Judge Cynthia Ming-Mei Lee was the first Asian American woman Presiding Judge in San Francisco history. A single mother who raised two sons in San Francisco, she is committed to providing equal access to the court for all citizens and ensuring equal justice.

Judge Lee is the granddaughter of immigrants who ran a Chinese laundry on the East Coast. She was raised in New York City’s Chinatown. Her father worked in a hardware store and restaurant and her mom worked as a clerk. She attended New York City public schools and earned a scholarship to Mount Holyoke before heading west for law school.

Before her appointment to the Superior Court, Judge Lee earned her law degree at Golden Gate University School of Law. She worked for several years in private practice before joining the San Francisco District Attorney’s Office where she served as an assistant district attorney from 1977 to 1998. Since her appointment to the court in 1998, Judge Lee has presided over hundreds of criminal and civil trials and was awarded Trial Judge of the Year in 2014 by the San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association. Judge Lee is currently the head of the Asbestos Case Management and California Environmental Quality Act Department.

Judge Lee founded the San Francisco Veterans Justice Court to assist veterans in our criminal justice system. The court has provided customized treatment plans to help incarcerated veterans re-enter society instead of re-entering the criminal court system. As of January 2018, the court has 124 graduates and has been widely viewed as a success.

Judge Lee instituted mandatory domestic violence training for all judges and received a commendation from the Commission on the Status of Women. She co-founded the Truancy Action Partnership to work collaboratively with parents, school staff, and child welfare agencies to help parents overcome obstacles to school attendance and made changes to increase court support for dependent children and the elderly.

Judge Lee raised her children in a three-generation household, and was an active volunteer in their school and sports meets (soccer, running, and rowing). She is an avid runner and yoga practitioner.