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ASIAN AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION  
*of the Greater Bay Area*

## AABA Newsletter - December 2016

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### President's Message

By Hung Chang

2016, for some of us, has been a lousy year: Passing of many musicians and actors who defined our childhood, more police shootings and the intensification of race relations, Brexit, and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election are just a few cases to that point. As we prepare for 2017, it's natural to dismiss 2016 as a "bad" year and hope that 2017 will be "better." As I am also looking forward to a brighter New Year, I want to remind us that (1) whether something is "good" or "bad" is a value that we subjectively assign and (2) we choose to let these things affect our own perception and our own mood. There are events that we can all agree as generally "bad", such as people whom we care about suffer or die. However, on some of these issues such as Donald Trump, I think 2017 would be better if we stop dismissing or underestimating the "others" who side "against us", and instead start thinking about how we can improve our situation and actions we can take next year. We can choose to sulk and feel depressed about things that we have no control over, or we can choose to focus on the good side of the force. To quote the great Carrie Fisher: "Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die." May we all resent less in 2017, and count our blessings more, even if some of us may be a little short for stormtroopers.

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## Election Candidate Statements

Below are statements from 6 candidates running for Director positions. Each candidate has contributed a great deal to AABA and would like your support. Please cast your votes by January 3rd for these dedicated AABA members and encourage other members to vote too!

### **Lin Chan**



The current political climate demands that AABA does everything we can to defend the civil rights of our most vulnerable communities. My goal is to strengthen partnerships between AABA, civil rights nonprofits, and the ABA. In the past five years, I have co-chaired AABA's Women's and Civil Rights Committees. I am also a partner at Lieff Cabraser, serve on the Board of AAAJ-ALC, and vice-chair the ABA's Fair and Impartial Courts Committee.

### **Richard Cooc**



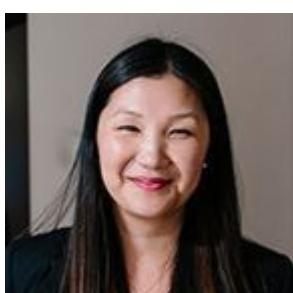
I grew up poor in the ghettos of Oakland. I understand the struggles of the underprivileged trying to make a living with limited resources. As I got more affluent, the playing field changed, but the barriers of race, stereotype, bigotry remain the same. I support our Asian American Bar Association's cause, a better tomorrow for all Asian Americans living in America. I will not sit down while injustice remains standing.

### **Alice Liu Jensen**



As Judiciary Committee Co-Chair since 2010, my AABA service has been dedicated to increasing API representation on the bench. I am running to mobilize AABA to provide a voice for vulnerable communities; to combat racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and other forms of hatred and discrimination; to stand united by finding existing and creating new opportunities to utilize our legal knowledge and our political will to speak for those who cannot.

### **Marie Ma**



I'm excited about the opportunity to serve on AABA's Board and continue working on promoting diversity and inclusion in our profession – as demonstrated by my involvement with AABA, BASF, USF School of Law's Board of Governors, and Gap Inc.'s Law Firm Diversity Committee. I'd also be honored to serve as the Board's only

in-house representative and, with that perspective, help drive engagement and support from our in-house membership and their networks.



### **Kelly Matayoshi**

Having spent the last year on the Board, I am ready to continue the good work AABA has been doing and push it even further as we stand up in the wake of the new challenges our community faces. My experience as former Co-Chair of the LGBT Committee, liaison to the LGBT and Women's Committees, and active supporter of the Civil Rights Committee, provides me a solid platform to do so.



### **Sean Tamura-Sato**

Since joining AABA in law school, I've worked with nearly every Committee to organize events on issues such as immigration, workers' rights, and bias in the legal field. My work at Minami Tamaki is grounded in using the law to advance social justice. As a Board Member, I will ensure that AABA carries on its history of protecting civil rights and serving as a leading voice for the API community.

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## **Reflections on My Involvement in AABA**

By Kathy Aoki

Co-Chair of AABA's Newsletter Committee

When I joined AABA almost 26 years ago, my father thought I wanted to become an attorney because I was attending many AABA events where many attorneys were in attendance. I recall telling my father naively "I would rather become a sportswriter than an attorney." At the time I had little experience covering sporting events and writing sports stories so I did not know how much work sportswriters do. Journalism was my passion back then with no thoughts of pursuing a career in anything legal.

Over the years things have changed for me and journalism has too. But, my involvement in AABA has remained strong. I remember when Jeff Adachi called me to ask me if I could help him when he became AABA president in 1991. Since I enjoy helping my friends out, I agreed but then I asked Jeff, "What could I do?" since I am not an attorney. Jeff insisted that I did not have to be an attorney and he paid my AABA membership dues. Before I knew it I had joined the AABA newsletter committee and I began a new volunteer venture which I have always enjoyed.

More than seven years ago my life changed when my newspaper company was going out of business and I, like my former colleagues, had to decide what I would do next. Since I was not one of the younger staff members I felt I had to have a plan. After speaking with my friend Kathy Asada, a former AABA president and someone I met when I first joined AABA, and jokingly asked her what I should do next, she responded "how

about paralegal school?" Since I did not want to become an attorney this seemed like a venture I would enjoy pursuing much to my family's displeasure.

In 2009 the recession was terrible and when I watched a news report on television about the hardships people were going through to find work the person they interviewed was a veteran paralegal who could not find a job. My father said to me "and that's what you want to do." Contrary to what some people might think I never gave up my journalistic career to pursue my goal of working as a paralegal or finding work that is suited for someone with a legal background. In my Ethics class when the professor asked his students to write what our dream job is I wrote "working in the legal department of CNN." For me, my paralegal education was worth every cent I invested in it and all the blood, sweat and tears I had to endure to survive through San Francisco State University's highly esteemed ABA Approved Paralegal Studies Program.

As we head into the heart of the holiday season with Christmas and New Year's upon us, I feel a deep sense of gratitude or "kansha" in Japanese about my involvement in AABA. I feel much appreciation, thankfulness and gratitude about being accepted in an organization in which I am not an attorney or an aspiring attorney. There are so many AABA members I have met past and present who have helped me along the way whom I feel a deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness to all of them. Thank you Jeff for getting me involved in AABA!

It has been an honor and privilege for me to serve as Co-Chair of the AABA Newsletter Committee this year with Richard Cooc. I commend our Newsletter team which also includes Stephanie Yee, Jason Yee, and Alice Chin. We are lucky to get guidance and help from AABA President Hung Chang. Also, a special thank you to Tina Hsu, whose hard work and talent has helped make the AABA newsletter look more attractive and reader friendly.

Although our AABA Newsletter Committee is small and we would like to get more people to join us, our success is due to everyone working hard together and listening to each other's ideas, thoughts and feelings about what we can do to continuously improve to make the newsletter something everyone can enjoy and feel proud of. Please do not hesitate to tell any newsletter committee member what you think about the newsletter and suggestions you have.

Best wishes to everyone for a healthy, peaceful and prosperous 2017!

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## AABA Membership Spotlight: Vilaska Nguyen

Vilaska Nguyen is a senior trial attorney at the San Francisco Public Defender's Office where he began his indigent defense career in 2005 as a misdemeanor attorney litigating nearly 30 jury trials before moving on to the felony trial unit. His current focus is on serious felony matters and he has successfully defended cases involving homicide, sexual assault and hate crimes. Over the course of his career, Vilaska has mentored and championed students who later developed into stellar advocates in the courtroom and prominent leaders in the legal community.

Vilaska is a zealous supporter of education and outreach. He previously served as the President of the Asian American Criminal Trial Lawyers Association and currently serves as the Mentorship and Training Director. Vilaska is a certified instructor for the National Institute of Trial Advocacy. He is a guest lecturer at USF's



Criminal Law clinic and a faculty member of the law school's Intensive Advocacy Program. Vilaska developed the Mock Trial workshop at the non-profit 826 Valencia and he is a past co-chair of the AABA scholarship committee.

Beyond the courtroom, Vilaska is dedicated to criminal justice reform. He works closely with grass roots organizations such as the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, C.U.R.B. and the Drug Policy Alliance in a united effort to end mass incarceration, to stop the War on Drugs, and to eliminate racism in the criminal justice system.

**First Job:** My first official job was a cook at Roundtable Pizza. I started at \$4.75 an hour and topped out at \$5.25. As much scrrill as that was back then, I consider my first real job to be the first gig I landed after I graduated from the University of Washington. I worked at the Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs and lobbied for civil rights issues in the State capital during the legislative session then continued my outreach work throughout the state once session ended.

**Describe Yourself:** I was named Vilaska because my parents were Vietnam War refugees and arrived in Anchorage after the Fall of Saigon. They named me after my birth state, Alaska, and my Vietnamese name Viet. Growing up, all I knew was being poor, working hard and always helping others, especially my community. Public defender work was a natural fit.

**Favorite TV show/movie:** My favorite movie is City of God. It's such a whimsical coming-of-age story in the context of breathtaking violence, poverty and despair.

**Hidden Talent:** I love to write, act and perform stand-up comedy. I've appeared in some local and national commercials and regularly appear at comedy clubs in the City. I'll be at Cobb's Comedy Club on Sunday, December 18th at 7:30pm--come out! Go to [cobbscopyrite.com](http://cobbscopyrite.com) for tickets.



**Favorite Food:** My favorite lunch is a cup of coffee from Roma Cafe or Philz.

**Why did you enter law?** I've always been connected to community advocacy. As a college student, I was the President of the Ethnic Studies Students' Association at University of Washington where we successfully organized the community leaders and students. We were able to shut down Obachine, a restaurant affiliated with Wolfgang Puck, which refused to take down a huge, grotesque portrait demeaning the Chinese community. Moving on to work at a civil rights commission, law school was the natural next step towards my goal of impacting policy and community advocacy.

**Dream Job:** I'm pretty spoiled with my current job. I can't imagine my career being much better than this.

**AABA is:** my extended family. Sky's the limit for us.

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