

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

JUDICIAL SPOTLIGHT

MEET HONORABLE LETICIA MARQUES

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HOSTED BY: CHIEF JUDGE LISA T. MUNYON

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. I’m here today with Judge Leticia Marques, one of our circuit judges in the Ninth Circuit. Judge Marques is a graduate of Georgetown Law. After receiving her juris doctor, she went on to work in private practice with firms such the Draper Law Offices and Dellecker, Wilson and King, formerly known as Martinez and Dalton. But in 2012 she made the life changing decision to run for the bench and won. She officially joined the Ninth the following year as both a circuit judge and the first Hispanic female judge in Central Florida. I’m thrilled to have you in the studio today Judge Marques. Thanks for joining me.

JUDGE MARQUES: Thanks for having me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me a little bit about yourself. You’ve got a very unique background, having been born in Cuba so tell me a little bit about that.

JUDGE MARQUES: I was born in Cuba. I lived there for the first two years and three days of my life and then Castro and the situation there forced my family to leave but we lived in a little town called Cabaiguan and I actually don’t know how to spell it. I could if I thought about it but I don’t.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Had your family been in Cuba a long time before you were forced to leave?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes, my grandfather’s – well, my maternal grandfather was born in Spain. I just found that out this weekend but grew up in Cuba. The other three of my

grandparents were all born and raised in Cuba. I think some of my great grandparents were born in Spain but not all of them. Most of our paperwork got lost in the revolution. When you left you left with one suitcase and you weren't really saving all of that family history.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. So your grandfather was born in Spain, grew up in Cuba. What did he do?

JUDGE MARQUES: My maternal grandfather, the one that was born in Spain, he owned an import/export business in Havana called El Mundo, The World. My paternal grandfather was a surgeon and he worked in what they call the clinic which was the hospital in the little town that we lived in. They called it La Clinica Cabaiguan but they still call it that to this day. Friends that have gone to the town have told me the name is still on there and his name is still on there.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. Your grandfather's name is still on there?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yeah. Now, my dad joined him as a surgeon when my dad finished med school in Cuba. And we lived – the house that we lived in is still there and it's still in our names.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, any plans to move back?

JUDGE MARQUES: No.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: No.

JUDGE MARQUES: That would be a no.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: No, probably not. So when you were two years old, two years and three days, your family left Cuba. Did your entire family, your mother, your father, your siblings leave or did you leave peace-meal?

JUDGE MARQUES: No. No. My dad had already been in quite a bit of trouble with Castro's regime. There was a death sentence issued on him. He was – sometimes he was hiding, sometimes he wasn't. The situation was very unstable so they issued exit visas for my mom, my two brothers and I and my parents decided that they didn't want us growing up in a communist country. So my mom, my two brothers and I left. We arrived in Miami on August 30<sup>th</sup> of 1961.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MARQUES. And now everyone is doing math to figure out how old I am.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes, they are. So what did your dad do when his entire immediate family just left for Miami?

JUDGE MARQUES: He kept moving from place to place. There are doctors who – one of whom is still living but who were helping me. They were helping him hide. Eventually he made his way to the Spanish Embassy. The Spanish ambassador owed him one because he had operated on his son and helped save his life so they put him on a plane to Madrid. And at that time Cuba wasn't in a position to argue with Spain. They needed the money. So he went to Madrid and lived there until the US issued him permission to enter the United States.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And was that a fast process at that point or was he in Spain for a while separated from his wife and his kids?

JUDGE MARQUES: He was there for several months. You know I was so young; I don't remember the exact time frames but it was - it was months. I mean, I know he struggled in Spain. He – later on he admitted to me that there were times he had gone hungry there but the process for Cubans was faster than other people. So I'm going to guess he was there somewhere between three and six months but he entered the United States and joined us in 1962.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what did your mom do? I mean, newly from Cuba, three little kids and not – I assume she didn't speak English.

JUDGE MARQUES: She did not. My dad spoke English. The rest of us did not. Mom – my family lucked out in that my paternal grandfather, the one who owned the import/export had said before the revolution, or before Castro succeeded, kept saying that guy is a communist, we all need to get out. He had moved a lot of his money out and had bought a house in Miami. So we went to Miami and stayed with my grandfather and my grandmother, hoping my dad would get out. And at that time everyone who came that was Cuban, you got to go to what's called el refugio, the refuge, which is welfare. So she was learning English and getting ready to get a job and then she would go down – we would walk down to the center and you'd get this big box that had peanut butter and jelly, which Cubans had no idea what peanut butter was but that's when you were introduced to it. You got a giant jar of peanut butter and a giant jar of jelly. You got a block of what I now know to be Velveeta cheese, powdered milk, bread, that kind of – just the staples of everything that you needed. And so you know we used that to contribute to the household. My brothers loved peanut butter and jelly. To this day I can't stand the stuff. I just can't eat it but she was just getting ready to get a job because there was nothing else she could do. She was going to have to support us all.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So your dad finally came, was able to get back in the United States. Where did you go then?

JUDGE MARQUES: We went to Vicksburg, Mississippi. My father was a surgeon as I said but you had to repeat your medical training. They recognized his schooling but he had to take the MCAT and repeat his medical training here in the United States and –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So he had to go to medical school all over again?

JUDGE MARQUES: Nope. You had to take the test, the MCAT test and he took that and passed it. Somewhere in all the paperwork I have are his MCAT results. So he passed that. Again he spoke English so that helped. The first place that offered him a job, the first hospital that offered him a job was an internship in Vicksburg, Mississippi and he took it. And while he was in Miami studying and all that he just worked as an orderly at a hospital.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you moved – he moved with his family that spoke very little English to Vicksburg, Mississippi?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me about that.

JUDGE MARQUES: That was just a freak show. We were – my mom, my two brothers and I, my oldest brother and I were – our hair is so, at that age was so blond, it was white. I have bluer green eyes, couldn't speak a word of English so here you have these little kids speaking a completely foreign language in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1962. So it was – it was different. I mean, obviously it was an adjustment especially for my parents. You know they went from having a very comfortable life in Cuba. Later on in life mother would talk about the fact that she had to wash clothes in a bathtub because we just couldn't afford to go to a laundry mat. But I don't remember being unhappy, any of us. I mean we – we had a good life. We were all together and we went to the Vicksburg War Memorial. There's a civil war memorial there. It is the only memory I have of Vicksburg because as mom said, we went every single day because it was free. And we climbed on the cannons and walked around the battlefield and all that. So – and the

hospital hooked us up with some public housing and the folks there were really nice. That's when mom started to learn how to cook because she did not know how to cook.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how long was your family in Vicksburg?

JUDGE MARQUES: We spent two years there. My brother – my oldest brother started first grade. Within six months the three of us could speak English and Spanish. We all spoke Spanish when we arrived and then we just tagged on English. Then we went, at the end of two years, we went to Newport News, Virginia, then to Richmond, Virginia and then here to Orlando which is mainly where we stayed.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you moved to those places because your father took different jobs at hospitals?

JUDGE MARQUES: Correct, he was completing his residency. Back then you had to do an internship and then residency.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: All right. And after he finished his residency, do you have any idea how they settled on Orlando?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes, I actually do know. Dr. Alfonzo who I adore and is my second dad, and his wife, we met them in Newport News. Also Cuban refugees. The families because really, really close. And Dr. Alfonzo had come here to Orlando so when we finished – when dad finished his residency, was getting ready to in Richmond, Dr. Alfonzo and his wife convinced them to try Orlando and come to Orlando and so you know they were good friends. It was close to our other relatives who did live in Miami so we came to Florida.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And your dad worked as a doctor here until he retired.

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes, he was a doctor here originally at Mercy Hospital which is long since gone but he also worked at what is now Orlando Regional, back then was a different name. I couldn't keep up with all the names but yeah, he was a surgeon here for many, many years until he retired. I still run into people who say your dad was my doctor.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how old were you when you arrived in Orlando, if you remember?

JUDGE MARQUES: I'm going to have to do math. I was four when I went to Newport. Five when I went to Richmond. Nine.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You were nine. So elementary school --

JUDGE MARQUES: Correct.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- ish age. And obviously you became a lawyer so you were good at school. Did you play any sports or in any extracurricular activities when you were in high school?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes, my dad -- well in grade -- starting in grade school, my parents were of the opinion that after school they needed to keep us busy. There were three of us. We were quite active so we played sports. And you could play any sport you wanted but you played sports. So when I got to high school, back then they really didn't have that many sports for girls. That had not become that common so I played sports with my friends but not organized sports.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what sports did your parents get you into when you were in - starting in grade school?



JUDGE MARQUES: Swimming, track, softball, what else did we do? Volleyball.

Volleyball was my favorite. I played that the most and I enjoyed that the most.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, it's the old mantra, a tired child is a happy parent.

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes. Exactly and my parents practiced that to the nth degree. I also liked to play tennis but I played that not for school. I just did that for fun.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you graduated from high school, you went on to college. You went to college at Loyola?

JUDGE MARQUES: I did, Loyola, New Orleans.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How did you decide upon Loyola?

JUDGE MARQUES: I knew you were you going to ask me that. And I don't really remember. I – it was a long time ago. My dad accused me of picking schools based on the cities that you know the schools were in but he had no actual proof of that so I never admitted to it. But I don't know why I picked Loyola. I had to pick between Loyola, University of Florida, which back then wasn't the powerhouse that it is now. And one other school, and I just – I think – I went to Loyola and I really liked it and ended up going there.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what did you study while you were at Loyola?

JUDGE MARQUES: I was a political science major with a minor in history.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what – when you decided to major in political science with a minor in history, what in the world did you want to do with that degree?

JUDGE MARQUES: I wanted to be a lawyer.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Did you?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: When did you decide you wanted to be a lawyer?

JUDGE MARQUES: When I was a junior in high school.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How did that come about?

JUDGE MARQUES: We were in a class, whose class was it, where we were debating and I really, really, really enjoyed it and it was the teacher who said you know you should consider law school. I was like, do I get to argue with people?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, so you decided you enjoyed the argument. That just doesn't surprise me.

JUDGE MARQUES: Look who's talking.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And that interaction made you decide you wanted to try law school?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes, I did. And the one thing my parents had always told us, you're going to college, or you're going to get a career of some kind. It didn't have to be college. Dad said if you want to be a plumber, whatever, but he, my entire life all I ever heard was, the one thing no one can take from you is what you know. Money, all the rest of it, you can lose in an instant but you can't take what – they can't take what you know so they always said, what are you going to be? What are you going to study?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you went to Loyola. Obviously did well there. How did you decide where to go to law school?

JUDGE MARQUES: That I do remember.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Other than the city.

JUDGE MARQUES: That I do remember. It boiled down for me of the choices I had, it was either Columbia or Georgetown. I did not – at that time, it's weird because now I love the city of New York. I didn't at that time like the city of New York. I went and I visited and I thought I really don't want to spend three years here. And my roommate who was also my best friend had been admitted to Georgetown also so I thought, what the heck, I'll go to Georgetown. It was a good school.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, Georgetown is an awesome school.

JUDGE MARQUES: And I – it really is a cool city to go to school in. Not that I picked it for that reason.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you finish law school, did you move back immediately to Florida, to Orlando?

JUDGE MARQUES: I did. I had been away from home by then for six years so I, you know, my whole family was here.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I know family is very important to you and very important to the Cuban culture.

JUDGE MARQUES: Very much so, yeah. We spend a lot of time together and it's just the way I grew up and what I was used to. So – and honestly, I like Florida. I decided to come home and try it here.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, Florida's climate is a lot more like Cuba than –

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes, it is.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- than Washington, D.C.'s.

JUDGE MARQUES: Yeah, Washington has about one short period of time where the weather is really nice and the rest of it is just either too hot or too cold.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you got out of law school and decided to come back to Orlando, what kind of law did you want to practice and where did you start? How did you go about finding your path?

JUDGE MARQUES: This was pretty funny. I, when I started law school, I thought I wanted to do international transactional law. And kind of took classes with that in mind. I kept having internships and I didn't like it. I was really, really bored. And so I came home, I wasn't 100 percent sure what was going on but I saw that there was an advertisement and an opening at the Public Defender's Office so I went and applied. And people from law school thought I had lost my mind. A lot of people don't know this because I don't really talk about it very much. I mean it was 40 years ago but I was law review at Georgetown which meant I had gotten some offers from –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right, from big firms.

JUDGE MARQUES: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Like from New York and Washington, D.C.

JUDGE MARQUES: For a lot of money. So not me, no, I came home. I interviewed for the PD job. I talked to a few people and it sounded really interesting. For once, it – you know

how you feel when you find something that you're interested in and I thought I really like this.  
So I took that job for \$18,000 a year.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. Yeah, we were in pretty much the same era because I think my first job at the State Attorney's Office was \$18,500.

JUDGE MARQUES: Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Because I had already passed the bar so I got the extra \$500.  
Oh, yeah.

JUDGE MARQUES: I bet you went on a shopping spree with that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how long did you stay at the Public Defender's Office?

JUDGE MARQUES: Two years, I think. Two – two years.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how did you find the experience?

JUDGE MARQUES: I loved it. I really did enjoy the PD's office. And I started in Osceola County. At that time I was, and I know this is going to astonish people, I was the only Spanish speaking lawyer in Osceola and then I moved to Orange County after a year, into the felony divisions here and I really loved the experience. I worked with Joe DuRocher who was magnificent, got to know folks I'm still friends with to this day, but like all public defenders I was underpaid and overworked and I was getting burned out. But I like the subject matter of criminal.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you decided to leave.

JUDGE MARQUES: I decided to leave and go into private practice.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And what did you do in private practice? Where did you go and what did you do?

JUDGE MARQUES: I started at first with a colleague, Wayne Sprague. We did that for a year but that didn't work out and I joined the Draper Law Firm in Osceola. I always liked Osceola. It was a great place to be. And I did criminal law and some family law at that point.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And how long did you stay with Draper Law before you moved on?

JUDGE MARQUES: I knew you were going to ask me that. I'd have to actually look at my resume. It was a number of years.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Was it?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yeah, they're good friends, good people. I really enjoyed practicing there and I enjoyed being in Kissimmee but at some point, it would have been 12 years into my career, so I probably stayed there 9 years. I was just – I was a little bored. I was a little burned out. I had done some really big cases. I had done a huge murder case. I was worn out. And Mel Martinez offered me a job doing personal injury with his firm and so I decided what the heck, I'll learn something new so I took the chance.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And former Senator –

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: He was Secretary of –

JUDGE MARQUES: HUD.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- HUD. Yes.

JUDGE MARQUES: And just an all-around great person.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE MARQUES: Yeah, and so I joined their law firm to do personal injury work. So I did plaintiff's personal injury work for the next 17 years before I decided to run for judge.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I – his partner at that time was Skip Dalton, the federal judge.

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you had two great people to learn –

JUDGE MARQUES: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- civil law from.

JUDGE MARQUES: Very much so, yeah. It was a very good firm. It is a very good firm. It evolved into Dellecker, Wilson, King, I think Sos, something, something, no, Dellecker, Wilson, King, Ken McKenna. So McKenna, Sos, et cetera, yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you did personal injury law during all of that time that you were with their firm?

JUDGE MARQUES: I did except for this one death penalty case that Judge Kaney assigned me while I was on a cruise. And I came home to find out that I had been assigned that case, but other than that I just did personal injury work.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And what made you decide that you wanted to be a judge?

JUDGE MARQUES: People had talked to me about it for a while and I just – you know I enjoyed being a lawyer. I enjoyed my career. I reached a point where I had done pretty much everything I wanted to do as an attorney. I felt like there wasn't much else that I was interested in and being a judge seemed like a challenge, something that I might be interested in and I hoped I'd be good at. So I went for it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you ran a campaign.

JUDGE MARQUES: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How did you find campaigning?

JUDGE MARQUES: It was interesting.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I know it's a lot of work.

JUDGE MARQUES: It was exhausting. Like every candidate I would like to know who thought it was a good idea to schedule campaigns in August in the state of Florida. It's a legitimate question that someone needs to answer.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's a little hot holding signs in the middle of summer.

JUDGE MARQUES: It's really miserable and you have to rope all your family and friends into participating. The weather is terrible. I got to meet some really interesting and great people, just general public. They were very interested in what we were doing and who we were as people and all that. I did enjoy that part of it but it is exhausting. This is a huge circuit. It goes from the edge of Mount Dora all the way to Yeehaw Junction so it was exhausting. And I ate more bar-b-que than any human being should have to consume in one year. And I like bar-be-que.



CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, you obviously won your election and had to wind down your practice. So do you remember how you felt the first day you were on the bench?

JUDGE MARQUES: Scared. I was very, very scared. I you know took the bench down in Osceola in the domestic division which I hadn't done domestic law for years. So I was worried that everyone in the courtroom knew more than I did. But sometimes it was just funny, like, I walked in and I sat down and everybody was still standing and I remember thinking why are these people all standing? Then I realized, wait, I'm the judge, I have to tell them to sit down because I had spent years as a lawyer. So making the change was interesting.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you spent your first couple of years on the bench in Osceola?

JUDGE MARQUES: I did. I spent four years. The first two were the first assignment everybody, you know you go where you go and I was in the family division but then I voluntarily stayed because I loved it. Two more years in the criminal division down there.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And then you came up to Orange.

JUDGE MARQUES: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Which divisions have you been in in Orange?

JUDGE MARQUES: Criminal and guardianship and now guardianship, probate, mental health.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Being a judge is, yeah, as litigators we think we know what being a judge is like until you actually get in the office and then you really see what it's like. What did you find to be different than what you anticipated?

JUDGE MARQUES: Most of it, to be honest. It's – maintaining neutrality was much more difficult than I thought for the first six months. Now I just don't have a problem with it, but you're so used to being an advocate that when people were making mistakes or you knew there was an argument they could make or anything like that, I was thinking, oh, I really want to tell them but you can't and you don't. Making decisions is more difficult than I thought it would be. I make them. I make them all day long but – and the thing that was the most surprising to me is the amount of work this is because as a lawyer I saw the judge on the bench. I did not realize the hours that you have to put in off the bench just to be competent at what you do, let alone good at it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, it is amazing. I always thought that if the judge wasn't on the bench they didn't have anything to do.

JUDGE MARQUES: Right. And that is so wrong.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That is so wrong.

JUDGE MARQUES: I think there should be full disclosure before we run for judge. But yeah, it is – it is an amazing amount of work.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what have you found to be the most rewarding thing about being on the bench?

JUDGE MARQUES: The control you have over certain decisions that are really important to the litigants, to the folks that are involved. Every division has something that is really rewarding, whether in criminal there are the cases, I'm sure you've had them, I'm sure you've experienced this where someone thinks they're about to go to prison forever but you have the ability to listen to them and you find out that there's – there's something there to work with

and you can craft a sentence that punishes them for what they did but doesn't ruin their lives. Those moments are great in criminal. In guardianships, it's the finding out that somebody's abusing an incapacitated person and being able to step in and really do something about it, make sure that you get a good guardian in place. So for me in every division, there's been that moment when as a judge I've been able to help people that I would not have been able to do as a lawyer.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Are there any aspects of your role as judge that, I don't know how to phrase this, is there anything else that you want to accomplish as a judge that you have not accomplished yet?

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes, but it would take me – I'd have to think about exactly how to phrase that. There's always the ability to get better. There's always the opportunity to improve upon the way we do things here in the circuit. You know, you've been involved in that. We've worked together on that of trying to improve processes, improve access, improve this, that and the other. I would like to hopefully be able to contribute more to the circuit so that it's a better circuit even though I think this is the best circuit in the state.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Of course it is.

JUDGE MARQUES: I think it is.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you have been an administrative judge, particularly in criminal during COVID.

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me about that experience. It was unique and a bit difficult.

JUDGE MARQUES: I still have post-traumatic stress from that. COVID was the oddest experience I've had as a human being let alone as a judge. It was difficult. We had I think three hours to close the place down, four hours maybe. The chief judge informed us that we were closing the courthouse at 5:00 o'clock and that we all needed to figure out a way to keep the essential divisions going and criminal is an absolutely essential division. So thanks to the support staff. Without them, we would have crashed and burned. AV who came up with all of the ways to connect the judges to the jail, to other courtrooms so that we could process defendants. I mean you couldn't just let people rot in jail. So it was rewarding in that I got to work with a bunch of people very closely, staff members that normally they're in the background and you know they're there but you don't have to work with them as much. It was very, very difficult because we had ten felony divisions, all of whom needed to conduct initial appearances, process people out of the court – out of the jail, take pleas, all that without having any contact with one another. And we had to coordinate with other divisions. Normally each division just, as you know, just works but we had to coordinate time with the county judges who needed access to the jail. We had to coordinate time with the domestic judges who needed access to folks who had been arrested for child support. So it was just this big giant complex organism that had to be created overnight basically and then we spent a year tinkering with it, trying to keep it going with each phase of COVID. It was tough.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And then you had the backlog of criminal trials to deal with when we could finally start doing jury trials again.

JUDGE MARQUES: It was horrendous. I reopened, over a lot of protests from folks, the trial divisions reopened in October of 2020, 2020, right?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, 2020.

JUDGE MARQUES: And the backlog was monstrous, but all the judges cooperated with one another. We restructured how we did it to try and process as many people as possible and try as many cases as possible. We were aware of the fact that COVID was still here, that people had to wear masks and all that but we literally had people sitting in that jail who were acquitted. A significant number of cases came back not guilty. We had to get the cases tried. So that was very tough to do. I exited the criminal division at the end of 2020. And at that point I think we had resolved over 200 trial cases, close to 300 and we're still massively backlogged. The backlog was close to 1,000, wasn't it?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It was a lot. I don't remember the exact number now.

JUDGE MARQUES: I don't either. I think I blocked it out. It was so bad when they showed me the number, I was thinking, oh, no. But they cleared it out. Even after I left, the judges really put their noses to the grindstone and got that backlog cleared up.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, hopefully we won't have to deal with anything like that in the future.

JUDGE MARQUES: I do not want to do that again.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Now, we've talked about your career and both as a lawyer and a judge. What do you do for fun when you're not on the bench?

JUDGE MARQUES: I have lots of fun when I'm not on the bench. I like to travel. As I said, I spend a lot of time with my family so we get together for family dinners and family get-togethers as often as possible. I love to cook so we all take – we kind of do potlucks so I enjoy that. I love to read, not legal books. I keep pretty busy. I have a lot going on and I have a lot of friends that aren't lawyers, thank goodness.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you spend time with them too I would assume.

JUDGE MARQUES: Oh, yeah. I have a group of friends, there's three of them that we've known each other since grade school and so we make a point of seeing each other as often as possible. It's amazing how we all live in the same city, but it's hard to get together.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So would you have any advice for those that are seeking to become a judge or for our new judges, because we have a lot of new judges in this circuit?

JUDGE MARQUES: Let me think for a minute. I kind of feel badly for the new judges, the ones that came in on COVID because they never really have had the full judge experience because they just really haven't done it the way we did it. My advice is to ask for advice. If you're already a judge, as you know, I come by your office pretty frequently and say, I need to run this by you. I have a question. I you know, I have many judges that I talk to about the decisions that we're faced with, about what the law is, to just double check what I'm doing, and to get myself through situations. I can't stress enough how important it is to find people who know more than you do and there's always someone who knows more than you do and talk to them, and get advice from them. If you're thinking about becoming a judge, I would suggest you ask to shadow a judge and find out just how much work this is, and just how different this is. As you know this is very isolating. You're cut off from a lot of things. Our judicial canon of ethics requires us to be cut off from a lot of things that you can do as a lawyer you can't do as a judge. You know it subjects you to motions to recuse. It gives the appearance of impropriety but it's also just the sheer volume of work. The new judges frequently come by and go, I didn't realize this was this much work. I would suggest you try and shadow a judge or certainly have conversations with them about what their schedules actually are like and what the job actually entails.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, it's kind of like be careful what you ask for. You might get it.

JUDGE MARQUES: Yes, it is.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, thank you for joining me here today. It's been a pleasure getting to know a little bit more about you.

JUDGE MARQUES: Well, thank you. This was less painful than I thought it was going to be. It's always fun talking to you; thanks.

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.

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