

NEXT BIG THING;

TAKING THE CIRCUIT BENCH

FEATURING GISELA T. LAURENT

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HOSTED BY: LISA T. MUNYON

(Music)

NARRATOR: Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida.

And now here’s your host, Chief Judge Lisa Munyon.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Hello and welcome to Open Ninth. Joining me today is Ninth Circuit Judge Gisela Laurent. Gisela was first elected in 2016 running unopposed and becoming the first Hispanic female judge on the Orange County bench. She made history again earlier this year when Governor Ron DeSantis appointed her to the circuit bench, becoming the first female Hispanic judge to be appointed to the Ninth Judicial Circuit. I am thrilled to have you here today, Gisela.

JUDGE LAURENT: Thank you so much for having me, Judge Munyon.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I want to talk about your background because you have a fascinating background but it’s a background that’s very common to many Latina in our community. So tell me about your family and how you came to be here.

JUDGE LAURENT: Well, thank you so much for the opportunity again to be here and I do say the same thing, you know, my story is not unique but it’s still an amazing story. My parents are from the Dominican Republic and at a young age, both of them, you know, with their parents came to New York, the United States in order to find a better opportunity. My dad and his family, they were farmers and they really wanted to come to New York and make a difference for their family and my mom, my grandmother, she was a maid. And so she came to New York to be a helper and also brought her children over one by one. My mom lived in a convent until my grandmother could afford to bring her over. But once my parents met in New

York, fell in love and decided to have a family of their own, my dad really wanted to open up his own business. He saw that as an American dream and so he relocated from New York to Cleveland, unfortunately for me. I ended up being born in Cleveland. Not that – some people love Cleveland, but I don't know anything about Cleveland except that they call it the mistake on the lake sometimes. And my mom didn't like Cleveland either so by the time I was three, we had relocated to Florida and that's where I've been ever since.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. That's amazing. How old was your mom when her mother made the heart wrenching decision to leave her at a convent?

JUDGE LAURENT: She was about nine years old.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. That's amazing and heart breaking all at one time.

JUDGE LAURENT: Um-hum. Yeah, and you know she didn't make it to New York I think until she was like fourteen or fifteen. And by that time she really just wanted to help the family work and she didn't – she tried doing job corp. She tried some things and she didn't like it and then she just ended up working like everybody else. And so they worked at a doll factory.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, your dad is an amazing man as well. And I know he's been a big influence on your life. So tell me a little bit about your dad.

JUDGE LAURENT: So my dad is the hardest working person I know. Ultimately, his mom died when he was eleven and so in Dominican Republic you know he was farming on the street. Basically, he was selling vegetables on the street to bring money to his family and when he and my grandfather came to New York, he immediately started working at an auto body shop and learning the trade to help bring over all of his siblings. In all, he has thirteen sisters and one brother.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE LAURENT: And he's been like the primary parent the whole time. And so he was just hard working. You know, both my parents didn't speak English of course when they first got here. They had to learn that on their own. And he worked basically seven days a week to be able to provide for our family.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me about coming to Florida and your education, how you got where you are.

JUDGE LAURENT: So I always think it's a cute and funny story because we came to Florida when I was three. I didn't speak any English. My mom, you know, she's always been like the home keeper. She also worked at a dry cleaner's but the house was immaculate, the food was delicious. She did everything that a Latina mom would be doing, including dressing me up all the time. And so I remember vividly my first day of elementary school, I looked like I was going to prom. I had this huge ruffle dress, huge ruffle socks, shiny, shiny patent leather shoes. Like two pigtails, long hair and I think the teacher was just amazed. I looked like I was going to be the lead of a parade or something. But my mom was like, you know, we have to make a good impression and so I walk into the classroom and by this time I'm four back then, with your birthday, I could start school at four. So I was coming in and I knew a little bit of English from cartoons, enough to know, you know, my name, date of birth, where I'm from. And the teacher says, oh, my goodness, you're so cute. Where are you from? And I think she was hoping I would say Mexico or something. I said Cleveland and her eyes just blew up. And everybody started laughing like this girl is from here, and that's how you dress, but you know my mom always wanted us to look good. And so I always remember that. So then I was in the ESOL program and learned English pretty quickly.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I guess that's where you get your fashion sense because I've always known that about you. That you always dress to the nines.

JUDGE LAURENT: Oh, my goodness. Well, yeah, so mom you know always thought that you know people will take a look at you, quickly decide how they feel about you. And so she always had us dressed up all the time. And even if we didn't have much resources, you know, even though we shopped at – I remember my mom would drive me crazy. After school, you had to hurry up and eat because we had to get to the moonlight special for Sears. I was like, mom I have homework to do. I don't want to go to the moonlight special. But that's where we would get our clothes from and it was in Pine Hills on Silver Star and Hiawasse. But that was big to her because that's where you could get, you know – and still now, she fights with me. I can't ever tell her how much I spend on my clothes. I have to be a little dishonest because she's like, oh, my god, you could have gone to Dillard's and that is a dollar. And so she's still, I mean, whenever she sees something nice at Dillard's at the clearance store over there in Ocoee, she buys it for me and she brings it to the house. She's so excited to give it to me. I bought this jacket for a dollar. I'm like okay, thanks mom.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did you go to high school in the area?

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes. I went to all the Orange County Public Schools from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade and so I went to Evans High School.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you obviously did well because I think you did your undergraduate at the University of Florida.

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes, well, first, I was admitted into the University of Florida but my parents were like, you know, 17 years old, Gisela, she's not married, she's not leaving the

house. So it was like – I was so excited to become a Gator and my dad was like, I don't think so. You're going to go to Valencia and so you know, in the moment you don't appreciate what the life lesson will be because in the moment I was like, dad, you're going to make me go to Kirkman High School. I can't believe you; I hate you. That's what they used to call Valencia back in the days because it's on Kirkman Road. But it turned out to be the best thing for me because Valencia gave me a chance to really focus on how hard college courses were but still had the support and love of my family. My mom was still cooking for me. She was still doing my laundry. She was still doing everything for me. And I still had the support of my parents. My dad there, my sisters and I really was able to excel and get my AA before I went off to Gainesville, which was a Pandora's Box of things and influences that might have steered me the wrong way had I gone at a younger age.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, my dad wouldn't have let me go at 17 either. Fortunately, I lived in Gainesville already so I could just go to UF because he would not let me leave the house either.

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes. Yes, those dads.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes. They are very special. So what did you major in?

JUDGE LAURENT: So for undergrad I did business – that's the thing, my parents were both – had their own business and I said, I always knew I wanted to be a judge and I saw how my dad ran his body shop and how my mom ran her little cleaners. And I said, if I'm going to run a courtroom, I need to run it like a business as well. So I did business administration for my major and mass communications for my minor.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And then you've already told us you wanted to be a judge so I guess you went to law school after that.

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes. And that – yes, I went to law school and I went back to UF because why, you know, fix something that's not broken, and I love Gainesville. And I did my – actually, I finished my undergrad, because I did Valencia, in three years instead of four and I finished law school in two-and-a-half years instead of three. So I was always on the full year-round program.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And why did you choose the law? Why did you want to be a judge from an early age?

JUDGE LAURENT: You know, my dad, I always saw him as a community leader because there's wasn't that, you know in the early 80s, that many Hispanics in the community, but because he had the business there, and right close to his business there was a Spanish supermarket, people from the supermarket would always say to people, like, ask Jose, you know, ask him. And he knew you know where the travel agency was, where all the Hispanic businesses were. And so he helped guide a lot of people through their problems and situations. And I would see that. And I would gravitate to that. Like, I wanted to be that kind of helper. And I think that communication has always stemmed naturally in me. Like I'm a people person. I love communicating and helping people with their problems because of my father. And so I knew that that was my blessing that I would be able to serve in a capacity where I could help people identify problems and work through it. And I saw that just being in the courthouse where people had to go for all their problems. And you know another thing that's not unique to myself that happens with a lot of immigrant children or second generation is that we spend a lot of time translating paper work for our parents. And a lot of times, they're court documents and so I can't

tell you how many times my mom would receive something like, come read this to me and tell me what it says. And so I had a strong appreciation of legal documents since I was very small.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you got out of law school, what did you do? What kind of law did you practice?

JUDGE LAURENT: So it's so funny because I wanted to help businesses navigate investments abroad. I still love business. And my mentor at the time said, Gisela, you cannot do that unless you know how to be a trial lawyer because if you're negotiating a contract, or you're trying to settle something, they're just going to blow you off unless you know how to have a trial. So go to the state attorney's office, go to the public defender's office and you know cut your teeth learning how to have a trial. So I'm a woman of faith, I really do think that God put now Judge Jenifer Harris, she was Jenifer David back then in my path because she came to the University of Florida probably within the week of my mentor telling me this. She was interviewing people for the public defender's office, and I was just studying where she was at. So she came out of the room and was like, are you my next interviewer? And I said, I am if you want me to be. I didn't have even a resume put together but she met with me and she said, you know if you want, you can come shadow me one day, and I can show you around the public defender's office, and let me know when you're going to be in town, in Orlando. So I did. I took her up on her offer and I had a great time shadowing her. And then I became a public defender, which I knew would be a great opportunity for me to cut my teeth and learn how to have trial skills but really I think it was just fate that we met that day and that she gave me the opportunity.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I know that at some point you left the public defender's office and went into private practice.



JUDGE LAURENT: I would have stayed longer but I was a single mom and I really needed to make money. So a mom with two kids –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And public defenders don't make a lot of money.

JUDGE LAURENT: Public defenders, state attorneys, they do not get paid what they're worth. And so I had to leave and go into private practice. And I really truly enjoyed – I went to one downtown firm and I helped expand that firm who originally only had criminal defense work and then we went and did criminal and family law. And when I branched out on my own in 2011 I started a boutique, what I called it, just like with my dad, a service industry because I knew very well criminal defense and family law, but anything that came from that, those type of cases, if those were the originating cases, I would also handle. So I would handle bankruptcies. If it was a divorce that now needed a bankruptcy because of the dissolution of marriage, or there may be a domestic case where now there's some immigration consequences because of that, I would handle the immigration portion of that. So it was limited but it was involved with trying to be a full service firm as far as the needs of a family are concerned and any criminal cases.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Do you recall a defining case or experience when you were practicing law that --

JUDGE LAURENT: There were so many.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- that you still hold on to today?

JUDGE LAURENT: You know, what I always use as an example is a case that I had that had about, I want to say it started out with 28 counts of sexual battery. And the family was completely devastated. The husband had adopted one of his new wife's children, a stepparent adoption and then they had a child in common and she also had children that were older. And

that case really always makes me think about how interrelated criminal defense and family law are which is why I loved having that boutique law firm that I could offer multiple services. Because the parties had marital issues, and because she wanted to leave and go back to Puerto Rico, and then dad was not allowing it, it spun into some accusations that you know I was able to prove were not accurate. That the wife had made some allegations in Puerto Rico which were completely different from the ones, you know, she learned her lesson, like, okay, well, that didn't work there, let me go to Orlando and do something different. So we were able to show that. All in all this case was tried in front of Judge Morgan, who has now passed away, and he was an exceptional judge on a very delicate case and it came back where all counts – he was acquitted of all counts. And even there, I still had to, after that case was over and he was emotionally destroyed, I still had to handle the divorce and there was a lot of property issues and things of that nature. And if you still google him, it still comes up, the sexual battery cases because it was in the newspaper. So these are people that we help when we're attorneys. You know, one thing that could have been a family feud or a domestic incident can become huge, but they're real people with real life consequences and I never forget that, you know. And I think that even as a judge I keep that perspective of you know these cases are not just simple case numbers and straightforward. They have many implications and sometimes a web of issues.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What hurdles did you face as a lawyer with your own firm and how did you overcome them?

JUDGE LAURENT: You know, I had heard from many greats, and I also had the opportunity you know, the first firm that I worked with was Mark Longwell. And I had the chance to see the Longwell lawyers, it's now called, used to be Longwell and Gentle, grow and also contract, you know. And so I think I learned so many lessons from my experience there at

Longwell Lawyers that I knew I wanted to keep my small boutique small and I wanted to keep the overhead low. And I had heard that enough times from people. So as far as obstacles, I think I was very blessed when I had my law firm because I only had myself and two paralegals in a small little 800 square foot office in Metro West which is close to Pine Hills which was close to my heart, and also kept the rent low. And I think by being smart like that I was able to always, you know, cover the bills, because that's what stresses people. They feel like you know you start doing rent law, you start freaking out and start saying like, I'm going to take whatever case comes in the door because I need to pay the rent. But I was just so blessed, especially too because being a female Hispanic, there were so many people that wanted to have an attorney who spoke their language. And you know the Hispanic community is growing now. I'm so happy. I've sworn in last year probably about five female Hispanics into the bar.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wonderful.

JUDGE LAURENT: But when I was practicing early on there wasn't that many and so sometimes I'd have to tell people, I have to turn you away because I couldn't take any more cases because I wanted to be able to be smart about how many cases I had so I could service everybody.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I imagine that one thing that people don't recognize, if you're a practicing lawyer, you're the one that gets paid last.

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Everybody else gets paid before you get paid.

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And it can be quite stressful both practicing law and owning the business.

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes, which is why I was always very happy about my business background.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So why did – why did you pick the point in your career that you did to run to be a county judge?

JUDGE LAURENT: You know, I really think that it picked me. I was trying to get appointed and I had been doing pretty well on the appointment process the first time around. You know, I followed the advice of people who would give me advice from the JNC members and from different organizations that had different paths to the bench. And then on my, I think fourth or fifth time applying, which they say, you know, you normally don't get it on the first time, I heard that Judge Brewer was retiring and I said – just something came over me, like, just go talk to him to see, you know, and when I spoke to Judge Brewer, and he did confirm that he was retiring, I saw that it was almost two years before it was time. It was about like 18 months, and I said, you know what, this is perfect because I don't know how to run a campaign. So I'm going to file early and I'm going to learn and everything just started falling into place. So I could have stayed practicing for a longer time. I had already been practicing for 14 years. My .business was doing very well and it was flexible. But I had that commitment to serve and I felt the time was right. I just feel like all the chips were falling into place.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what – when you took the bench as a county judge, what surprised you?

JUDGE LAURENT: Well, you know, it's funny because I love Sally Kest and I always remember her talking about how inflexible the job of a judge was. And I always thought – you know, everybody would say and even you know, Bob Wesley, he's the hilarious Public Defender, he'd always say, if I could just get judges to work on a Friday, you know. And so I was like – but I realized when I – so I was thinking, you know, you set your own schedule, it's your docket, but no, I mean, you really do serve the public and the public runs your calendar basically. And so I realized really quickly that, you know, hey, I'm not going to get a dentist appointment unless I plan this out with a long time in advance and I block off this time. There are a lot of players involved in me having a dentist appointment. And so I didn't think I appreciated that from you know the outside looking in. But now – and then actually when I switched over to county civil from county criminal, I went a whole year without going to the dentist. I'm almost embarrassed to admit that, but I did not go to the dentist that first year.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It is hard to take time off and I'm sure you can confirm judges do work Fridays very hard.

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes, very hard, very hard. I promise you, like if my husband tells me, hey, this is coming up and he didn't tell me about three months in advance, it's just not happening for me. I can't go.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you were on the county bench, what was the highlight of your day?

JUDGE LAURENT: People who know me see that I'm very positive so I think the whole day is always a highlight. I'm always excited, but coming in in the mornings and seeing all the other judges, you know, bumping into judges downstairs, then you come in and you're

going to see what your day looks like. That's always exciting. And then every case, you know every person that comes into court, you don't know how long they've been waiting for that court appearance and so I always make it a point to try to get a smile out of them. So I welcome them with a smile. I try to cheer them up. Even now in Circuit Criminal, you know, you have felonies, and I ask people, hello Mr. so and so, how are you doing? They say fine. I always say just fine, that's it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what made you decide to apply to be a circuit judge?

JUDGE LAURENT: So like we spoke about earlier, my practice, when I had my law firm and basically almost the entire length of my practice, I did mostly circuit work so I did family law. I did criminal defense and I mostly, because of the demand that I had on myself and the fees that I charged, I would always tell people you know, maybe if it's a very small offense, it's not worth it to hire me. You might want to hire somebody who takes those types of small offenses. So it turned out that I only took felony cases, or federal criminal cases. And that was just because of the demand of my time. And so I just felt that I would be able to serve the community with all of my experience in circuit court.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me about the appointment process when you're already a sitting judge and you apply to be a circuit judge.

JUDGE LAURENT: You know, it's intense and sometimes you know it's not any different than you being a regular person. I don't think that the Governor's office gives any additional weight to whether you are a sitting judge or not. Of course, you can offer that you have a lot of experience in courtroom management and running a docket. And you have those experiences, but it's the same process for you know when I wasn't a judge as to when I was a

judge. And the application process is grueling because you want to put your best foot forward. They always say you have 15 minutes to interview either at the local JNC office or at the Governor's office. And they really can't get to know you in those 15 minutes because you'll have anywhere from, you know, locally ten, eleven people and they each want to ask you a question. So imagine you know how substantive is your one-minute answer. So I really think that the application is so important and I think that a lot of us you know for a good reason invest a lot of time in putting that application together. You know, and I've heard comments from JNC when I go to these Path to the Benches, you know, they want to make sure that your application is grammatically correct, that there's no spelling errors. And you're looking at, talking about a 50 page document so it's intense and it's an emotional roller coaster too because you know, we all have that imposter syndrome where we're like you know am I good enough, am I not good enough. And you go through the process and you don't get selected and you're like, wow, maybe I'm not good enough. And it's not that. It's just that there's so many qualified applicants that are applying for the position and they have a lot to look at as to what's the best fit or what they believe the best fit is. And so I love the process. I mean, I always think of it as a challenge, like I knew it was a goal that I wasn't going to stop until I reached it. And I would always have you know assurances from Judge Lauten and other judges who had gone through the process so many times. They'd say you just keep going until you get it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I know that when you get appointed, you generally get a call usually from the Governor asking if you still want the job and telling you about their decision. So tell me about the call.

JUDGE LAURENT: Well, so this time it wasn't – it was not like that, you know, you get the call from the Governor's office. So I got the call from the GC, James Uthmeier, and that call,

you know, it was funny because your heart is racing when you see the Tallahassee phone number. And then you're trying to listen but you know there's outside factors, so I was actually in a board meeting when I got the call. And so I'm trying to step away from the board meeting but not too far away, just enough so I could be in both rooms at the same time, hearing the board meeting and hearing what the general counsel had to say. And the tone of his voice, which I'm really good at body language but this is over the phone, almost sounded like thanks for trying. And I was like, my heart was kind of like calming down, okay, okay, so I'm not going to get it this time, but then I heard it again, I'm like he's saying I'm going to meet with the Governor. So I was like – I was like, okay, yes, yes, where, when, whenever you say, like I will make myself available. And so the meeting with the Governor was in person and that was just an amazing experience. Governor DeSantis is so laid back and easy to talk to, and you know he asked the questions that he wanted to ask me but I didn't feel nervous about talking to him at all. So it was just a great experience and then he told me, yes, that he was going to give me a shot. And I wanted to hug him but I was like, that's probably not appropriate.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what have you found different on the circuit bench from the county bench?

JUDGE LAURENT: Well, you know, the severity of the offenses is basically what is, you know. I think that you know county court has – you know, they're the workhorses of the courthouse, you know. You come in with a huge docket. You really don't get to have that personalized – you have a personalized experience but you can't know every case that you have on your docket. You know, I think county court -- county civil may have what, about 12, 13 thousand cases in each division –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I think they told me 18,000 –



JUDGE LAURENT: 18,000.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Last time I asked.

JUDGE LAURENT: Last time, okay. So and that's the pandemic. When I first came into county civil, there was about 7,500, and so there's no way that you can possibly know what's happening with every case. But in circuit, I feel like I've taken the time to get to know all of my files and I know the people. I've either seen them at some point now and so I think that it's a much more high consequence that I think the circuit judges have the time to get to know the defendants or the plaintiff, or a defendant who's in that division to really take an appreciation of what's going on. And I was blessed to get a division in felony where the prior judge had taken copious notes in our system so I can go back and look at everything that they reviewed and what I'm reviewing, and really do a service to the community.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So after – you're serving in felony now, and you're going to be moving to a different division soon. Are you looking forward to the transition to family?

JUDGE LAURENT: I'm so excited. I'm so – I feel so blessed. I feel – and I'm so grateful to you for putting me in family, and I just had my first family law meeting today via Teams and it was just great to just hear the talk again. You know, it was almost 80 percent of my practice when I was in private practice and so just to be able to get a perspective of you know how I believe things work and going forward now that we're coming out of the pandemic, you know, how we can better serve the community. And being able to give valuable feedback because I used to be that attorney that would be coming in so it was just a great opportunity today. I'm really excited about serving on the family law bench.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what do you wish that people knew about being a judge that they may not know?

JUDGE LAURENT: You know, I think that just not lose sight of the fact that we're human. I mean, we – we come to our job, you know, with a passion to serve, you know, do our job and we make mistakes. And you know it's okay to bring that to our attention and have us have the opportunity to fix that. I think that many of the judges that I know, all the judges that I know want to be able to serve the community, the people in front of them to the best of their ability. And we're human, and so sometimes, you know, I want to run my courtroom a certain way that I believe is efficient and someone may bring it to my attention that that is efficient but maybe it's too fast, or maybe you know, you want it to slow down a little bit. And I'm more than happy to do that. I'm more than happy to do that because at the end of the day we're here for them. And so I think that sometimes people think you know a judge, you can't approach them, you can't tell them anything, we wear the black robe but you know I don't know a single judge here that has that robotis. I think that we really want to serve and if they feel that something is, they don't like it, just bring it to our attention.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I want to transition now to some more personal things other than being a judge. Being a judge can be stressful. I mean, in the felony division you may have 500 cases and like you said, when you're in a count civil, you had 12,000. In family, you'll have over 3,000 and same in circuit civil. So how do you handle stress?

JUDGE LAURENT: You know, someone asked me a similar question today, like, you know, do you ever get frustrated or you know – I said, I don't think I – I'm a very patient person. And so if I feel that the day has just evolved to something that is intolerable, I don't think that has ever happened, but if I ever felt like something is going wrong today, like, when you have

people say, like, is it a full moon outside, so on those type of days, I just learn to breathe. I love yoga and meditation. I do that every morning and I don't forget that when I'm in the courtroom I just need to breathe if I think things are not as smooth or if I feel that maybe a defendant is not being as forthcoming and you know, I just breathe. I just take a breath, you know, what, maybe they don't understand. Maybe they need to come back another day, you know, but I don't take it out on them. I think that learning to take, you know, being in that moment and being able to take the moment to breathe and just grab ahold of what's actually happening because it has nothing to do with you at all, it's so important. And then you know once I leave the building, you know, it's like I have – like many mom – many women and men, you know, we have two jobs. You know we have our job that pays the bills and then the one that doesn't pay the bills which is being a parent. And my kids, you know, they're so – they ground me so well because like they come back – you know, they see me they just want to cuddle. They want a hug. They want this – they want this shirt fixed or they want something painted in their room and so it's like, it's very humbling that you come from being a judge and you're quote unquote fixing the problems of the world to you're putting on Band-Aids and braiding a doll's hair.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Is there any little known thing about you that if other people knew they'd just be surprised?

JUDGE LAURENT: You know I think that – I think I'm a very happy person and I'm always very positive, but sometimes you know I doubt myself. And I think that sometimes people think that I don't – that they think I'm just so confident but I think that for many people, you know, we're strong, powerful women and men and we've done so much but deep down inside I think we all have that time where we're saying, you know, hey, you know, am I good enough? Am I doing this right? You know, maybe I'm not worth it. And I go through that too.

And so I think that is also a good thing because it's why people see what they see because I may doubt myself, I push extra hard. If I think there's something wrong, I want to fix it and I'm always pushing extra hard. I think I'm a self-motivator and I think that's a lot due to meditation and just you know, always trying to speak words of encouragement to myself. Positive affirmations.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you've had an amazing life and you've had amazing role models. Who has been your inspiration to get where you are today?

JUDGE LAURENT: I really can't pick one when you said it, I think that just seeing how my dad and my mom came from a third world country without speaking the language and were able to persevere and provide, I think I still haven't been put in that situation. You know, I've never been thrown into a different country where I didn't speak the language and had to survive. And so I always tell myself, you can do better. If your parents can do this, then you can do better you know. And then I look at the judges, like I love Judge Lawson, you know, he was a circuit court judge when I was here, and we were all so excited when he became a fifth circuit judge. And then I think a huge amount of us carpooled to Tallahassee when he became a Florida Supreme Court Judge. And he's so humble, you know, he gives back in so many different ways. He travels to Guatemala every year to help, you know, build houses for the underserved, the poor people. And I'm like, I give back a lot but I don't give back that much, you know, so I still haven't reached you know that climax to see you know what Judge Lauten has been able to do – Lawson has been able to do in his career. And what – not only in his career, but what he does as a person, as a human being. So I see those examples and that's where you know, I was saying, you know, you think you've done a lot, but really you haven't. And there's so much more to do and so I – a lot of the cases that Judge Lawson has, he says, you know, you look at statutes and

you look at you know the Pole Star. And so if I had to think of a judge, I would definitely think about him and the Pole Star of where I would think you know my trajectory would go and just the kind of person that I want to be.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: He is an amazing person.

JUDGE LAURENT: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Absolutely. Judge Gisela Laurent, Circuit Judge of the Ninth Circuit, thank you so much for joining us here today. I hope that you've been able to tell everybody a little bit about yourself. And I know it's an interesting story.

JUDGE LAURENT: Thank you for having me. I love the opportunity to share my family's life story with the Ninth Circuit. Like I said, it's not a unique story, but it's a story that I love. And thank you so much for this opportunity.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Thank you for joining me.

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