

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

NATIONAL PARENTS DAY – PART I

FEATURING NJCC JUDGES

EPISODE 156

JULY 15, 2022

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. We’re taking a departure from our normal conversational interview style to bring you something a little bit different. July 24th is National Parents Day. In 1994, Congress unanimously passed the Parents Day Resolution to recognize, uplift, and support the role of parents in the rearing of children. And President Clinton signed this resolution into law that same year. To celebrate this day, we invited our judges to talk about their parents, and about being a parent. Eighteen of them volunteered to participate and over the past few months, each judge spent time in our recording studio sharing their thoughts and memories. And over the next two episodes, starting with this one, I’m going to share with you some of what they recorded. Part I begins with our judges’ parents, their fondest memories, the influence they had on their careers and the impact on their lives. You’ll hear audio vignettes from Judges Jeff Ashton, John Beamer, Jeanette Bigney, Luis Calderon, Vincent Chiu, Elizabeth Gibson, Diego Madrigal, Mikaela Nix-Walker, and Tarlika Nunez-Navarro. We’ll start things off with Judge Bigney, who I am honored chose to participate because as you’ll hear, she tends to be a more private person. Listen as she shares a bit about her parents’ impact in her life.

JUDGE BIGNEY: Growing up, seeing my parents immigrate from the Philippines and start from square one, and realizing how much I had to start with but you just got to work – you

got to work like you need the money, so – but they always – they were so – they’re just loving people, and they’re just proud people. But the flip side of it is that I think kind of ethnically, they just don’t put a lot out there. Like, I think they kind of raise an eyebrow to social media and all that stuff so that’s kind of stayed with me too. So I’m a little bit more modest in what I share. My favorite memory of my parents is seeing them with my kids. There isn’t just one favorite memory. Like, seeing my dad hold my newborn daughter and he just looked so nervous. But also seeing the way they comforted by son when he looked a little jealous of his newborn sister. But those are some of my favorite memories.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Judge Bigney isn’t the only judge joining us on this podcast with parents who immigrated to the United States from other countries. Judge Calderon speaks of his parents fleeing Nicaragua, and how their views on education shaped who he is today.

JUDGE CALDERON: You know my parents under you know very difficult circumstances came to this country, but they you know studied very hard in their youth. They actually met – my mother’s from Panama, my dad is from Nicaragua. They actually both earned scholarships to medical school in Brazil and that’s where they met. So they were both really good students and then when they returned to Nicaragua, there was a revolution so they had to flee Nicaragua, and we came to the United States. But they said, you know, despite all of the, you know, unrest and you know revolution that was going on, that the one thing that they can never take away from you was your education. So that was something that was always kind of engrained in me. So that was kind of like the base, was you know, you need to be a good student, you need to take advantage of this opportunity because not everybody has this opportunity. I can remember being really, really young and you know my mom would work days, my dad would work nights at the hospital so you know my dad would get me ready in the

morning for school. And so in the mornings we'd watch old episodes of Perry Mason. You know, it was the old black and white version with Raymond Burr, and I remember it was just something we did together. And you know my dad was so just entertained and impressed by you know, just the idea of the lawyer and the role that they play. And so I think that just having that memory, it just kind of stuck with me, that that was a potential career path. And it just kind of evolved from there. It's little things, you know, as a child you kind of want to, you're always eager to please and you want to make your parents proud. And so I think sometimes we internalize the things that they value and they become our values so, yeah, that was a big influence for me in my career.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Education and the opportunities it offers is often a common value amongst parents and up next Judge Chiu shares with us that his parents, who also immigrated to the United States, sought these opportunities for him and his siblings, and gives us a glimpse into the memories that has stayed with him.

JUDGE CHIU: So my parents, neither of my parents ever graduated from college so I was the first one to do that. And I knew that that was always very important to them. They always wanted to see me have access to sort of the choices that life had to offer with an education. You know my dad, for most of my – well, for my childhood my dad worked in Chinese restaurants. And for a lot of it he had – he owned a Chinese restaurant, and people would ask him, like, oh your – is your son going to take over for you someday and he said, no, my son is going to do other things. You know, and I think it always struck me that for my parents, them coming to this country I think was all about me and my siblings having sort of the choices to do you know any number of things that the world had to offer as careers. So I think that is something that always drove me. Unlike I think a lot of maybe other kids, you know,

because my dad and my mom worked in the restaurant business so they – they worked nights and weekends so it's not like we had all of this time to sort of do fun things. And I think – I think culturally too it just was a little bit different. When I was seven, we went to Disney World actually, came down to Orlando. I grew up in New Jersey. We came down to Orlando because my mother won employee of the month at – at the casino where she was a – she worked in a restaurant. I always remembered that because that was like our – probably the only time we ever had like a vacation that where we flew somewhere and did touristy things. So I've got three kids, eleven, nine and six. We've taken them places. We've done things, but I think similarly to how I grew up, I think the things I look back most fondly on are not those things. They're the – it's the daily – it's the daily sort of heartbeat of life together. So I think that's what I – I remember most fondly with – about with my parents, just sort of living day-to-day life with them.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Daily life often looks very different for children whose parents serve in the armed forces. For Judge Gibson, whose father was in the Navy and often deployed, sharing day-to-day living meant getting creative. Listen as she talks about how her dad's service impacted her from a young age and her memories of his time in the Gulf War.

JUDGE GIBSON: My father was a chaplain in the Navy my whole life so we moved all over and my mom was a public school teacher for most of my life. And my father actually enlisted in the Army during Viet Nam, and I can remember from the time I was three or four hearing him talk about, he did it because it was his duty to serve his country. And so as a child from that young age, I knew that I had a duty to serve my country, my community, my state. There had to be a duty to serve. And so that's the reason I'm a judge today is my parents instilled that in me. So when I was in middle school, he was deployed in the Persian Gulf War

and he would write us letters. So remember, this was a long time ago. There was no Internet and email – well, there was Internet, but they didn't have it on the ships and he couldn't use it. And so he would write us letters and he had a little tape recorder. We sent him a miniature tape recorder with those little tiny cassette tapes and we would send tapes back and forth. And he would read us stories, and he would tell us about what was happening over there, not anything you know top secret or anything, but just what was happening in his life and he also ran the MARS radio when he was like off duty so that when they weren't using it, he could call home. And I will always remember him having to remind me almost every sentence, Elizabeth, you forgot to say over, because it's MARS radio so you have to say dad, I miss you, over. I love you dad, over. So I think that might have been some of my fondest memories, honestly.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: While some of Judge Gibson's favorite memories revolve around connecting with her dad despite the distance between them, it is quite the opposite for Judge Nunez-Navarro. Up next, she shares memories of being the child of a small town doctor and making the rounds with him.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: My father was a doctor in Central Florida, Lake Placid. He was really the only doctor in our town, and we would do house calls every evening. He would pick me up with his little black bag and we would go to the peoples' homes who – the homes that we would go into, they would have like fresh tortillas made, fresh guacamole for us because of course he wasn't charging them. And he would trade services, so we would sometimes, I tell my husband, we would sometimes have fresh flowers in exchange for like a simple, like surgery like on a foot or something like that. So my father worked two, three jobs. We would visit the hospitals. We would do house calls, and I would do them with him. So absolutely, he instilled in me a priority for your community and a service over and beyond your

nine to five. He would bring me to Orlando every Wednesday because we would then visit his patients in Orlando, which we called the city. Orlando was the city back then, and he would take me to dinner, depending on my grades in school. So if I made straights As, I got to go to the Melting Pot. And then if I didn't do so well, then it would be like a step down from the Melting Pot.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: While in the recording studio, almost all of our judges spoke of their parents' commitment to their community and their families. They also often talk about their work ethic. As you'll hear about next from Judge John Beamer, who shares his memories of his parents' hard work and sacrifice, as well as one of his oldest memories of snow in Tennessee.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: So both of my parents at times when I was growing up, worked two jobs, and they always put the family and our needs ahead of their own. So my mom worked at Texas Instruments in the daytime while I was at school and then at night she taught dance classes. So I went to dance class with her and took dance and things like that. My dad sold insurance during the day and at night he worked at a men's clothing store. So there were some nights where I would go with dad to work and I would sit in the manager's office and we would order the greasiest pizza called Greg's Pizza. It was the best I'd ever had and I would sit in there, eat pizza and watch TV on a black and white like manual channel changing TV where I had to get up and change the channel. And that's – those are some of the memories that I have of my parents. And then my dad had a paper route when I was in high school, and he would take me with him in the mornings because he needed help and I would run alongside the car and deliver the papers and things like that. So just the work ethic that I didn't realize at the time that they were kind of showing me carried over into – into my career and eventually how I ended up

on the bench. My fondest memories of being with my parents is probably one of the older or first memories that I have. I was probably about three or four years old and in East Tennessee, it snowed and we probably had a foot, foot and-a-half of snow, and my little brother wasn't born yet. And I had been – I was up looking out the window and so dad bundled me up in a snowsuit and mom went out there with me, and we made like a tiny little igloo and snowmen and stuff like that and just played. That's probably my oldest and one of my most fond memories of my parents.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: When it was Judge Nix-Walker's time to record, she shared how involved and supportive her parents were throughout her formative and young adult years, and how accompanying her dad when he was summoned for jury service would spark her interest in the law.

JUDGE NIX-WALKER: So I was very blessed to be in a two-parent home with very, very Christian values and kind of strict upbringing. So my parents were always very involved in the process and the procedure. So they would help me with college applications. They would help me when I became excited about going into the law field. From a very young age, my parents were always trying their best through girl scouts and different means, and finding different career paths. So I can remember my dad being – taking me to jury duty service with him and the impact that it made on me, I knew I wanted to be in the legal field. The courtroom, the dynamics, I was just so excited, but that wasn't just it. My mom always – they always pretty much told me that whatever you wanted to do, just make sure that you were hardworking, that you put God first, and that you were diligent about things. And so my parents were never the parents who let you quit something. So if you wanted to do ballet, horseback riding, girl scouts, travel all around the world, they were saying, whatever you're going to do, if we're putting our

money behind it, you're going to make sure that you accomplish that task. And that is exactly how they were when it came down to my career. There were some time periods where I didn't want to do law anymore and I said, okay, daddy, I want to do something else. And I remember him saying, well, let's finish this task and then we can move on. And so, my parents were really big on accomplishing your goal, setting that goal, and then moving forward if you wanted to change. So they were very impactful all throughout my life on every career aspect that I chose. I didn't – I wasn't your typical lawyer. I didn't start off exactly in law. I owned some businesses before then, but every angle, it was always accomplish a task, finish it and then move on.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Much like Judge Nix-Walker, blessed was one of the first words Judge Madrigal used to describe his feelings about his parents. Listen as he shares with us how their encouragement and sacrifice shaped who he is today, and gives us a glimpse into one of his fondest memories.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: My parents, and I said this during my investiture, I talked about how I have lived a blessed life, which I have, and that the biggest blessing I had was being borne to them, and that's absolutely true. They've had the greatest impact on my life, on my career, on my sense of doing what I feel is right and wrong. And the biggest impact they had is merely their encouragement, telling me I can do whatever I wanted to. Just if I worked hard and kept my nose clean, as the phrase goes, that I could do anything and that's the impact they've had on me. When I was young, we lived in New York, and every Saturday we would pack into the family station wagon. My dad loved station wagons, and we'd drive to New Jersey for my sister to have piano lessons. And I would stay – my aunt lived in New Jersey and I'd stay with my parents while my sister was practicing piano. And now as an adult, I think about how I value my

Saturdays and don't want to make that sacrifice of giving my Saturdays up, but they did every single Saturday. And so that's my fondest memory, is just that driving to New Jersey and hanging out with them and other family.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Like Judge Madrigal, Judge Ashton's favorite memories of his parents are tied to their support and encouragement. But he also shares a fond memory of John Wayne westerns.

JUDGE ASHTON: Neither one of my parents were lawyers or in law, and so I know that, you know, my father was always I remember encouraging me. I remember my father, when I was in college, virtually begging me to take a business class, but I was a philosophy major and I was very stubborn. So I think when I – when I went into law school, he was pleased because he knew I was going to go into a profession where I could actually make a living. But they were, you know, they were always very supportive of everything I did. My parents lived in St. Petersburg, so it's about a two-hour drive, and a couple of occasions they came over and watched me in trial, and that was a real thrill for me as a young lawyer. So you know they were – they didn't have a background in law, but they were, you know, education was hugely important to them. So they helped all four of us get through college and beyond. So yeah, they were a huge, huge impact on me. My fondest memory of my dad was, oddly enough, I was the only boy of – I had three sisters and me. And so when my – when my sisters would have like a birthday or an occasion where they had a lot of their girlfriends over, my dad and I would go to the movies. And I think that's one of my fondest memories, is going to the movies with my dad, and we would usually go to like a John Wayne movie, you know, western or something like that. So you know I have very, very clear memories of sitting in the movie theater with my dad watching John Wayne movies.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Encouragement and support from parents, and simple moments with family are strong themes that run through many of our judges' lives, including my own. It has been a great experience for all of our judges to walk down memory lane and I hope you've enjoyed listening in as much as we've enjoyed recording. Part II is up next and this time you'll get a chance to hear our judges' thoughts about being parents. Thanks for listening in.

NARRATOR: Thank you for listening to "Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom" brought to you by Chief Judge Lisa Munyon and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram @ninthcircuitfl for updates on new episodes and subscribe to Open Ninth on your favorite podcast service.

(Music)