



# Profile: Annie Wu

After years in defense, child of Taiwanese immigrants makes her mark in the plaintiff's bar

By **STEPHEN ELLISON**

It wouldn't be very far from the truth to say the law profession chose Annie Wu rather than the other way around, as is more commonly the case. Before she even opened a law book, Wu had already developed many of the necessary attributes to make a career in the courtroom: a high intellect, a studious nature, an exemplary work ethic, a pleasant demeanor. Not to mention just the right amount of street savvy.

Those are the very traits that give people options when it comes to career choices, and Wu's only goal when it came time to make such a life decision was to follow her parents' vision and earn a graduate degree – or two.

"I didn't know what I was going to do after college; I knew I wanted to get another degree, and I ended up just kind of falling into law school," Wu said. "I did have an internship that I did in college with a public defender that opened my eyes up a little bit to law. So that was a little bit of a motivator. But I just wanted to get another degree after college."

Indeed, Wu was not done studying after she earned a bachelor's degree in economics from University of Illinois, where she also majored in speech communications. Nor was she done even after she graduated from University of San Diego School of Law. She continued studying at USD while launching her law career and earned a master's in business administration. But the law managed to hold her interest, and she was ripe for the challenge.

"My parents were immigrants from Taiwan, and they always encouraged me to get a graduate degree, which inspired me to get my law degree," Wu said. "They were immigrants to this country and owned small businesses while I was growing up. I saw them work long hours,



Wu

12-13-hour days, seven days a week, and only had Christmas and Thanksgiving off. I became independent at a young age because my parents worked long hours. But their work ethic is instilled in me."

Wu started her law career in insurance defense and quickly cut her teeth as a trial lawyer. She spent nearly a decade on the defense side, but the notion of transitioning to the plaintiffs' side had always been at the back of her mind, as if she knew that's where she belonged, she said. It may have taken longer than she anticipated, but after nine years in defense work, the timing finally felt right in 2014.

Wu said she wouldn't trade her defense experience for anything, and it was hardly a good riddance of the law area that helped launch her career. It was more of a welcome to a new challenge as she spread her wings.

"The upside is that you're always trying to push the cases forward, and you have to be very proactive in just discovering the facts and getting the case to trial," Wu said, describing the key differences in the opposite sides of the plaintiffs' bar. "And a lot of times we're doing that for our clients ... so we can put this tragedy behind them. I think that the differences on the defense side is you're kind of responding to what the plaintiffs are doing, and you're trying to give a little bit more pushback – for good reason."

On the plaintiffs' side, making a real difference in people's lives was key for Wu, whether it's for an individual who suffered a catastrophic injury or a family whose loved one died because of another party's wrongdoing. Those people are relying on Wu and her team to stand up in court for them because they essentially have lost their livelihood, she said. Some of those clients are disabled for life or have lost the household's breadwinner and may be struggling to make ends meet. That's truly what inspires Wu.

"I find myself working probably just as hard or even harder on the plaintiffs' side because I want to make that difference and help them put everything behind them," she said.

## Midwest product goes coastal

Wu was raised in Illinois and stayed close to home when she went to undergrad school at University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. But when she finished college, she was eager to move out west for her graduate studies – what turned out to be law school.

"Well, I wanted to move out to California I think ever since I was young, but my family kept me close," she



recalled. “Then when I graduated, that’s pretty much where I looked for law schools – on the West Coast.”

After earning her juris doctorate at University of San Diego School of Law, she landed a job at Ryan Mercaldo & Worthington, a defense firm in San Diego, where she spent a little more than five years before making the move north to the Bay Area for a job with another defense firm, DeHay & Elliston. After another four years there, Wu made the big leap across the aisle, landing with Alexander Law Group in San Jose, where she practiced premises liability, commercial transportation and trucking law, construction accidents and medical malpractice.

Four years later, she accepted a job at the Veen Firm in San Francisco, one of the most prestigious plaintiffs’ firms in the nation. At that point, Wu had become familiar with a lot of the firms and attorneys she had been working against, and that made the transition a bit easier, she said.

“I wanted to work on catastrophic injury cases, and they’re one of the best,” Wu said. “They’re a great trial firm, and that’s kind of what my training had been, so that made me a pretty good candidate. They’re also very cutting edge. We utilize a lot of technology, and I think that’s very helpful when you go to trial.”

### Preparing and learning

While technology may be the better way to connect with jurors and present evidence during a trial, Wu falls back on traditional methodology when looking at the most important aspects of trial law: preparation and telling her client’s story. But by no means does she consider herself an expert, as she continues to learn and self-correct with each case.

“I think once you start preparing trials, and you continue to prepare them over and over, you notice what you didn’t do at the last trial, and it makes you be more proactive about getting certain evidence admitted and finding the

### REDIRECT

**Getaway Spot:** Anderson Valley

**Go-To Music or Artist:** Alternative Rock or ‘90s Hip Hop

**Recommended Reading:** I don’t have a favorite, but I enjoy reading autobiographies

**Dream Job:** The job I have without ever losing

**Words to Live By:** “Don’t take yourself (or any job) too seriously.”

right person to testify about it,” Wu explained. Also “getting some requests for admissions out so the defense will admit, ahead of trial, certain facts, or finding other ways to get certain evidence authenticated into trial.”

“Then figuring out your witnesses,” she continued, “and what we’ve been doing a lot is taking depositions by video and playing them at trial. I think that’s actually very helpful.”

Wu said her team uses animations, working with an external animator and expert witnesses to help get the animations to where they’re admissible at trial. Such visuals are powerful and compelling in giving the jury a sense of what the plaintiffs’ team members believe happened at the time of the incident as well as why they believe it happened and how they believe it happened, based on the evidence.

“I think trials have become a lot more interesting to jurors just because of a lot of the visuals that are being used,” Wu said. “I think back in the day, you would have had maybe a white board. I mean we still have white boards, but now we’ve got PowerPoints to dress up the presentation.”

### Recent success

Wu has had a number of cases that might be considered memorable, but the most recent one she worked on perhaps tops the list. She won an eight-figure settlement for a family whose provider was killed in a vehicle crash. Wu represented the victim’s widow, a stay-at-home

mother, and their five children. The case received preference because all five of the kids were under the age of 14.

“I had met the widow, I think it had been six months (since the incident), and she was just really devastated, of course,” Wu said. “I was with her (at their home) with all her kids. She really didn’t have the means without her husband, who had worked and taken care of the family. We ended up resolving the case.”

Without identifying the defendant, Wu was able to disclose that she obtained an \$18.5 million settlement for the family.

When Wu is not in court, bringing in seven- and eight-figure awards, she enjoys yoga, hiking and generally being outdoors. Before the coronavirus pandemic shutdown, she had been a big world traveler, she said, and was hoping to get back to that when it’s safe again.

“I like just going to different parts of the world and discovering the culture,” she said. “What I do on the weekends now is spend most of my time at parks with my daughter, who was born last year. My life has changed dramatically for the better. My job also has a new meaning because I want my daughter to learn how important it is in helping others.”

One other thing Wu had been doing in her spare time before the pandemic was volunteering with the Boys and Girls Club of America. She said it’s her way of giving back to the community, and she misses it.

Her advice to younger lawyers and law students is rather simple: Hard work will take you a long way.

“Work really hard the first couple years because that’s when you learn the most,” she said. “And I think that the harder you work and the more time that you put in during your early years will actually transform (you) into a better attorney.”

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