

May 2018

## The Most Determined Lawyer You Will Ever Meet

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*Steven Adair MacDonald & Partners, P.C.*

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### Recommended Citation

Danny Wang, *The Most Determined Lawyer You Will Ever Meet*, 48 Golden Gate U. L. Rev. 127 (2018).  
<https://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/ggulrev/vol48/iss2/5>

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## ARTICLE

# THE MOST DETERMINED LAWYER YOU WILL EVER MEET

DANNY WANG\*<sup>1</sup>

Danny's family emigrated from Taiwan, and he is the first generation of his family born in the United States. His parents spoke very minimal English and had little money in their pockets upon their arrival. But to support his family, which included his older sister and brother, who, at that time, were only four and five years old, his dad started waiting tables at a Chinese restaurant. Danny's dad eventually got a job working for an import and export company, but the whole family had to pack up and move from Boston, Massachusetts to Charleston, South Carolina.

While Danny enjoyed spending his childhood growing up in Charleston, there were simply not many Asian persons around with whom to hang out. For example, he was the only Asian child at his elementary and middle schools, and this was essentially the same case at his high school. It was a challenge for Danny to deal with the daily teasing and numerous stereotypical and derogatory comments thrown his way throughout his childhood and continuing until he graduated high school to attend the George Washington University in Washington, D.C.. However, Danny now understands that those early life experiences helped forge him into the confident person he is today. Those experiences have also taught him to embrace people's differences and to better understand and appreciate how those differences make each person unique.

To this day, Danny is still inspired and very grateful that his parents made the huge sacrifice of uprooting their entire lives to relocate to a completely foreign country—away from all their friends and family—

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\* J.D., Golden Gate University School of Law, 2008; B.A. Sociology and Peace Studies, George Washington University, 2002.

<sup>1</sup> Interview by George Emmons, Executive Articles Editor, *Golden Gate University Law Review*, in San Francisco, Cal. (Feb. 6, 2018).

just to try and provide their children with the best educational opportunities to hopefully maximize their chances of securing a better life. His parents instilled in Danny a tireless work ethic and a motivation for success that has greatly helped him during the difficult journey from law school, to starting out as a solo practitioner, to subsequently becoming a partner at his law firm.

Danny's legal journey first began when he worked as a paralegal after college for a large intellectual property law firm in Washington, D.C.. One of the memories he remembers from his paralegal days was when he was sent to Indiana for a huge document review project that spanned several months. He recalls long hours, some 17- to 18-hour days cooped up in a conference room with ten attorneys reviewing a seemingly endless supply of documents. Danny learned a lot working at the firm for roughly three years, but he realized that the world of Intellectual Property law was just not for him. He wanted to find a new path.

Danny first discovered his love for the "City by the Bay" after a vacation spent visiting San Francisco. He loved the city's atmosphere and felt that it was the best place to be. His paralegal days were winding down, and Danny was already filling out law school applications. His visit confirmed for him that he one day wanted to practice law in San Francisco. When Golden Gate University School of Law offered him a seat in the Fall 2005 class, Danny was thrilled at the chance to make his dream a reality.

While Danny was excited to begin his law school career, he had an interesting decision to make before starting. Danny was an avid pool player and loved to play when he had free time. In fact, when Danny arrived in San Francisco, he was eager to visit all of the famous pool halls in San Francisco that he read about. Unfortunately, by the time Danny moved to San Francisco in 2005, a majority of the city's famous pool halls had already closed down. The weekend before his very first day of law school, Danny and some pool friends were scheduled to compete at a national pool tournament in Las Vegas because they had qualified after winning a regional tournament in D.C.. Danny reflects back on this moment as a turning point for him at his life's crossroads. He had to determine whether he going to take law school seriously and be fully prepared for his first week of school, or whether he would venture off to Las Vegas and have a great time playing pool. Naturally, Danny informed his friends that he could not make the tournament and decided to pursue his law degree.

Danny is extremely grateful to Golden Gate University School of Law for providing him with the opportunity to begin his legal career. He learned a great deal working at Golden Gate University's Environmental

Law and Justice Clinic with Professor Helen Kang<sup>2</sup>, and Danny honed his legal writing skills serving as both a journal editor and on the editorial board of Golden Gate University's Environmental Law Journal. Danny is obviously most thankful to Golden Gate University because this is where he met his wife, Kimberly Wong. Danny and Kimberly first met in 2006 when they served as board members for Golden Gate University's Asian Pacific American Law Student Association. They have been together ever since, and they were married in 2013 at San Francisco's iconic Cliff House.

After graduating and passing the bar, Danny began his full-time job search. He was already working part-time as the Graduate Fellow at Golden Gate University's Law Career Services.<sup>3</sup> Here, Danny was responsible for developing writing content, such as cover letters and resumes, to help other Golden Gate University students and alumni find jobs and to better develop their networking skills. At the same time, Danny was practicing what he was preaching to these student and attorney job-seekers. For instance, he attended various networking events organized by Law Career Services, and he also joined the local bar association groups to create a large network of contacts.

In addition, through job advertisements posted on Law Career Services' website, Danny was able to find contract work to keep him busy and to further gain valuable legal experience. For example, he remembers once working with an attorney to help get her legal article published in a scholarly journal. Relying upon his editorial skills and experience acquired through his time with the Environmental Law Journal, Danny succeeded in getting the attorney's article published. Danny additionally worked with other attorneys performing various contract work covering employment law matters, family law disputes, commercial litigation issues, and unlawful detainer actions. Given all of the work that Danny now had experience with, he decided it was time to open his own law office.

Danny vividly remembers all the stress and constant challenges of juggling the responsibilities of wearing his attorney hat while simultaneously building and managing his own solo practice. Not only was it hard work and long nights, but paying the bills and student loans were a constant pressure. As a result, while he was working as a solo practitioner, Danny also worked part-time as a reference librarian at the San Francisco Law Library during the evenings and on weekends. Taking a direct les-

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<sup>2</sup> Helen H. Kang, Director, Environmental Law and Justice Clinic, and Associate Professor, Golden Gate University School of Law; B.A. (1982), Yale University; J.D. (1986), Boalt Hall, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>3</sup> Golden Gate University's Law Career Services is now known as Law Career Development.

son from his parents, Danny was always a hard worker and his work ethic incomparable.

During this early phase of Danny's legal career, Danny fondly recalls that his best colleague and "mentor" was his wife, Kimberly. Danny joked that while he was older than his wife, she was older than him in law years. Moreover, Kimberly was already working as an associate for another solo practitioner and had more legal experience than him. Danny remembers constantly bouncing various legal ideas off of Kimberly and always getting great advice from her. They were not living together at the time they were dating, but they would talk on the phone most nights after their respective long days at work. Danny's goal was to do his best to not make Kimberly too stressed before they went to bed. However, early on, this was quite difficult because Danny had a lot going on in his legal practice. Eventually, Danny scaled back the late-night legal discussions to ensure they each enjoyed a more peaceful sleep.

Danny remembers one case where he represented several restaurant employees against their employer who committed various wage and hour violations and did not provide the appropriate meal and rest breaks for her employees. While Danny obtained a favorable ruling from the Labor Commissioner in Oakland against the employer, Danny knew that a central problem in this matter would be collecting any money judgment. Collecting a judgment would be an issue because the employer had dissolved the business entity prior to the hearing to help shield her personal assets. Despite Danny's best efforts to convince the Labor Commissioner that the individual employer was the alter ego of the now dissolved business entity, the Commissioner unfortunately did not agree and only found the corporation liable for money damages. In short, Danny could not pierce the corporate veil and was therefore unable to collect the money judgment for his clients. Danny learned the valuable lesson that while you can "win" a case, you may still not be the "winner."

Being the first generation of his family born in the United States and also not being from the San Francisco Bay Area, Danny had to pave his own way. He started building his solo practice by meeting with potential clients in coffee shops and helping clients with a variety of projects. Additionally, in exchange for legal training provided by the Bar Association of San Francisco's Voluntary Legal Services Program<sup>4</sup> on unlawful detainer and family law matters, he represented low-income clients on a pro bono basis so that he would gain more valuable legal experience helping clients. Danny would also take contract projects from other practicing

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<sup>4</sup> The San Francisco Bar Association's Voluntary Legal Services Program is now known as the Justice & Diversity Center.

attorneys, which eventually resulted in a job offer from Steven Adair MacDonald,<sup>5</sup> who is the managing partner at Danny's law firm.

Danny first met Steven while he was still working at Law Career Services as the Graduate Fellow. Steven was presenting at a lunch-time program at Golden Gate University, and Danny approached him afterwards to ask Steven if they could set up a time to chat so that he could learn more about Steven's real estate law practice. The timing did not work out at that time to meet, but that did not stop Danny because he had a plan. He learned that Golden Gate University was soon hosting an alumni reunion event, and Danny knew that Steven was attending. Being tasked to create the seating assignments, Danny was conveniently seated at Steven's table at the dinner. This time, Danny made sure they scheduled a time to have lunch.

Steven Adair MacDonald is a well-known and respected attorney in the area of landlord-tenant and real estate law. He has also published various articles and books to help people better understand the complicated nuances of landlord-tenant law here in San Francisco. During their lunch, Danny shared with Steven that he had a lot of editing experience and helped many authors with their works both during and after law school. Upon hearing that, Steven asked Danny if he would help him revise and update his San Francisco Rent Board Users Guide. Danny was ecstatic to help and took on this project with enthusiasm. After this project, Danny continued helping Steven with certain contract projects related to unlawful detainer matters. As Steven discovered that he was giving a lot of contract work to Danny, Steven decided to hire Danny as an associate in 2010.

Upon Danny joining the firm, there were a total of four attorneys at the time—now there are nine. While Danny currently spearheads the firm's unlawful detainer department, he was actually the only member of the department when he first joined Steven's firm. Therefore, Danny had to learn a lot on his own. He also had to create his own systems for litigating eviction cases. He developed strategies for drafting persuasive pleadings and legally compliant eviction notices that met the high demands of precision that this field requires, as a defective eviction notice can be catastrophic for a client's case. Danny has since passed along these strategies to his associates.

Danny's unlawful detainer department has now grown to six attorneys. Danny has an impressive management style. He devotes significant time to his new hires by supervising and training them on the important aspects of landlord-tenant and real estate law. Danny believes

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<sup>5</sup> J.D., Golden Gate University School of Law, 1979; B.A. Management, Golden Gate University, 1976.

that being receptive to constructive feedback, being a team player, and showing that you care are extremely important qualities for attorneys, especially new attorneys. Danny realizes that everyone makes mistakes. His goal is to invest time in training new attorneys at the firm to help them avoid the mistakes that he made when he first started practicing. He values attorneys who have an attention to detail, are accountable, and are willing to learn. While he is open to learning new ways to make his department better and more efficient, Danny appreciates when new attorneys learn the strategies he teaches and perform them with precision. He is famous for his red pen when reviewing the work product of his young associates. Many view Danny's "boot camp" as a rite of passage. Once a new hire can draft a legal document without red marks from Danny, that new hire has earned his or her position as an associate.

Danny is now a partner at Steven MacDonald's firm. As a partner, Danny's responsibilities have now grown to include more business development and firm management tasks. Danny finds networking in the legal field and other industries crucial to his firm's success. Danny serves on the board of directors for the Small Property Owners of San Francisco Institute and is a member of several bar association and professional groups. He finds that building his network creates opportunities for business referrals and further enables him to meet and help new clients. Danny believes that it is never too early to start networking to meet new contacts. It is the people who you have coffee or lunch with to learn more about their law practice who will one day potentially help connect you to your next job or next client.

Danny is the type of person who will always lend a hand to help in whatever way he can. Danny built his legal career through his own initiative and took many risks, from being a solo practitioner and working two jobs, to being a partner at Steven A. MacDonald & Partners and leading the firm's eviction department. Danny's persistence, strong work ethic, and desire to help and teach others make him a great lawyer and a trail-blazer. Danny has built a successful career at a young age and is a role model for young attorneys who are attempting to make it on their own as solo practitioners. Danny has walked the walk of creating his own business and training new attorneys. We can all take a cue from Danny, but just not the one he plays pool with.