

# Incidental Lives: 72-year-old new lawyer starts quest for justice

By [Michael Tsai](#) | November 13, 2018 *Updated November 13, 2018 12:11am*

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Among family, friends and even casual acquaintances, 72-year-old Honolulu resident Kay Lorraine is well known for meeting challenges with a shrug, a smile and healthy dose of humor.

But late last spring, after her years-long legal battle in a religious and sexual harassment and discrimination case took an abrupt and negative turn, the normally ebullient Lorraine found herself falling into a deepening depression.

Lorraine is legally constrained from speaking about the case, in which she was the original plaintiff. She says only that the experience “completely destroyed my faith in justice.”

The admission comes painfully for a woman who left behind a successful career — several, actually — to earn a law degree at age 70, even more so for someone who had dedicated many years to leading nonprofit organizations in their efforts to champion civil rights and promote community development.

Lorraine was, in her own words, “in a bad place” and in desperate need of spiritual healing. She would soon find it some 3,700 miles from home, at the epicenter of perhaps the most heated and controversial humanitarian battle in a year when such pitched clashes have been waged on a thousand partisan fronts.

To understand Lorraine’s decisions of the last several months, it is instructive to map the road she’s traveled.

Born and raised in Pigeon, a small farming community at the tip of Michigan’s geographic “thumb,” Lorraine learned lessons of ingenuity and self-realization at the hip of her father, who ran dress shops in Michigan and later Ohio. Hewing close to his own motto, “Just because you haven’t done something before doesn’t mean you can’t,” Lorraine’s father, a World War II pilot, built every house the family lived in, rebuilt and repaired airplanes as a hobby and personally took care of every sewing need his family and his business had.

After high school a violent crime and its unfortunate aftermath robbed Lorraine of her intended path through college. In typical fashion she kept her faith and blazed a new trail for herself, first as a singer (not to be confused with Kaye Lorraine of “I Don’t Want to Walk Without You” fame) who opened for jazz legend Mel Torme and later as a film producer.

“It hasn’t been particularly pretty, but I’ve had an interesting life,” she said with a laugh.

Along the way she met and married Brad Bate, her husband of 43 years and the man she calls, on nearly every reference, “the love of my life.”

Some 25 years ago the couple visited Hawaii for a convention. Upon their respective returns to then-home Chicago, each made note of the fact that they had left 86-degree weather on Kauai for subzero temperatures in the Windy City.

“We started to ask ourselves why two reasonably intelligent, hardworking people couldn’t make it work in Hawaii,” Lorraine said, again laughing.

And so, after spending eight months winding down their production company and ensuring each of their employees found other work, the couple relocated to Honolulu.

Here Lorraine leveraged her administrative and managerial skills into a series of leadership positions at local nonprofits, including the Research Institute of Hawaii and the Hawaii Women’s Business Center. Seven years ago she took a hiatus to take care of her ailing mother; in her downtime she began taking online college courses and eventually earned a degree in public policy analysis from Ashford University. The Monday after her undergraduate graduation ceremony, Lorraine attended orientation for incoming students at the University of Hawaii’s William S. Richardson School of Law.

At UH Lorraine found herself in a broadly diverse and uniquely supportive law program in which her wealth of personal experiences was valued.

“When we covered the Nazis marching in Skokie in our constitutional law class, it meant something to me because I was there — I was at Skokie in 1977,” she said. “They started calling me Forrest Gump.”

While in school Lorraine worked part time at the UH Law Library and part time at the local firm Greg Ryan & Associates. (“Hey,” she said. “You try going to law school on just Social Security!”) She stayed on with the firm after graduation.

Personally, all was going well until the negative outcome of her ongoing court case in the spring, which left Lorraine struggling to come to terms with what had occurred.

"One night my husband was watching Rachel Maddow, and he came in and said, 'I think you should watch this,'" she recalled. "They were talking about RAICES (the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Support, based in San Antonio), which was working to reunify immigrant children who had been separated from their parents.

"I was crying, and I turned to him and said, 'I think I have to go to Texas,'" she said. "He said, 'I think so, too.'"

Forty-eight hours later Lorraine was in San Antonio.

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