that, what I mean is, there was a lot of nonverbal communication going on between the suspect and the undercover officer where they would exchange glances,

they would nod at each other, linger in the bathroom for 10 minutes, making various gestures back and forth, to then have the suspect lower their guard assuming now that this person they're communicating with is actually going to be receptive to what was going to come next.

And even that was incremental. Without getting graphic, the suspect would engage in some conduct that would be misdemeanor level but non-registrable, and rather than arresting the person for that on the spot, the officers were trained to wait until the conduct escalated to the point where it became a registrable offense and then the arrest would take place.

In my mind, I thought, where else in the criminal law does this happen, where a police officer is witnessing a battery in progress but waits to see if it's going to be a homicide and maybe they'll get a better arrest out of it. It just didn't make any sense to me, other than animus. That was the only thing that made any sense at all. They were trained to write in their reports that the public restroom was within a certain distance of a public school, even when the sting operations were not during school hours or even on school days, but just to raise the specter of children being around, even though there's no evidence that any children were ever around. So little things like that, that were based in stereotype.

As someone who has been on the receiving end of stereotype and animus based on membership in an insular minority group, it was something that, and I don't want to say it was something that I felt like I wanted to help the defendant, but it was something that I could recognize. It was something that I could see. Because again, sometimes there are things that you can understand or that you can know conceptually, but you don't understand it unless you've been in that experience. And then, you're looking at something through a lens that helps you identify a situation where maybe if you didn't have that experience, you wouldn't even identify it. It would be right there in front of you, and you wouldn't see it.

And so, I think that difference of perspective I think helped me then take the step of dismissing a case -- and it was not lost on me that I was still a relatively new judge. I was going to dismiss a case of a sex offense that took place in a public restroom involving an insular minority group and there might be some blowback of that that would fall on me. But my former colleague, Justice Lavin, here in Division Three once said, and this is something that I feel is appropriate for all judges to hear, "If you really want to do the job right, you have to be prepared to lose it," and it's the only way to do it. And that was kind of my view.

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I couldn't sit there in that role and not make that decision and just ignore what I was seeing, because it was a violation of the Constitution. If that's not enough for me to make that decision, then I need another job, was the way I looked at it. But what I did have the presence of mind to do, and I'm glad I did this, as you know, judges aren't allowed to talk about their decisions publicly. And so, I knew that I was not — people were going to write about the case, they were going to criticize my decision -- and I wasn't going to have an opportunity to explain why I did what I did.

So, I wrote out a fairly thorough decision, which I read from the bench, because I figured that we're in court, it's on the record and I'm going to explain everything. Even though I can't talk about it later, I can tell you in advance sort of what my rationale is. So that would be one experience from the trial court. From the Court of Appeal, a case that I'm proud of had to do with a three strikes prosecution.

It was a case where, as a D.A. for 14 years, I understood three strikes, I understood what the law meant and how fairly draconian application of it could lead to unwarranted or unjust results, but when you sit as a judge or when you're on the Court of Appeal, there's a certain level of deference that you have to give to the other parts of our system. You don't get to make the charging decision even if it's a decision you don't like.

You don't get to reverse the trial court just because you would come to a different decision. And in particular, in the area of this particular case, the standard of review is very deferential. It was an abuse of discretion standard related to the Eighth Amendment application, whether the third strike would be cruel and unusual.

Justice Jenkins: Is this People versus Avila?

Justice Dhanidina: It is. And so, what surprised me though is — just to give you a quick factual synopsis of the case, this is an individual who was charged -- in California, we have changed our approach to three strikes. Certainly, where it used to be as long as the third strike was a felony of any kind, you get a life sentence. Then it was changed to if it's serious or violent, you get a life sentence.

But the universe of what makes something a serious or violent offense is broad. In that case, the serious offenses involved were attempted robbery, but the robbery was without a weapon, without the infliction of injury, and it was a theft of bags of oranges. It involved an individual who was selling oranges on the freeway off-ramp and the defendant in that case was trying to extort money and get $100 from the individual who was selling the oranges. When he wasn't paid the $100, he took a bag of oranges that the guy was trying to sell and he stomped on them, he squished a bunch of

oranges. So, there you go. That was an attempted robbery by squishing oranges.

The trial court applied a third-strike sentence to him, even when, by the way, a second-strike sentence under all of the relevant enhancements, was a fairly astronomical sentence for that conduct. The defendant also had no criminal history for a decade or so, as I recall. And so, again, I'd ask myself, what legitimate purpose of sentencing is served by giving this individual here a life sentence for squishing oranges. That's really what it was.

And so, the case piqued my curiosity. As soon as I got it, I thought, well I don't really know which way this case is going to come out, but let's see what the law says on this, because on the Court of Appeal, you're not there to make law. We have reams and reams of reported decisions that cover every conceivable scenario you can think of, and three strikes is not a new law. So, I started doing research and I thought, well, let me see which cases, which decisions applying Romero to strike a strike, which decisions found an abuse of discretion in denial of a Romero motion. I was surprised to find that while there are many, many reported decisions finding an abuse of discretion in granting a Romero, meaning striking a strike, many, many, many of those decisions, there were no corollaries on the other side.

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No reported decision in finding an abuse of discretion to deny a Romero motion and this conceptually was a problem, in my opinion, because part of what I think Courts of Appeal and reviewing courts need to do is offer some guidance to the trial court. And when you — it doesn't do you any good to have one guardrail on one side of an issue. You really ought to have both in order to sort of delineate the appropriate breadth of discretion that the trial court has. Trial judges want this. As far as I know, in my experience, trial judges don't want unfettered discretion on every issue. They want some guidance.

And what message is being sent to the trial court if the only reversals in the context of Romero are when the Romero was granted. That signifies to the trial court, if I don't want to get reversed, I'm denying the Romero, right? And that didn't seem right to me, and the facts of the case kind of appeared to be such that I thought, well, if there is a test case that is getting a little close to the edge of what is appropriate, this could be it. Because here you take an individual who really didn't do anything violent or serious in a general sense, didn't have a recent record, and part of the issue too is that the trial judge in that case was making findings that were not supported by substantial evidence in how the court was characterizing the case.

And so, to me, I thought this is the right type of case to send back to the trial court and to also send a message to the other judges that if you find that a Romero is warranted, you don't need to be afraid of reversal. You can do the right thing and the reviewing courts will be okay with it. Because now they will have some authority to support that position. And so, I was proud of that contribution to that area of the law.

Justice Jenkins: With guidelines to boot.

Justice Dhanidina: Right.

Justice Jenkins: Exactly.

Justice Dhanidina: That's the idea.

Justice Jenkins: Interesting, you know, we've talked about shaping the record, through the discovery motion. You've talked about a maxim that one of your colleagues, Justice Lavine, that you have to be prepared to lose a job to keep it, and sort of a corollary to that is that it's a good thing to be skeptical. Sometimes you have to get yourself out of the way to really get a fulsome sense of what the boundaries are, what the law is. For someone who liked and engaged so much of his career shaping the record, framing the record, litigating the cases, being involved in discovery disputes, how did the Court of Appeal come about in the first instance? What was your interest in it?

Justice Dhanidina: You know, again, this is another one of those opportunities that appeared by accident. You know, I really enjoyed -- and this is kind of an interesting thing. Out of all the jobs that I've had, I have not left any of them because I didn't like them anymore. And so, you know, I've never felt compelled to leave any role that I've played. And so, I was really enjoying the trial court. I felt like I was doing a good job there and I loved being in the mix and being in the courtroom.

Justice Jenkins: About eight years?

Justice Dhanidina: The trial court was about six years.

Justice Jenkins: Six years, okay.

Justice Dhanidina: And then three on the Court of Appeal. And I really had not thought about the Court of Appeal until a friend of mine had been sitting here in this chambers as a pro tem after the position became vacant with Justice Aldrich's retirement. And she was about to finish her pro tem stint and had spoken with the presiding justice here, Lee Edmon, who has always been a mentor of mine. She was the presiding judge of the superior court when I was appointed, and said, "Hey, you know, what about Halim? Do you think,

you know, you could use him as a pro tem?" And so, they reached out to me and asked me if it was something I would be willing to do. And I've always been one of those people who, you know, I like giving myself challenges, and I did not have any inkling of how I would do in this role as an appellate justice. None at all. But the challenge, it was very enticing to me, and I thought, you know what? Let's see. Let's see if I can do this. And I came to the Court of Appeal. I was fortunate to sit as a pro tem for a significant amount of time -- it was almost a full year.

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And once I came here and I met Justice Edmon and I saw sort of how things operated, Justice Edmon asked me, "You know, would you want to seek an appointment here to this position?" And I really again started to think of this is a way that I can actually affect even more people and even more cases by the work that I do, and it's such a crucially important job. Let me see if I have the skills to do it and being able to sit pro tem for as long as I did, I felt pretty comfortable that this is a job that I can do and I can do well. And not to suggest that I mastered the role because I'm not sure you — honestly, I'm not sure you ever really get to the point of mastery, especially in this context. It's so challenging and, intellectually, it was the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life, but that gave me a little bit of a rush and it made it more satisfying as cases came through and I was able to lend my voice to their resolution.

And in discussion, by the way, with some of the smartest people I've ever met, with my fellow justices here in the division, Justice Lavin, as I mentioned, Justice Edmon, Justice Edgerton, it was a very stimulating environment. And I was so glad to have had that opportunity because I realized how rare these opportunities are just generally but, you know, really for anyone, that I think I was drawn to the Court of Appeal more than I was pushed away from the trial court.

Justice Jenkins: Very, very interesting response to why the Court of Appeal. I'm interested in — you know, we talked a lot about judicial philosophy. What would you say your judicial philosophy is? Is it different in the Court of Appeal as opposed to the trial court?

Justice Dhanidina: You know, I actually see a lot of commonalities in what my philosophy has been in both roles. And what's interesting too is that I have never really viewed the Court of Appeal or the trial court as, in the construct of hierarchy, I think in the way that we sometimes talk about where you — the lower court, the higher court. It's in the terminology we use, right? And then, the appellate decisions, we talk about what happened below as if we are above on high. And to me, it really is just a difference of role, right? It's again to use the sports analogies.

You have the official that makes the call on the spot in real time with limited information, then you have the replay official that can slow it down, look from different angles and depending on the type of decision that's being made either defer to the previous decision or reverse it altogether or to disturb it or affirm it. It's not that one person is superior to the other. The job is different, and they require different skill sets. But the philosophy I think stays the same. The North Star stays the same. You know, judges get things wrong. They get them wrong on the trial court. They get things wrong on the Court of Appeal. We're all human, right? I think we're all pretty experienced and pretty smart people, like the judges and attorneys even who appear in front of us are all very smart and accomplished people.

But despite that intellect, we will make mistakes and, or we will have decisions that will be criticized or that people will disagree with. I would always tell my law students when I teach them that even when you go in front of the United States Supreme Court and you argue an issue and you lose, chances are you've convinced at least some Supreme Court Justices that you were right, and that's a big deal. And so, you can't be I think too fixated on -- we try to be right but that's not the measure of whether you are a good judge. To me, the measure of a good judge is the judge that never forgets the core purpose of the role is to be open-minded and even-handed, right? If you have an open mind and even hand, then you are doing the job right, regardless of the result. I truly believe that that's true.

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It's interesting -- back to sports for a second, but this is not my analogy -- it's become very fashionable to talk, in a context of confirmation hearings for judicial positions, to talk about balls and strikes. The judge's job is the official called the umpire. They call the ball and the strikes as if there is something mechanical about balls and strikes.

Nowadays, we do have sometimes the infographics that will show exactly where the ball crosses the plate or if it does or it doesn't. But one thing that's true about all umpires is that they all view the strike zone differently. They have different eyes. They take different positions. They all look at a different strike zone. So, does that mean that one umpire is better than all of the others because their strike zone is the right one? No. I don't think that's what that means. And when you call balls and strikes, there is a certain amount of perspective that's inherent in that decision, right? Because you can only see those balls and strikes through your own eyes.

So, that's not a measure of whether the umpire is a good umpire or not. It's whether they're calling it the same for both sides. Whether they are — they don't have an agenda. They don't want one side to win and one side to lose.

They want to apply it fairly to both sides, right or wrong. And most baseball fans will tell you, this umpire consistently calls the low strike, but they're doing that for both teams and no one's going to complain. The batters don't complain, the pitchers don't complain, because it's the same for everybody.

And that is sort of how — I feel like that analogy is misused sometimes in those hearings because the suggestion is, if you're just calling balls and strikes you are not an individual anymore. You're always going to be an individual. So much of what we do as a judge is, particularly at the appellate level, it has to do with values. It has to do with balancing. And how do you — balancing tests are not hyper-technical tests that can be fed into a computer. It has to do with your judgment. It has to do with what you as an individual think is reasonable under the circumstances, right? How else do you identify reasonableness? How else do you define it but through the lens of your own experience?

But that's at the core of what so many certainly constitutional decisions are based on, are these greater principles of things like reasonableness and justification. And so, just to circle back to your question, I have always felt that that skill needed to be at the forefront of my consciousness in everything that I did as a judge, whether on the trial court or on the Court of Appeal.

Justice Jenkins: Interesting. It sounds like the underpinnings of your North Star, your judicial philosophy, the way you seek to do this important work. I'm interested in another facet of your time on the bench, and it might be the D.A.'s office and it sort of harkens back to something you said like Pomona about getting involved with organizations and seeking to raise the consciousness of others around you, not in any way that has an agenda, but as an education device. As something that brings us together as people.

So, you've been involved in extracurricular activities, symposiums at your law school, Judges in the Classroom. Can you talk a little about the kinds of things you've done in the community and why that is important, why that's an adjunct that you see is relational to and necessary to your role as a judge?

Justice Dhanidina: Yeah. I was always, as you pointed out, involved in community work in part because my parents, I think, instilled that in me that you need to not only just do whatever your nine to five job is but find ways that you can touch the lives of other people in a positive way. And so, I tried to do that as a student, as a young attorney, and I didn't want that to end when I became a judge. And so, I would always seek out opportunities to be plugged in to what's going on with students, whether it's at school, nonprofit community groups that don't have a political angle, because I think society is better off

the more involved members of the judiciary are in what we try to do as a community.

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And that's because, maybe now more than ever, right -- we live in such a hyper-partisan era, that when a judge gets involved in speaking or gets involved in working with a community organization, they necessarily and ethically have to do so without agenda, certainly without partisan agenda. Because otherwise, they would be running afoul of their own ethical duties, and I think it lends judges a certain air of credibility that other people and other people in public roles may not have. And that's a tremendous advantage.

So, if you are a judge and you have something to say about the improvement of our judicial system or, honestly, even if you just want to talk about yourself in a way that could inspire other people or provide useful information to those who are coming up after you, I think you have such a tremendous opportunity to do that as a judge and it would be really unfortunate to not take those opportunities.

I haven't come across a single organization, school, student group, that hasn't been extremely excited to be the audience of a judge. And maybe the way that our judiciary stays in contact so that we're not so aloof with the community that we serve is to find these opportunities and to connect with the fabric of society, because otherwise you would be always running the risk of seeming so distant and so far removed that the court's legitimacy, I think, sometimes suffers from that. We are still public servants as judges, and we can serve the public in ways that go far beyond what we do in the actual courtroom.

Justice Jenkins: We're experiencing quite a bit of that now with the United States Supreme Court and recent rulings and a decline in public confidence. So, that point is very well taken. We've had quite an amazing conversation and one of the things that has struck me during this conversation is how introspective you are about all kinds of things and how you don't suspend that in your personal life and your professional life. And one of the things that I want to ask a bit about is, I recall when you were appointed, there was much discussion about you being the first Muslim judge in the state of California and the first Muslim judge ever to serve on an appellate court anywhere in the country, including the federal courts.

Because you're so introspective I'm wondering, what significance do you feel like your appointment as a Muslim had for the California judiciary or even beyond, is there any significance to that and why is that significant?

Justice Dhanidina: It became especially significant for me years before it occurred because the relationship between the Muslim-American community and the American community at large has gone through — it's ebbed and flowed and there have been times of real crisis. Certainly, around when I was really young, around the Iranian Revolution and the hostage crisis, then later again during the Gulf War, the war on terror after 9/11. And the Muslims who come to the United States, or Muslims who are already here, desperately want to be a part of what we've got going on here. They want to be part of the fabric of America.

And I think after 9/11 it became really, really challenging for Muslims to want to engage in the rest of society because they were sort of painted — the Muslim community was sort of painted into an impossible situation where there were voices telling them, you know what? The Muslims are here to infiltrate. They're here to take over and take over our institutions and pass Sharia law and change our way of life.

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And so, I think that made a lot of people in the Muslim community feel like, you know what, we can't be so outwardly involved in what's going on in the United States because people are accusing us of wanting to take over the country. Which is, you know, Muslims just don't have the numbers for it but don't really have the desire for that either, to take over in that sense.

But then on the other side, when you withdraw, the criticism becomes, well, they just stick to themselves and they won't mix with anybody else and they won't assimilate and have their own communities and they have their own practices, and they won't become American. And that's just a hard place to be in, because then you lose either way, right? If you participate, then you're an infiltrator. If you don't participate, then you're not willing to be fully American. And so, for me, I kind of thought, in particular in the area of law and in particular in the area of becoming a judge, just holding the position had significance.

I remember there was an article, like a Time Magazine piece that was done shortly after 9/11, about the attitudes of the Muslim community within the United States. And one thing that was striking to me — so this was early 2000s -- they would ask questions like, "Do you have a Muslim friend? Do you have a positive view of Muslims?" Actually, there were two important things that I got from that article. One is, people who knew other Muslim people -- so they had Muslims in their life, you know, they were colleagues, or they worked with them or they were their friends or they're friends with their children -- tended to have a more open-minded view or a more positive view of them because they probably just saw them as people. This is just the person who works at my bank, or this is just the person who I'm in a

soccer league with, and they don't think of all of the other stereotypical baggage that comes with that identity. So that didn't surprise me.

But what did surprise me was people were asked whether it would be okay with you for there to be a Muslim congressperson, senator, governor, President of the United States, or justice on the Supreme Court. And, you know, those percentages were not high, as you might imagine, but what surprised me was, there were more people okay with the idea of a Muslim President than a Muslim justice on the Supreme Court, and that shocked me. And I began to think about, why is it? What is it about a Muslim in a black robe that bothers people so much that they would rather that same person be the President, right?

And it occurred to me that the idea of Muslims in the law is a particular third rail for a lot of folks because of this concept of Sharia law as it's understood in the media, for example. And we like to say that we are a society of laws and there's this notion that Muslims have an alternative legal system to which they owe fealty and that is incompatible with the Constitution. And I've seen that firsthand because I've been asked — and by the way, I have been asked this by non-Muslim groups and Muslim groups that I've spoken to -- what do you do when your religion and your religious views conflict with the American laws or the Constitution? And so, there's an assumption built into that question from both groups, Muslims to non-Muslims, that there is some inconsistency or that there is a natural friction between how someone understands their religion as a Muslim and our constitutional system.

And my answer is the same to both groups, which is, I don't perceive any conflict in between what I believe as a Muslim person and what the Constitution says. That's not to say everyone practices the religion the way I do, or everyone understands it the way that I do, but at least for me personally, I don't see that conflict. And if I did, this is the last job I would want. I wouldn't want to be — why put yourself in that position? No one has to be a judge, right? So, I would, you know, kind of assure people that, I think you can be a good Muslim and believe in equal rights between men and women, for example.

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Or believe in the whole laundry list of constitutional principles that make up our due process and equal protection jurisprudence that a lot of people think maybe is in conflict with how some Muslims practice their religion. And so, I understand, and I've always understood that to just be in the role, just be in the position and do the job well, goes miles and miles towards, I think, my goal of greater understanding between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. I think it's important for non-Muslims to see that you

can be a Muslim and be a judge. That's something that you can achieve but it's also a role that you can play in society and do it well without compromising who you are.

And I think it's important for non-Muslims to see that, hey, we have Jewish judges, we have Christian judges, we have Buddhist judges, we have judges who do not practice any religion at all. We can also have Muslim judges and that's okay. And everything's going to be fine. And I think a lot of people maybe panicked a little bit at the news of my appointment because they didn't know what's going to happen, we've got a Muslim judge now in California. Is there going to be Sharia law in DUI cases all of a sudden? What's going to happen?

And I felt like it was my responsibility to show that that big news was not really news. It's just somebody who is trying to be a judge the best way that they can. So that kind of even, despite the import of the moment, took a little bit of the pressure off of myself to resolve some of these greater issues. I just focused on doing the job.

Justice Jenkins: And knowing that there was a school of thought there that operates on the notion that perhaps a Muslim judge may weave in his or her religious beliefs as a relevant or material consideration resolving cases. Did that create an extra burden for you in terms of how you went about doing the job well?

Justice Dhanidina: Not at all, actually, because this may come as a surprise, and I would be remiss if I didn't say this. I don't feel like I've had to set aside my religious views or my religious upbringing in order to do the job. I find the two completely consistent with each other. Principles of equality and justice and mercy and ethics, these are all Muslim values, the way I understand the religion, the way I was brought up, the way I was raised. And so those are all primary components of what judges do every day. And so, for me, I felt like being a better Muslim made me a better judge because of my attention to being fair, treating people equally.

And again, the concept of mercy is a huge, huge concept in Islam. The notion of mercy begins every Muslim prayer and it's a huge component I think of what judges need to do in the courtroom too. And so, I've never really felt that you can only be really, really good at one or the other. I think you can do both really well, the same way that I think there are people who practice all other faiths also make really great judges.

If there were, like as I indicated before, an aspect of practice or dogma that was inconsistent somehow with the judge's ethical responsibilities, then of course that would have to be set aside, the same way it would for anybody, the same way that all judges set aside their personal views in their cases no

matter what the type of case is, no matter what the view is. The whole idea of the robe, to me it's a very powerful symbol.

I would speak to student groups and, for example you mentioned Judges in the Classroom. I would ask students of all ages, why do you think judges wear a black robe? Actually, I asked them two important questions. Why do you think judges wear a black robe and why, at least in the trial court, do you think the judge sits a little bit higher than everybody else? And it's interesting, because when I asked them about the robe, sometimes they say, "Well, because black is a very serious color."

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Or because that way the judge — some of the young kids will say, "That way they're not going to be wearing someone's favorite color or something." They come up with all these weird reasons, and I would tell them the reason why all the judges have to wear that same outfit and why it's a plain black robe is because it shouldn't matter who is wearing it. It's a position that no matter who slips into that robe, you should be treated the same. And if you should go to a different courtroom or someone's wearing that same robe and be treated the same as the judge who's sitting in the other courtroom wearing that same robe.

The decision should not be informed by the individuality of the person wearing it. And the reason why judges sit a little higher, of course, you can imagine students say, "Well, it's because they're the most important and because they need to be able to see what's going on in the courtroom." At least from my point of view, the way I express it is, it's actually just the opposite. The judge is not there because the judge needs to see everybody. It's because everybody there needs to be able to see the judge, because the judge is the one person in that entire room that's accountable to everyone. And so, everyone needs to be able to see who they are and what they are doing. Those were sort of guiding principles for me as a judge.

Justice Jenkins: We've talked about a really fulsome career, both as an advocate and as a trial judge and several years in the Court of Appeal, and you're a young man -- I think you said you just turned 50 -- and yet you left this labor of love to go back to the practice. Can you tell us about what informed that decision and how you're doing?

Justice Dhanidina: Absolutely. It's interesting. It comes back to what I said before, which is I never really left any position that I've had because I didn't want to do it anymore, and that's not easy to do. It's easy to leave something that you're sick of and you're like, you know what? I'm going to close the door on that, I never want to see that again. But for me, the pattern of my career has been more of opportunities arising that were just too good to pass up and I'm glad

that I've sort of followed that pattern rather than falling into my comfort zone of not wanting to change, because I would have foreclosed so many great experiences and so many different avenues, I think of contributing to the community.

I've been grateful for all for all of those positions. One of the things that I think I realized, once I left the practice of law as a D.A., and I sat on the bench for nine years, I would stay engaged in the legal community largely through teaching, because judges are always free to teach classes, and the class that was my favorite to teach had always been trial advocacy, because I enjoyed it. It was my favorite class in law school and once I was on the trial court and even on the Court of Appeal, I had to turn off that part of my brain.

Like I was talking about earlier where you can't think about who you want to win and about strategy and all of those things that I really, really loved engaging in as a lawyer. So, a great outlet for me was teaching in law school so I could teach students how to be good trial lawyers. I think I kind of got to the point where I felt like there was still something left inside of me. There were still things that I could accomplish as an advocate that I hadn't done yet and if I waited too long, I probably wouldn't have had the courage to do it.

And so, I kind of thought, you know what? There's no blueprint for how a career needs to unfold. There's no chronology that is required, and there certainly hasn't been for me, so I thought, you know what, maybe this is the opportunity to see what I have left as an advocate in private practice. I had an opportunity to do civil litigation for a year after leaving the bench. I'm now doing largely criminal defense. These are things I could not have done before. And I was also kind of curious to see the same way that my experience as a trial lawyer informed what kind of judge I would be. I was curious to see whether that was reciprocal, whether being a judge would inform what kind of lawyer, what kind of advocate I would be.

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Justice Jenkins: What's the verdict on that?

Justice Dhanidina: You know what? So far, so far -- we talked about surprises, it surprised me how much I think about my judging when I'm in court acting as the lawyer. People have made fun of me, I think, kind of tongue-in-cheek. I'll walk into a courtroom and the comment will be made, like, are you trying to just sit in every seat here or are you going to learn how to be a court reporter or maybe you're going to be a bailiff next?

For a minute I think about it, maybe that is something I could try to do, but I think there is value in that. There's value in sitting at the table or standing at the podium, knowing that I've been in all of the other shoes because it just brings with it a greater understanding and perspective of what people's roles are, what their motivations are. And if there's anything that I'm loyal to, it is this system.

Dare I say, I mean, it approaches the level of being sacred to me. And so, every single role, every single component of what goes on is, it's such a great opportunity for anyone to play any of those roles, but for someone to have played multiple, I feel blessed that I've had that opportunity and I think it does make me a better lawyer because if you kind of have an idea of what your audience is looking for, it helps you tailor your message, I think, in an appropriate way.

I think it also has given me a certain level of balance, and even serenity in the courtroom, where I know it's not about me as an individual. I'm not there to prove something or to feed my ego. I'm really there to do something that I think is important work that I haven't had a chance to do before.

Justice Jenkins: We've talked a lot about your professional life and your formative years. It's been an amazing experience to sit here with you and learn more about you. I don't know that I could have more respect for the judicial branch and for the profession of law than I had before I started this interview, but it has certainly grown in the last hour or so talking with you in that respect. What are your interests outside of law? What do you do in your free time?

Justice Dhanidina: I've already talked about sports, so I kind of grew up with that. It's interesting too, because my parents -- we talked about the immigrant experience and about assimilation -- when you emigrate to a city like Chicago, and if you want to get dialed into the local culture, it's going to be through sports, probably. And so, that was sort of my dad's earliest introduction to American culture, which he passed on to us. We would go to sporting events. I went to a lot of Chicago Cubs games as a North Sider once we were in Evanston, watching Walter Payton carry the football for the Chicago Bears. Obviously, Michael Jordan and the Bulls.

I'm a huge sports fan and so I love attending sporting events, coaching youth sports both for my daughter and for my son. Now, actually, my interests are dictated a little bit more by my kids in the sense that they have actually both become quite accomplished artists. Our family, we're great consumers of art, but I don't consider myself to be very artistic. My wife probably would tell you the same thing, but our kids somehow have this ability, this talent.

My daughter is a musician and an actress and a writer. My son is a very accomplished guitarist, and they right now are pursuing, hopefully, careers in the arts. And so, for me, I'm just a fan. I love introducing them to different forms of art and artistic expression. I think it's good for society. I think it's good for the soul. If think it's good for the world to have more art in it. And if my children have decided that that's the role that they want to play, I'm fully supportive.

And so, we, you know, we go to a lot of concerts and we go to a lot of shows, not just for professionals but the performances that they're involved in because I think it also — in what can be a very stressful legal profession, it's a nice diversion and it kind of grounds me in what makes you a complete person. And so, that's what I like to spend a lot of my time on now.

02:10:12

Justice Jenkins: What's been the most fulfilling aspect or event in your career as a lawyer? I'm really talking about values now, and as a judge.

Justice Dhanidina: There was one moment in particular that I found to be really overwhelming, and this surrounds the occasion of my appointment to the superior court. I had been so focused on that process and so excited to get the call, and I knew it was going to be just a huge celebration for my family. And I don't think I realized -- I was so humbled by the reaction, there was mixed reaction, to be fair -- but the overwhelming positive reaction that I received, my family received from people globally.

We were getting emails and correspondence from other corners of the world -- people who had somehow heard about the fact that I had been appointed to the superior court in Los Angeles -- and that it meant something to them. It meant something to them, not for themselves personally, but also for their own families. And it just never occurred to me that I could have that effect on people, not even by something that I had done, but it was a decision that the Governor had made, but I was hearing about it.

And I remember that there was one occasion where I was speaking to a community group. After I was done speaking, a young parent brought their child up to me to introduce me to them and to take a picture with them and basically say, "I want my child to know that they can accomplish what you've accomplished, that they don't need to be afraid, they don't need to feel like it's not for them, that you are just like them."

That was also very humbling too, because as a parent, I know what it takes to bring your child up to an adult, a stranger, and say something like that, I want my child to be like you. That is really an overwhelming feeling of,

really, responsibility more than anything else, because it made me see my role as a judge in a different context.

This was not about something that I had accomplished that I was going to do, but this was really a responsibility for me to set that example for so many other people that, many of whom I would probably never meet. And it's something that I think about a lot. You mentioned introspection. It's something that, even all of these years later, I still think about very vividly.

Justice Jenkins: I'm going to conclude this very enlightening and gratifying discussion with this. I've been a judge now for 30 years and you are the judge I would want to appear before or have my case brought before, because of all you've articulated here today, you represent what's best about us. Thank you for your service.

Justice Dhanidina: Well, I can't have heard a better compliment than that. So, thank you so much.

02:14:00