

# Rounding the Circle

*A young attorney becomes the champion her immigrant family never had.*

I was eight, and I remember we would always leave at dusk, driving south from Akron to the Ohio town where this man lived. When we arrived it would be dark, and we would park across the street, my parents and I perched in our little burgundy Geo Prizm, eyes steadied on that unassuming house, watching lights flicker on in one room and then another. “He’s home,” my father would whisper. “Why is he avoiding our calls?” And then we would sit in silence, my parents lost in reflection at the shame of it all. We never left the car, and certainly never went up to the door to confront the man. After an hour my father would drive us home.

My parents had immigrated to the United States from China two years earlier so my dad could attend graduate school at the University of Akron. Through a mutual friend, the owner of the house had been introduced to my parents. He convinced them that he had an infallible business plan and could guarantee a 12 percent return on their money. My parents scrounged up \$25,000 and gave it to him—all they had saved from my dad’s \$12,000-a-year school stipend and money borrowed from friends.

A year later the money was all gone. The business opportunity never existed. The man stopped answering my parents’ calls. My mother was deeply upset, realizing it would take years to recoup our losses. My dad rationalized, refusing to admit he had been duped. Seeing my parents so vulnerable for the first time, it felt like the end of the world.

We worked hard as a family to recover financially. The three of us worked Satur-



Jenny Hua and her mother in Akron, Ohio

days cleaning office buildings and parking lots, and my mom and I worked weeknights and Sundays at laundromats for years before my dad graduated. The loss loomed over my childhood, and I was determined never to feel—or let my family feel—helpless like that ever again. So I decided to become a lawyer.

In 2010 I entered UC Irvine Law School, as a member of what would be the second graduating class. I received a significant scholarship thanks to the vision and support of the community that was eager to ensure the school’s success. I took full advantage of the many opportunities for service and experiential learning. In my second year, I joined UCI’s inaugural Jessup International Moot Court team, which I captained the next year. In the Appellate Litigation Clinic, I also briefed an immigration case before the Ninth Circuit, persuading the government to agree to a remand of the case without need for oral argument. I participated in several pro bono cases and clinics, helping with immigration,

guardianship, and contract matters.

As a summer associate after my second year, I helped write an amicus brief before the Ninth Circuit for Snell & Wilmer in Orange County. I joined the firm after graduating, and within months I was in the California Supreme Court, watching the oral arguments for *Patterson v. Domino’s Pizza* (60 Cal. 4th 474 (2014)), which I helped prepare. I also found myself drafting motions, jury instructions, and briefs for writs and appeals. Through it all, my firm has encouraged me to continue my pro bono work.

Whether my work is for a Fortune 500 company or a pro bono client, my goal goes beyond crystalizing tough legal problems. It’s to be the lawyer I wish my parents could have afforded. The one that could have wiped away the shame and sense of helplessness, even if only with a few comforting words; the advocate that could have been our family’s champion.

I was reminded of that goal when I met the eight-year-old daughter of one of my pro bono clients, whom I was helping apply for a U visa and employment authorization. The little girl sat quietly through the interview, as her mother recounted the details of domestic violence and other hardships. As we finished and the pair made their way out the door, the little girl suddenly turned to ask if she could hug me. I realized I’d come full circle, from that eight-year-old girl huddled with her parents on a dark street, wondering how we would survive our loss. [📌](#)

*Jenny Hua, a second-year associate with Snell & Wilmer in Costa Mesa, concentrates in commercial litigation and appellate law.*