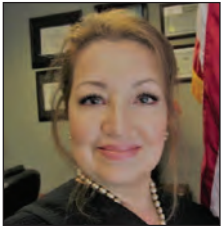




Hon. Darrell Fun

Administrative Law Judge, U.S. National Transportation Safety Board

by Hon. Alisa M. Tapia



Hon. Alisa Tapia is an author, freelance writer, and administrative law judge for the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). In July 2021, Judge Tapia was appointed to NTSB Circuit III based in San Antonio, TX. She has been presiding over administrative law cases for over 18 years, having worked at the Illinois Commerce Commission, Social Security Administration, and USDA National Appeals Division

Judge Darrell Fun was born and raised in Rock Springs, Wyoming, an old coal-mining town in the state's southwest corner. At that time, a culturally rich community of just over 12,000—presently, a population of 23,000.

Rock Springs is distinct and beautiful in its character. Yet, the town does reveal one of the worst massacres during the 1800s. On September 2, 1885, white immigrant coal miners viciously attacked immigrant Chinese miners, killing at least 28 and wounding many others. According to historical facts, the conflict stemmed from racial tensions over a labor dispute. It was perceived that the railroad hired Chinese miners over their white counterparts because they offered cheaper labor. In retaliation, the white miners attacked the Chinese miners—releasing an anti-Chinese response throughout the United States. The attack became known as “The Rock Springs Massacre.” Nevertheless, Rock Springs survived the tragedy. Today, it is a vibrant town of multicultural and, notably, breathtaking landscapes of the beautiful outdoors.

His Roots

In the late 1920s, Judge Fun's father emigrated with his parents from China to Laramie, Wyoming, to flee the war. Once settled, the family opened a small eatery called the “City Café.” The family ran the small-town restaurant until Judge Fun's father was drafted into the army during the Korean Conflict.

His mother, her siblings, and her parents also fled China to escape the war and settled in San Antonio, TX, where his grandfather established the first Chinese Baptist church. The family worked the land and grew vegetables to sell to local markets, and while his grandmother cared for the farm animals, his grandfather operated an Oriental Antique and Pawnshop. His grandfather's claim to fame was when robbers attempted to rob the store, and his grandpa chased them down the street with a Samurai sword—an incident that hit the local newspaper.

Several of Judge Fun's uncles served in the U.S. Armed Forces; a few were Air Force pilots and trained with the American Volunteer Group, the Flying Tigers. In the 1950s, Judge Fun's parents met at a



Chinese military social gathering. As his father fondly remembers that moment, he was introduced to a beautiful Chinese lady, an administrative assistant at Lackland Air Force Base in Antonio. Although she had three other sisters, this one captured his father's heart. After completing military service, his parents married and moved to Rock Springs, Wyoming, where they would open a Chinese-American restaurant, the “Sands Café.” On their 20th anniversary, Judge Fun warmly recalls his parents purchasing a 30-foot Buddha statue that sat proudly in front of the Sands Café, a restaurant his family would successfully operate for thirty-two years.

His Childhood Passions

Growing up against the backdrop of Rock Springs, Judge Fun's childhood passions were hunting, fishing, and backcountry hiking. He warmly remembers his mother packing hearty lunches as he, his two older brothers, and his father headed out the door for a day of fishing. His father taught them how to bait their fishing hooks and patiently untangled their fishing lines.

Martial arts were another of Judge Fun's childhood passions that sustained him for over ten years. His Marital Arts instructor became his childhood mentor

and, later, a good friend. He taught young Fun the wisdom of patience, dedication, and, most importantly, belief in himself. Building on solid ground, Judge Fun would obtain a second-degree black belt in Tae Kwon-Do, a PADI scuba diver certification, and a private pilot license with an instrument rating.

His Influences

Judge Fun's parents raised their children with a strong work ethic and a love for family. His exposure to the family restaurant influenced him to pursue a career that would serve the public. Initially, Judge Fun thought being a doctor would fit that bill, but after almost failing chemistry, he had to reassess that plan. One of his high school interests would later lead him to become a lawyer—speech and debate. He enjoyed arguing contemporary issues on different topics. Life would later reveal that Judge Fun was not the only inspired legal mind in the family.

Judge Fun's brother significantly influenced his desire to pursue a career in law. His oldest brother, Jim Jr., was a deputy district attorney at the Washington County District Attorney's Office for 17 years and later a Washington County Circuit Court Judge for 15 years before retiring in 2021. Among many other accomplishments, Jim was honored with the Honorable Wallace P. Carson, Jr. Award for Judicial Excellence.

His middle brother Brian is similarly accomplished. He was a massage therapist for 17 years and ranked Denver's top massage therapist for eight consecutive years. At 54, Brian returned to school and became a registered nurse in Denver's health psychiatric department and now the Denver School District. Brian was awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal, which recognizes exemplary service in public health.

His Education

Judge Fun attended the University of Utah, majoring in Business Finance with a minor in Chinese. Soon after, he attended Syracuse University Law School, where he served as the executive editor for the Syracuse Law Review. One of his articles appeared in the ABA publication, *The Brief*, titled *HIV-Infected Healers: Do Patients Have a Right to Know?*

If that were not enough, Judge Fun was also the editor-in-chief of the law school's monthly newspaper, "The Judge."

While studying for the bar, Judge Fun clerked for a solo practitioner specializing in protecting the rights of employees in employment discrimination cases. He also interned at the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Northern District of N.Y. His experiences solidified his desire to one day become a litigator. Judge Fun is currently licensed in Colorado, New York, and Wyoming.



His Military Service & Its Sacrifices

Judge Fun served with the U.S. Air Force for 6.5 years and with the Wyoming Air National Guard Reserves for over 25 years—where he faithfully continues to serve our county.

Judge Fun's overseas duty includes Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea, Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar to support Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, and Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan to support Operation Enduring Freedom.

Serving overseas was a memorable experience for Judge Fun. It allowed him to accomplish humanitarian missions and, at the same time, experience deep-felt camaraderie among his fellow military members. Military service engrained in his character a sense of honor, loyalty, courage, integrity, and discipline—all for the love of his country. He explains no one cared about your gender, nationality, or skin color. The focus was on accomplishing the mission.

The most challenging aspect of serving abroad was lost time with his family. Judge Fun shares that military members make huge sacrifices by missing special moments of birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries with the special people closest to them: their families.

Judge Fun has been married to his lovely wife, Hae Yun, for 23 years. She is a domestic engineer. They have an adult son, Aaron, age 31, and a minor son, Anderson, age 16. Judge Fun states his family means everything to him. It is the reason he gets up every morning and goes to work.

Judge Fun holds the rank of colonel. Colonel Fun has received several awards for his military service, including the Air Force Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters (3 OLC), Air Force Commendation Medal with 2 OLC, Meritorious Unit Award with 1 OLC, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Valor with 3 OLC;

An early photo of Judge Fun and his parents.



Judge Fun during his military service.

National Defense Service Medal with one Service Star; Afghanistan Campaign Medal Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal; Global War on Terrorism Service Medal; Korean Defense Service Medal; Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal; Air Force Overseas Ribbon Short Tour with 2 OLC; Air Force Longevity Service Award with 3 OLC; Armed Forces Reserve Medal with “M” Device; Air Force Training Ribbon; NATO International Security Assistance Force Medal; Wyoming National Guard Meritorious Achievement Medal; Wyoming National Guard Exceptional Achievement Ribbon; and the Wyoming National Guard Service Ribbon.

His Legal Career

In 1993, Judge Fun began his legal career as a Judge Advocate in the U.S. Air Force handling international and operational law, estate planning for military members and their families, prosecuting and defending court-martials and handling multi-million dollar claims against the government.

In 2000, Judge Fun left active duty and returned to his hometown to serve as a Sweetwater County prosecutor with a cross-designation as a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney handling drug-related offenses. He was also a Larmie County Assistant District Attorney in Cheyenne, Wyoming and later an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Casper, Wyoming for nine years. After twelve years as a major crimes’ prosecutor, Judge Fun moved to Denver, CO, to spend precious moments with his father and family after his father was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer.

In Denver, Judge Fun started a solo law practice with an emphasis on immigration and business transactions. He recalls that being a solo practitioner “...was immensely satisfying. However, I missed serving the public.”

In October 2016, after a challenging multi-phase application process, Judge Fun was appointed administrative law judge for the U.S. Social Security Administration—a position he held for the next five years.

The Meaning of His Journey

When asked what brings significant meaning to his legal career path, Judge Fun said public service, giving back to his community and country, and the many blessings bestowed upon him. As a public servant, he is accountable to everyone wanting justice because the law is meant for the people. He states, “Everyone should have equal access to the courts and justice irrespective of social status, financial ability, gender, race, or nationality. I have always tried to remember that I am a public servant...”

In 2021, Judge Fun was appointed administrative law judge for the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)—a position that Judge Fun, as a pilot, is pleased to say is his dream job above all others. He explains the NTSB serves as the “court of appeal” for aviators, mechanics, or merchant mariners whenever the Federal Aviation Administrator or the U.S. Coast Guard takes a certificate action. The administrative law judges hold hearings to consider and issue initial decisions on appeals filed with the NTSB’s five-member Board.

Judge Fun takes pride in being an aviation administrative law judge. When asked what advice he would give to a lawyer wanting to pursue a career as an administrative law judge, Judge Fun advises lawyers to use their skills to help others in the public sector and be bold in taking on cases where people cannot afford counsel. More importantly, once you have obtained the judgeship, remember you *are* a public servant.

When asked what “equal justice under the law” means to him, Judge Fun shared that equal justice under the law means allowing everyone to access the legal system efficiently and effectively regardless of the economic situation individuals find themselves in because, without equal access, there can be no equal justice.

In closing, Judge Fun was asked how he would like to be remembered. He wants to be remembered as the average person doing his job—*yet we can all agree there is nothing average about Judge Fun.* ☺