



JUDGE DOROTHY NELSON

SENIOR JUDGE, UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS 9TH CIRCUIT

"I'd make a terrible litigator, says Judge Dorothy Nelson, grinning. Why? "Because you have to hate the other side."

A Senior Judge in the United States Court of Appeals 9th Circuit, Nelson specializes in law reform with an emphasis on mediation. She credits her Baha'i faith, which she has followed since 1954, with guiding her on her life's path. Baha'is espouse the oneness of mankind, and also believe in peaceful conflict resolution, and Nelson says proudly that "mediation is the hottest topic in the justice system today. Going to court is too costly, too inefficient and too destructive. Mediation is about the parties coming up with their own solution."

Now 82, Nelson became USC's first female law professor in 1957, and in 1979 President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the to the Court of Appeals here in Pasadena. Her husband of 60 years, James Nelson, who died in February, was also a judge. "The interesting thing," she notes, "was that my husband was appointed to the state bench by Governor Reagan at the time... Only in a Baha'i family would that happen."

Praising the multicultural society in Pasadena, Nelson recalls when she and her husband first saw the house where she still lives. "We bought it the night before it went on sale, because I walked into the backyard and there were 80 rose bushes in bloom. I said, 'We'll take it!' My husband said, 'We'd better look inside, just to be sure.'"

Today Nelson's focus is on the continued development of the Western Justice Center adjacent to the courthouse, which she helped found and where she was chairman of the board until two years ago. The Center is working to train both police officers and young people to mediate disputes, and the United Nations has an office there as well. Amazingly, shares Nelson, "We got the Pasadena Human Relations Commission to pass a resolution stating that this city is dedicated to raising the first generation of prejudice-free children. I love that as a goal."

WRITTEN BY // STEFFIE NELSON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY // PIPER FERGUSON