Good Afternoon!

It is indeed a pleasure to be in the midst of so many I know so well to receive this award in the name of our school’s founder Mary Lowther Ranney, including my ‘lifer’ classmate Meridith, my inseparable childhood friend Debbie, a smattering of my Ojai tennis team cohorts, and those from the class of 1968 who are here celebrating their 50th reunion. I am very honored to be joining a list of distinguished Ranney recipients, a number of whom are here today. I also want to express my deep appreciation to the Nominating Committee who are responsible for my selection.

I have been asked to reflect on how my Westridge experience influenced and shaped my life. Looking back over the past 50 years has been a challenging but engaging journey... so fasten your seat belts for the next twenty minutes or so as we enter this time capsule and go back to the future.

While everything I needed to know I did not learn in fifth grade, there are some fundamental truths that made a lasting impact. The first was to be kind - to be cognizant of your actions to avoid hurting others around you. The simple rule of our fifth grade teacher, Miss Pell, was that if you invite more than a third of the class to a birthday party or an event, you invite the whole class. The second is to value and believe in yourself. I ran for fifth grade class president against just one classmate. We all put our heads on our desks, covered our eyes, and raised our hands. The result? I lost by one vote. I had voted for my opponent thinking it was selfish and inappropriate to vote for myself. Miss Pell pulled me aside afterward and said, “Julie, if you think you are good enough to run, then you vote for yourself.” Duly noted! And the third, although not the final life lesson, was that with hard work, desire, and discipline, no aspiration was out of reach - anything was possible. Not the norm for a girl to believe in 1959.

And beyond those truths, what is the gift that Westridge imparts that carries us through difficult times and enriches the joys of happy times? It is knowing the importance of community.

In 1913, Ms. Ranney popped the genie out of the bottle ... never to return ... by starting a school that provided girls a well-rounded academically rigorous education separate from their male counterparts. And since that time girls have thrived in this environment, and as we know from many generations of graduates, been empowered to pursue with confidence their life’s calling. I have to take a moment to note the astounding achievement of our own Olympic star, Lauren Gibbs, class of 2002, who at age 33 won a silver medal in the two-women bobsled competition three weeks ago, missing gold by .07 of a second ... a sport she did not even take up until age 30. As you can read in the most recent Sugere that features Lauren on the cover, she credits learning at Westridge that she could accomplish anything if she was willing to work for it.

One can only imagine the conversations that occurred which inspired this bold move by Ms. Ranney a full 15 years before women had the right to vote. Westridge experienced the first of many expansions as 22 girls enrolled, more than could fit in the converted Tudor style house that continues to remind us
of the forward-thinking vision of our school’s founder to whom generations of women, and all those whose lives they have influenced, are deeply indebted.

In many ways, this award in Mary Lowther Ranney’s name, is the most significant I have received, for it is here that the exploration of the unlimited possibilities of pursuits was first encouraged, supported and celebrated in an intimate educational community where core values of empathy, respect and responsibility - promoting the individual and collective ‘power for good’ - bound us together. When other single sex schools opted to become co-educational, Westridge proudly stood resolute on the benefits of remaining an all-girls school consistent with its founding mission, and through the years has created a multicultural educational community.

In witnessing the ongoing evolution of all that is Westridge since my graduation, I note how appropriate and timeless is the motto *Surgere Tentamus* ... “we strive to rise” ... not only by continuing to expand the curriculum that nourishes intellectual endeavors and creativity, under the guidance of our exceptional Head of School, Elizabeth McGregor, and her predecessors, but also by being conscious of and embracing the changing landscape of a society that extends far beyond 324 Madeline Drive. One of the school’s greatest riches is the diversity of backgrounds which comprises its student body. It was at the forefront in recognizing the importance and benefits of this when in 1963, contemporaneous with the civil rights movement, Westridge enrolled its first African American student and perhaps its first non-Caucasian, Genna Rae McNeil, a former Ranney Award recipient and accomplished professor. I had the good fortune to be paired with her as a freshman in the upper school Big/Little Sister program.

Our interaction broadened my understanding on several levels, and was a factor in my choosing to participate in the program Open Future in 1968, after my freshman year in college, following the devastating riots in Watts and Compton. Open Future was a collaborative program Westridge developed with Scripps College, in which we lived on campus as counselors and teachers for six weeks with a group of middle school kids of color from those cities, and from whom I gained a deeper understanding of the impact of socio-economic disparity and racial discrimination that permeated our society, and continues to do so. There is no question that this experience broadened my perspective and contributed to my decision to pursue a legal career to ensure the fundamental rights of access to justice and equal treatment of all under the rule of law. I received an early education in the workings of our government created by the opportunity to attend the Watergate hearings after my first year of law school, and then by my return to Washington D.C the next year as a summer intern in the antitrust division of the Dept. of Justice. Following graduation, I pursued the position that was my calling as a public defender, representing and protecting the constitutional rights of not only my clients, but by so doing all in our society.

And now, 50 years later, consistent with the Westridge motto to strive to rise to meet the challenges of the times, I have taken note of both the scope and depth of a significantly broadened curriculum, the first rate quality of the structural components on this expansive campus, and the array of independent opportunities that provide young women the foundation to become leaders in addressing the challenges of a global environmental crisis, bioethics issues, and what constitutes social justice and a just society.

When asked to reflect on how my Westridge education and experience shaped my life, the image that comes to mind is that of overlapping concentric circles that endlessly swirl. Academic rigor in small class settings, taught by an excellent faculty where participation and accountability, was and remains the expectation - whether it be grade four, eight or twelve. With the fundamentals in place, including for
some of us Mrs. Morse’s instruction in the ancient art of diagramming sentences, I recognize in hindsight how the aptitude for critical thinking, analysis and expression, and out of the box approaches to problem solving, incrementally evolved in each of us, and how innovation and creativity were encouraged and supported. I also credit my Westridge beginnings with fostering a curiosity and pleasure in lifelong learning. Had we not gone to the Hartford theater in Los Angeles to see a play we had read in English class come to life on stage, I do not know if my love of theater would have taken hold at such an early age.

Coming out of the sixties, a time of social unrest and confrontations on campus over our involvement in the Vietnam War, I knew I wanted to be engaged a profession that would bring about constructive social change. The late sixties, early seventies was a pivotal time for women entering predominantly male professions. In my senior year at Stanford, I knew only two other women who were applying to law school. In my law school class of 140 there were only five women. To this day I recall the fellow, a nice guy, who was married with children seated next to me in my first-year contracts class suggesting I should not have taken the place of a male student. Truth be known, he left the practice of law after about five years, and I am still engaged at age 69. Perhaps it was because I was so focused on mastering the material - fear of failure is a great taskmaster! ... or maybe it was my ability to successfully compete on the racquetball court, but to be honest I did not feel any overt or even implicit sexism or discrimination, or at least did not pick up on it, by professors or others in my class. I never questioned my decision to go to law school because I had confidence, which I trace back to my Westridge years, that I could master the unknown in pursuit of my calling.

After my years as a public defender, I joined a fourteen lawyer civil litigation firm as the only woman, and five years later became the first woman partner, joining six men. Having tried over 100 cases as a public defender, I soon found that my extensive trial experience, which others had not accumulated in civil practice, established my value. Only a handful of times during depositions did an older male attorney address me improperly or try to rattle me, but once it was clear that I was ignoring him and moving on with my questioning he realized he had better do the same. As my now 32 year-old daughter, an architect in Seattle learned in a field still dominated by men, you do good work, stay engaged and calm, and stand up for what is right.

So, what is it we experienced at Westridge beyond the academic challenges and the ability to think critically that prepared us to find our place in a larger society after graduation? What I see in my rearview mirror is how the opportunity for leadership and collaboration across a range of activities instilled a work ethic, a receptivity to the thoughts and perspectives of others, and an awareness of the importance of making timely, reasoned and fair decisions. Showing up prepared and fulfilling commitments were lessons learned early that have served me well in my professional life as a lawyer and a judge, both on and off the bench, and in my volunteer activities, whether it be heading up organizations, coaching mock trial teams, building Habitat homes, or delivering meals on wheels to seniors - and I dare say as a mother of two and a spouse.

In retrospect, I realize that being tapped for leadership positions was in large part as a result of having been recognized for conscientiously carrying through on assigned responsibilities and being forward thinking consistent with a given organization’s mission and purpose. To this day I credit learning those early lessons with how in 1992 I became the first woman president of the Oregon State Bar in its 57 year history. Did I actively pursue that position? No ... I just tried to do a good job during my tenure on the
Board of Governors ... which is why in close company I would sometimes refer to myself as the ‘Accidental President.’ Did I vote for myself following the nomination? Miss Pell would be pleased to know I did.

Beyond the academics and activities, it was the laughter and fun we enjoyed that balanced times of stress. This constant fostered my belief that a bit of humor enhances well-being and facilitates collegiality, recognizing the importance of weighing the gravity of the subject and the moment. I was appointed to the trial bench in 1994 by Oregon’s first woman governor, Barbara Roberts. When I reached the final round of many interviews for the judicial position, the Governor asked at the conclusion of an appropriately intense session if there is anything additional she should know that would persuade her to appoint me. I knew that the seemingly witty response that popped into my head would either seal the deal or blow the interview. Although I was tempted to say, “I look great in black!” I chose to utter a safer response about community involvement. I think I could have taken the chance as I told the story at my investiture at which she was present and she loved it.

And how did a growing concern for others cultivated during my years here impact my career choices? My awareness of the privilege of a Westridge education has become more evident with each passing year. My work as a lawyer and a judge has exposed me firsthand to the challenges of those whose fight to simply survive is a daily battle ... who try to navigate through our society without speaking the language, who suffer from a mental illness, or whose substance addiction can often be traced to the acts or omissions of those whose responsibility it was to care for them. Simply being the judge who presided over civil and criminal cases was not enough. So, I worked with several dozen criminal justice partners, legislators and county officials for almost a year to establish in 2008 my county’s first Mental Health Court, facilitated listening sessions with various minority groups to obtain feedback about our court system, and a dozen years ago started the Take Your Child to Work Day noon time mock trials in our court that annually draws in well over a hundred kids from transition and alternative schools to the children of attorneys from prestigious law firms.

As time went on, the calling to become involved in issues that cross state and national boundaries prompted me to join the National Association of Women Judges, whose mission includes ensuring access to justice and equal treatment in courts, protecting the rights under the rule of law of those whose voice is often not heard, and advancing women in the legal profession and judiciary. During my service on the Board of Directors, NAWJ was instrumental in the 2013 reauthorization by Congress of the VAWA - The Violence Against Women Act - after which several of us were invited to a small gathering at the Washington D.C. home of the Act’s true champion, former Vice President Joe Biden. NAWJ was also key in the successful effort through its Women in Prison Committee to prevent the closure and transfer of women inmates from the Danbury prison in Connecticut to Alabama, far from their children and families, for which we received a ‘shout out’ on NPR. Similarly, our work in the exposure of and tools to address all forms of human trafficking of children has received national recognition. Women taking action, not just engaging in the rhetoric. I mention these efforts as they are prime examples of the impact of empowered women actually making a difference.

And how did the core values instilled in me by Westridge, as well as by my parents, stir me to become involved in my community beyond my chosen profession? I felt the restless call to give back in a far more tangible way, locally and in the broader global community, than I could do from the bench. I recalled a public official saying at his induction into office that “community service is the rent you pay
for living.” Words to live by. Following the prolonged illness that brought about my mother’s death in 1995, I began a two-decade commitment to delivering meals on wheels on Sundays, understanding firsthand the need of housebound seniors for human engagement as well as for the sustenance the meals provided which enabled them to stay in their homes. I took my kids with me as I believed it was important they be aware of the challenges faced by the elderly, disabled and often impoverished in our community. As a family, we volunteered in Costa Rica through CrossCultural Solutions. My then eleven year-old son and I were assigned to assist a woman in her home where she had for 27 years annually housed and cared for twenty-five abandoned, often physically and sexually abused, children.

Recognizing the ever-increasing need for sustainable safe and healthy housing, and the collateral benefit that enables children to return to the same school and friends in successive years, I became involved with Habitat for Humanity in Portland building homes, which inspired me to invite 35 women friends to build a house for two days to celebrate my 60th birthday. I have served on our Habitat board for almost a decade with an ever-increasing passion for the work we do. In the last six years I have stretched my reach by participating in international builds in Ethiopia, El Salvador and, most recently, in India in an area where snake and rat catching is the primary livelihood of the villagers. Fortunately, we saw neither.

With all that being said, for me one of the most significant aspects of my Westridge experience was learning the importance in one’s life of developing a sense of community. I loved my Westridge years ... the encouragement and support to be the best version of one’s self, the exchanges fostered in small classes, the spirit and core values, the friendships made across grade levels, the range of activities, and the traditions ... all instrumental in creating a strong sense of community. That sense of community was evident in times of great joy, such as when the tennis team would receive an all school resounding send off each year for the four-day tournament in Ojai, to a time of great sorrow when our beloved classmate Sesaly Foreman died from leukemia in our sophomore year. The timeless connection we feel when we gather at these reunions, as I did at mine last year, and in times in between of our own making, are valued more each year. It was very special to receive emails following the announcement of this award from a number of those with whom I started Westridge in the fifth grade in 1959 but had not seen in decades.

Throughout my life, I have always been drawn to community as it nourishes the soul, provides a sense of shared purpose or adventure, fosters an understanding filled with caring and concern that does not always require articulation, and not unimportantly, resonates with the sound of laughter from cherished moments. I recently completed my tenure on the board of the National Association of Women Judges, comprised of a very diverse group of women from across the country who have so enriched my life. As outgoing president, I gave each board member and the many prior presidents present, a copy of the book entitled *Sisters in Law* ... without the hyphens. It is the recounting of the relationship between, in many ways, two very different and incredible women uniquely bound together on the bench by their gender: former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, affectionately known as Notorious RBG. Both are active NAWJ members who regularly speak at our conferences. I inscribed a personal note in each book with my signature, ‘Your NAWJ Sister in Law’ ... a description that is now part of the NAWJ jargon and has come to define the sisterhood.

Belonging to community involves an inherent responsibility to mentor others who follow. In my chosen profession, that has meant mentoring women, people of color and our youth through established programs such as set up by Oregon Women Lawyers, the bar associations and NAWJ’s Color of Justice
program. No one has expressed the importance of this better than Justice Sonia Sotomayor, with whom I had the privilege of sharing the podium in 2013 at my NAWJ investiture as president. After the Justice spoke, I included in my remarks this quote from her memoir, My Beloved World:

“When a young person, even a gifted one, grows up without the proximate living examples of what she may aspire to become - whether lawyer, scientist, artist, or leader in any realm - her goal remains abstract. Such models as appear in books or on the news, however inspired or revered, are ultimately too remote to be real, let alone influential. But a role model in the flesh provides more than inspiration; his or her very existence is confirmation of possibilities one may have every reason to doubt, saying, ‘Yes, someone like me can do this.’”

Mentoring in the flesh is all of our responsibility. I stand on the shoulders of many women before me, but would be remiss if I did not note the many men who contributed to my career path, including Debbie Pruitt’s father who, after we witnessed his brilliant appellate argument in 1971, walked us through the Superior Court in San Francisco where I saw a woman judge, Shirley Hufstedler, presiding over a civil case. The image stuck in my mind.

Standing up for what is right, and standing together, sometimes at considerable risk as we have seen of late, requires courage. Being complacent is the slippery slope to enabling, or returning to times of inequality. Westridge has provided generations of women with the ability to make a difference in small interactions, on large stages, and in broad venues. The intellectual acuity, poise and maturity displayed here today by the three students on the debate team assures me that our future is in good hands.

I want to close with a short story that also gives me confidence in what our youngest generation of girls has in store for us. In casual conversation at the end of an I Have a Dream Foundation board meeting last fall in Portland, the nine year-old daughter of a staff member offered a startling observation. For context, I Have a Dream is a mentoring program for kids in impoverished schools to achieve high school graduation and college preparedness. This nine year-old had recently been to Washington DC and noted that she did not see a single statue of a woman. She vowed that it was her mission to have five statues of women erected in Portland by the time she was 21.

It remains today’s truth that empowered girls become strong community leaders. And nowhere is that done better than right here at Westridge.

I am very honored to accept this award bearing the name and legacy of Mary Lowther Ranney.

Thank you.

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Julie E. Frantz