

# Mentoring Maven

“I’d describe Carol’s style as ‘mentoring on steroids,’” daughter-in-law Leonor (Leo) Fuller ‘84 said. “So many of the women judges in Washington state were her mentees. Almost every female judge in the state knows who she is.”

“How can I make your job easier?” were the first words Carol Fuller ‘54 said when asked for an interview about her career as a judge. This question was not empty; clearly it had been said hundreds, if not thousands, of times before and she meant it.

As the first woman judge in the state of Washington outside of King County, Fuller had few role models. Therefore, whether it was intentional or not, she blazed a trail for all women judges who came after her. Her daughter-in-law Leo Fuller ‘84 is betting that it was deliberate. “Carol has never forgotten the challenges encountered by a trail blazer,” Leo Fuller explains. “However, the experience never hardened her. Carol is a relentless optimist and, in this way, has inspired others notwithstanding how hard it was to achieve what she did.”

Judge Fuller of the Thurston County Superior Court was appointed by former Governor Dixie Lee Ray in 1979 after five years on the bench in Mason County as a District Court judge. After receiving this appointment, she went on to win a landslide victory in the Thurston and Mason County general elections.

In 1981, Ken Walz, an attorney in Tumwater, Washington, wrote of Judge Fuller in the *Washington State Bar News*, “As women attorneys continue their advancement in the legal profession, let’s not forget those who led the way.”

Then on February 9, 1989 Judge Fuller was recognized during the 10th anniversary dinner of the Northwest Women’s Law Center (now Legal Voices) at the Seattle Sheraton. Judge Fuller received an award for her outstanding contribution in advancing the legal rights of women in the Northwest. Nearly 1,300 people attended and author/ activist Gloria Steinem was the featured speaker.

A portrait of Carol Fuller '54, an older woman with short, curly, light-colored hair, wearing glasses and a dark jacket over a white collared shirt. The portrait is set against a dark, textured background.

Carol  
Fuller '54

Carol Fuller began her journey to becoming a ground-breaking judge and mentor when she entered law school in 1951 on the advice of a junior college teacher who said that women “should have good work to do”. While there were four women in her class, three graduated and only two of those passed the bar exam.

In law school, Judge Fuller enjoyed the challenge of the material.

“There was so much to learn,” she said. “I was devoted to learning the law and to learning how to practice the law.”

She also met her husband Herb during the first month of law school. They met in Contracts class and married in 1954.

After graduation, the Fullers moved to France where Herb Fuller served in the U.S. military for five years. They then returned to Olympia. In 1969, at the age of 39, Judge Fuller felt that their family was “stable enough” for her to resume her law career. Their youngest daughter was 9-years-old and although Judge Fuller had not worked since graduation, she took a job with Legal Services in Tacoma. In 1971 she joined her husband in his private practice.

Recently retired Judge Christine Pomeroy was in the fifth grade when she met Carol Fuller. “Somebody told me she was a lawyer,” Pomeroy said. “That really impressed me. I didn’t think women could be lawyers so I asked her. She replied ‘Yes, dear, they can be.’”

Inspired by Judge Fuller, Pomeroy attended law school. After graduating, Judge Fuller mentored Pomeroy and the young lawyer practiced in front of Judge Fuller for 15 years before being elected to take Fuller’s position on the bench, an honor not lost on Pomeroy.

Pomeroy said the most important lesson Judge Fuller taught her was “civility”.

“In Family Court, Carol always suggested settlement,” Pomeroy said. “She would say, ‘Let’s have a cup of tea’ and both sides would sit down to talk. Everyone was happy with the settlement. It taught me that it didn’t matter what happened – just focus on what you want to get across to the judge, focus on your role to advocate and to inform. She also gave me good advice when I became a judge. She taught me how to get along with people, how to be gratuitous. She’d tell me to really look at the person in front of you. Make them feel at ease.”

Pomeroy said Judge Fuller’s graciousness extended far beyond the courtroom.

“She would ask ‘How are you?’ of everyone she met,” Pomeroy said. “She’d be interested in your case, your children. She would take your hand and hold it a minute or two.”

Judge Lisa Sutton met Judge Fuller through her mother-in-law, Mary Stuart Lux. According to Judge Sutton, then Representative Mary Stuart Lux and Judge Fuller were among the first women in politics in Thurston County. A number of years later, in 1984, Sutton, a law student at the time, applied for and was accepted for an internship at the Thurston County Supreme Court. Judge Fuller hired her and also served as her supervisor. A lifetime friendship ensued.

Sutton, like Pomeroy and many other women law professionals in Thurston County, consider Judge Fuller a mentor and friend.

“As a judge and as a person, Carol was humble, compassionate and always wanted to resolve everything,” Sutton said. “Carol promoted alternative dispute resolution well before that concept was used as it now is.”

Sutton recalls the graciousness of Judge Fuller during her first court hearing as a new assistant attorney general practicing in front of Judge Fuller.

“As a judge and as a person, Carol was humble, compassionate and always wanted to resolve everything, Carol promoted alternative dispute resolution well before that concept was used as it now is.”

## Judge Lisa Sutton

“She asked me and the opposing attorney if we had discussed resolving the case,” Sutton said. “We had not, so she asked us to meet in her chambers where we had a cup of tea and talked about how to obtain a mutually agreeable settlement.”

**Chief Justice (Ret.) Gerry Alexander ‘64** lived in the same neighborhood as Judge Fuller.

“I always admired her,” Alexander said. “It was tough on her at first, being the only woman judge, but she never showed it. It didn’t seem to get under her skin.”

After seeing a documentary on women in the legislature in the late 1980s, Fuller was inspired to create a video recording on the history of women judges in Washington state. The Northwest Women’s Law Center agreed to produce the film with the help of Susan Starbuck.

In classic “Carol” fashion, Judge Fuller gives Starbuck all the credit for the award-winning film.

“Susan had the energy, intelligence and fundraising abilities,” she said.

Before retiring from Superior Court in 1993, Judge Fuller presided over thousands of important cases including the overcrowding of Echo Glen Children’s Center near Snoqualmie, the ruling on tax exemptions relating to heart-lung machines and hearing aids, the halting of logging in Snohomish County, and cases involving fish trafficking. But when asked about her most important or significant cases, Judge Fuller said she considers every case to be significant.

“If I put myself on the other side of the bench, I can only feel that every case is important,” she said. “Especially in family law. I know how important a judge’s decision is to the family.”

Although Judge Fuller retired from the bench in 1993, she returned to her husband’s firm Fuller & Fuller, a regional law firm emphasizing accident/injury law and medical malpractice law. The Fullers have always emphasized the importance of family. Also practicing at the firm are their son, Jay, daughters **Marya ‘85** and Nina and their daughter-in-law Leonor. The firm is currently celebrating its 40th year. Grandson **Evan Fuller** is now at the UW School of Law, class of 2014. “She is incredibly humble. Her calm, peaceful, insightful nature teaches me never to make assumptions about other people,” Evan said. “She has laid a solid moral foundation for our family.”



CAROL FULLER AND MARY STUART LUX