

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

JUDICIAL SPOTLIGHT

MEET HONORABLE ADAM MCGINNIS

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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 Adam McGinnis, one of our county court judges in the Ninth Circuit. Judge McGinnis is a graduate of Barry University School of Law and the first from the school to become a member of the judiciary. But before joining the bench he represented thousands of clients throughout the state of Florida with a law practice focused on traffic and criminal defense. It was in 2012 that he made the decision to run for the bench and joined us here the following year. I’m thrilled to have you in the studio today, Judge McGinnis. Thanks for joining me.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Thanks for having me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So I was born in Michigan, but then moved down here at a really young age to Clearwater, actually Ozona, if anybody knows where Ozona is. I grew up in the Clearwater area. I went to Ozona Elementary and if you recall, in 2013 at one of the first judges’ meetings, the new judges were required to sing their Alma Mater fight songs.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And as far as I know only Judge Cameron and I are the only ones that have actually done that. And he sang his university or Michigan State fight song and I sang my Ozona Elementary fight song.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I do remember that. I thought that was very original.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, well, I still remember it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I don't even know if my elementary school had a fight song.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. Well, I don't know if you call it a fight song, but it was like our song.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. I was just shocked that you remembered it.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, I still do. I - actually, I had to call - I called the school and I said listen, I went to school there in the 80s and I remember this song and I said, but there's a year that we say in this song and I think that the year is - is 1905. And I was talking to the lady, a lady who had no idea, she's probably younger than me, and she goes you know what, I think I've seen that written on a wall in the school. She goes, let me take down your number and so she went back and she - and she looked at the song on the school and she called me back, she said, you're right, it's 1905.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And I said, okay, thanks.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You actually did research for it.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, I researched it to make sure I had it right. No one would have known the difference. And then I went to Palm Harbor Middle and then I went to Clearwater Central Catholic for high school.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did - were you involved in any extracurricular activities during high school?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, so I grew up playing baseball and soccer, and I don't have very many baseball memories so I don't think I was very good at baseball. My best memories, I actually had played against Ron DeSantis when I was like 8 years old.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Really?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, and his – and his team, I know half the guys on his team.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Was that soccer or baseball?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: No, in baseball. He was a baseball player. And – but then I mainly focused on soccer and I played high school soccer all four years and then I was the kicker for the football team for half of my sophomore year.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: That was it, but yeah, we were good. They – they recruited a lot of us to go to Central Catholic for soccer and so my freshman year, I started off on JV and then moved to varsity and we started 9 Freshman on that varsity soccer game.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And we probably won three games and lost 20 games. And then the next year we started 9 sophomores and two freshman and we went like 500 that year. And then my junior year, we started 9 juniors and two sophomores and we only lost to one team that year and it was Jesuit and then we beat them in that state championship final so that was cool. And then my senior year we started 9 seniors and two juniors and we ended up actually being ranked second in the nation that year.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Number one for like two weeks.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's cool.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And I have the USA Today article, it's like the pinnacle of my career.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: As a soccer player?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah – no, just in life, yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you were a kicker or ...

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Just for the football team for like half a season.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, okay. As football, not kicker for American football, yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, I played soccer. The football season was in the fall and then the soccer season started right up after and ...

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what position did you play in soccer?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So I played right outside mid which the formations and the strategies back then compared to now are just antiquated so it wouldn't even make sense talking to a young kid now. And then football I played for half a season because I didn't tell my mom I was playing and then she found out that I was playing football. And that ended my football career.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So I would assume that you were a good student in high school.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: No.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: No?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: No, I was an okay student.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you obviously wanted to go – you obviously did go to college.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, so from the time I can remember, my parents, their goal was you will go to college, you will graduate from college. Yeah, so I mean I was a decent student. I wasn't a bad student. I never failed anything.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: But you had other interests?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. Yeah, I was all over the place.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you went - where did you go to college?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: UCF.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: UCF.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Well, I went to three colleges. I went to UCF for a year and then I went to, what was then St. Pete Junior College for two years. And then I came back to UCF and then I did a semester at Valencia to finish up my core classes and then went back to UCF and finished UCF.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what did you major in?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So that's an excellent question. I am 16 credit hours away from an electrical engineering degree.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And I was four years into college and I went every semester, fall, spring, summer, never took any time off. And I decided after four years that I didn't want to – it was one semester, I was like, I don't want to do this anymore so I picked up a catalog and I looked and the only degree that I could really get in say a year was a liberal arts degree so I changed my major to liberal arts.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And then did three semesters and graduated with a liberal arts degree.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you have all of the qualities that you would expect from a judge which is a Liberal Arts and then you also have the science.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, so my liberal arts, it's a rare one because it's a Liberal Arts, it's a BS degree instead of a BA. Most everybody has a BA.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Because mine was math and engineering were my two cores and I did a minor in legal studies.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So – so it's a real math and science based liberal arts degree. Most peoples' degrees aren't based in math and science.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, mine was.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: You're liberal arts?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: No, I was science – I have a BS.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Okay, yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, and finance.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: But most of the liberal arts degrees are BAs.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, they are.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I'm one of rare ones. So yeah –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's kind of unusual for a lawyer though to like the math and sciences.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, I know.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: At least allegedly but a lot of lawyers I know like the math and sciences.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Well, do you remember baby judges' college, they gave us the personality test?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And so when we took that, I think there's 16 different personalities and I want to say there was 88 people when I went and there was two of us with whatever my personality was. You know 60 percent of the class all had the same personality and they're like yeah, this is what most judges' personalities are and then they're like what about this one and a



handful of people, and I don't even think they talked about my personality you know and then I think we asked them later, they go, you and one other person so –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's means that you're unique.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. That's probably what everybody says.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you're getting your – a liberal arts – a Liberal Arts degree. When did you decide that, hey, I want to go to law school?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: When I realized I couldn't get a job with it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, okay.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So I – that would have been when about – that would have been in January of my last year because I graduated in August. And –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you didn't want to be a math teacher, I don't imagine.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I didn't want to be a math teacher and I was like well, I could go – I got to get – basically I could either teach, do some kind of occupation that has nothing to do with my degree or keep going to school. So I had a friend that was going to law school and I said, oh, I guess I'll go take the LSAT. So I signed up and took the LSAT.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And how did you – you went to Barry --

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I went to Barry, yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- Law School.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Um-hum.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How did you decide on Barry? It was local?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So – right. So I lived here. I never studied for the LSAT. I didn't even know what was on it and so my score was okay. It wasn't great. Barry had just opened up and so I walked into Barry and I walked up to the information counter and I said I want to apply to law school. And I had a check for a \$125 and my application. And the lady at the information kiosk opened it up and she says, okay, you're in so I got accepted by the information Kiosk lady. And then she said, go through that door over there about a scholarship and I walked about ten feet over and I sat down and the lady opened it up and she looked at my GPA and my LSAT and she said okay we'll give you this scholarship. And I was like okay and I said do you want my \$125 check and she said no that's all right, we'll just write you down and so that was my – my kind of --

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow, pretty informal.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. And I applied to FAMU. It was brand new at the time. I did want to stay in Orlando and FAMU was opened in the fall and believe it or not the tuition at FAMU at the time was like \$4,500 a year you know. And so – so I graduated in August and FAMU still hasn't made a decision on my application or not and so I go out to Canada and I'm hiking out in Canada with some friends for like ten days and I'm checking in every couple of days. And so FAMU says hey, you didn't get in. We thought we were going to have seats for 87 people and we only have enough room for like 27 people and so –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: -- that's why everybody's application was held for so long. So I called Barry and Barry says oh, well, orientation is in two days so I book a flight home and I flew the red eye. I got off the airplane and took a cab, that was before Uber, and went straight to

orientation at Barry and I hadn't shaved in like two or three weeks. People were scared to look at me. I sat there and went through orientation. And then started at Barry.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did you start at Barry during the time that they weren't accredited?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: They had just gotten accredited which is why I applied. I wasn't going to apply if it wasn't accredited.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay, yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So, right, to give you an example, the class before me had maybe 18 or 20 people in it. My class had 125 people in it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So it was the first class and had provisional accreditation and then if they had lost the accreditation, we were still good for the bar. And there were a number of people that had to go back and take two years over again.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. I can't even imagine that.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I don't think I could have done it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: No.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you got into Barry. Did you go full time to school and work or just go to school –

JUDGE MCGINNIS: No, full time.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Full time.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, I was full time there whatever that was, 15 hours I think a semester. And I didn't do summers in law school. I just did the fall and the spring.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did you know what you were getting into when you started law school?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: No, not a clue. So I don't think I learned how to study until my first semester of law school. And to give you an example, like I didn't buy books in college. I would go to the bookstore and I would just read at the bookstore and then take the tests and go and I did fine. You couldn't do that in law school and so I remember going, the first time I think I spent 8 or 900 dollars on books. I had this stack of books, this high and then I started to flip through the books and I realized I was in trouble when there were no pictures in the books. So it was just all words.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Just words.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: It was all words in there and there were big words and words in Latin and I remember reading before the first day of class, I had never done that and I got really lucky, I think. And during the study week, I mean I was – I was genuinely lost and I didn't think – I was like I don't know if I'm going to make this. And I ran into a buddy of mine, he says hey I'm in this study group and I joined this study group and I think that the guy that led the study group taught me everything that I needed to know for those exams in five days. And he ended up being the number one student in our class so just by pure luck I stumbled into that room and then I did fine, you know. And then I maintained a friendship with him and he always helped me out and he was a good guy. You know cause sometimes people will stab you in the back and we had

those people too. But he was genuinely a good guy and he got me through that first semester and then I kind of figured it out after that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you did – you didn't go summers so you did three years of law school.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, I did three years of law school. And my first summer I – what did I do? I think I just worked. So I bought a condo my second semester of law school so my first semester I actually lived in a guy's closet. And I did. I had a –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: -- futon mattress in his closet. I was paying him \$200 in rent and I was trying to save up money because I wanted to buy – and I bought a foreclosure – foreclosure, it was 2002, 2002 and so I closed on it in March of '03 and I gutted it and remodeled it and got a roommate in and my mortgage was \$576.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. And I a roommate that paid me \$400 a month for a room and half the utilities so you know it paid off. And so during the summers I –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Better than a closet.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Oh, yeah, yeah. It was much nicer, much roomier. I could bring people back and you could hang out. And so yeah, that first summer I worked and the second summer I went to – I did a study abroad which was amazing.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Where did you go?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So I did four weeks at Cambridge. And Chief Justice Rehnquist was one of our professors for that so that was – I did four weeks – I actually had two weeks with him and then he hung out for a few days afterwards.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Was that cool?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: It was awesome. It was really, really neat. And you know I put that on the top of my resume when I graduated and no one ever asked me about it on any of the interviews. And I thought for sure people would ask me about that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: But yeah, it was really neat and it was one of the last things he taught before he passed. And that was the summer of '04 and so my girl friend at the time, we did four weeks in Cambridge and then we did one weekend in the middle of that in Amsterdam. We did another weekend in Dublin and then afterwards we met some friends in – then we went to Paris and then we met some friends in Switzerland and so the whole trip ended up being maybe seven or eight weeks.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: We had never been to Europe before. And then after that I was hooked and I went like four or five years in a row. And the exchange rate every year just got worse and worse and worse and worse and now – the last time I think I was in Europe was '08, I went to Turkey and Greece for a wedding. I went to the World Cup in '06. That was really cool in Germany two and a half weeks with some friends but yeah, so I went to Barry three semesters. First semester – first summer I worked. Second summer I worked for a small firm for half the summer and then did the summer abroad the second half.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what did you want to do when you got out of law school? What were your plans before graduation?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: They were about as solid as my plans when I was graduating from college which was I didn't know. And Barry didn't have any kind of alumni at the time so I – I applied at a few insurance defense firms, kind of like the standard. The State Attorney's Office and the PD's office, I want to say was paying maybe 31 at the time.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, if that, yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, and so I think my student loan payments were about \$1,100 and so the math just didn't add up. I had to make more money than \$31,000. And so a buddy of mine was renting office space from Blechman and Lubet.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, those are two very familiar names.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And so he says hey, I've got this gig that I kind of stumbled into and you can make some good money and it's a couple of days a week and you're just going to cover hearings for people. And so he goes, if you want it, I'm getting busy and so I said, yeah, sure, I'll take it. And then I'm going to pick up a few cases here and there and it was kind of just anything that came through the doorway, I took. And then – and so I was covering traffic tickets and then I started working for three different firms covering their cases. And they paid – I would go sit out in Ocoee all day and then go sit out in Winter Park all day and go sit in Apopka all day and three days a week I was making a lot more money than the State Attorney or PDs office was and so I just kink of stumbled into that. And then I started to grow on my own. And then one of three firms that I was working for, they had offices all over Florida but most of their offices were in South Florida. They had one in Orlando, and so I approached them, I said, hey, I'd like to buy

your Orlando office. And so they sold me their Orlando office. And then I grew that one. And then I was probably the second or third largest firm as far as volume with all that kind of stuff. And then when I decided to run for judge, one of my competitors says, hey, do you want to merge with us? And they were two partners and they said, we'll make you a one-third owner and so I merged with them at the end of – or January 1<sup>st</sup> of 2012. So I went from working out of my car, and I remember when I started on my own, I bought a Brother Five In One, printer, fax, copier, and I had Metro PCS cell service which I still technically have cause I'm at T-Mobile. And that was \$30 a month unlimited and I had Sprint but I was getting – since I was doing everything through my cell phone, I was getting like these \$200, \$300 phone bills and so I went to Metro PCS and then every night I would come home and I would print out flyers and I would sit there for about an hour, two hours putting together flyers and print out the labels and put the labels on and send out all the flyers to all the people that got in trouble. And I literally just started in my living room and then rented a small office space and then got a little bit bigger office space and then within six years, there was – we had five attorneys and two office buildings and staff of like eight.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And the numbers were getting crazy with how much money we had to generate to cover overhead. And then we were doing really well and it was a lot of fun. And then I said I guess I'm going to run for judge.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I guess it had to have been terrifying to leave law school and just go out on your own, you know finding your own business.



JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, there was just – yeah, the hardest part was, there just wasn't a lot of support out there cause Barry just didn't have a presence.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: It was new. So there was nobody that you could really go out into the community and see if they could help you. You know that first job is always the hardest. And so there were a lot of us that were going and working as an associate in a small boutique firm here you know. Baker Hostetler wasn't hiring us. Gray Robinson sure wasn't hiring us and so we were just getting these small jobs here and there. And it's really neat to see the alumni now and you see all these people that are judges. I mean it's really neat to see it grow and see people from law school now in the news and things like that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you started out of your car and grew to two office buildings and multiple attorneys and staff.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And I started in a Mazda Protégé.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, so what do you – I know hard work would account for that. Anything else that you believe accounts for just that tremendous growth and opportunity?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yes. Yes, and I have so many – I used to have lots of people come and ask me, hey how did you do it, how did you do it and I was like, keep your overhead down you know, just be conservative and baby steps. And they go okay, yeah, well, I'm going to model my firm and the next thing you know they're in the Angebilt Building.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And they've got a staff of five and I'm like you just started a month ago, you can't sustain that. And none of them ever do sustain it. Billboards, why would you buy a billboard? You know, unless your John Morgan, you have every other billboard, nobody is going to look at one billboard and so you watch all these people just burn money. And so I would just say start slow. I mean, everybody – I don't know if they just want to be famous or popular or rich, but you got to let – it's got to develop you know.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. Any lawyer that does the books and does the business of their firm can tell you how – what percentage their overhead is.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Oh, yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And what the max percentage that it can be and still be profitable.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Um-hum. I mean, I learned pretty early on with my business at least, I would spend a dollar to make a dollar because I knew that I would get repeat and referral and so I knew if I spent \$20,000 this month on advertising, that advertising is only going to generate me \$20,000 in business. It's going to cover itself but then I know in a month, or two months or three months that person is going to get in trouble again or their friend is going to get in trouble or whatever, and then you would see those repeats and referrals. And so you had to grow it. So when I bought that law firm, I literally bought a database of 25,000 past clients and then a phone number and a website because I knew that they had spent over the course of ten years probably a million dollars on advertising and all these people had their business cards and their phone number and just tell you know, hey, call this guy, he helped me out. They don't

really know who they're actually calling. They just know that's the phone number of the person that helped them out. So –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So after you know successfully building a firm what made you decide to sell it and become a judge?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Well, this is where Judge Johnson stumbled mildly, but for us there was a seat and a lot of people just weren't happy with the rulings and how it was going and they were looking for somebody to run and I said, I'll support, I'll you know, I'll contribute, I'll be the boots on the ground, whatever you need. And inevitably nobody would step up because they didn't think that they could win. And so I said, well, I'll step up. And I'll do it and then I basically had to spend a year proving that I was worth supporting. And that was a lot of hard work.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Campaigning is a lot of hard work.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Oh yes, I've been through a few. And so at that point in time I think I owed \$65,000 on my condo and I had about \$65,000 saved up and I was 31 I think and I was like I'm going to pay off my condo. And then I was like, do I put it in the campaign? It's my life's savings or do I pay it off and go debt free. And as I'm sitting here, five minutes ago telling you about being conservative, I did the opposite and I put it in the campaign. And I just – I went all in on it and then just worked really hard. And then at the end of the day it paid off. So – and that campaign in 2012 was, from all the research I've done, it was the most expensive county race in the history of Orange County. And then I was the first candidate to ever have a pack support me and so I think that my opponent that year spent I think it was about \$200, \$225 thousand dollars and these county races are usually in the 50-to-60-thousand-dollar range. And

then I spent I think \$67,000 of my own money and raised – I didn't raise much, maybe \$30,000 and then I think the pack spent like 150 or 200 thousand so it was a half a million-dollar county race.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's a lot, yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: It was crazy. And so it was just an awesome experience and when I campaigned, I mean, I did everything. I did everything that you could, I never stopped and I just told myself at 7:00 o'clock, when 7:00 o'clock hits, I'll have no regrets. However the numbers come out, the numbers come out, there won't be anything that I second guess. I mean, maybe I made a mistake in a strategy or something like that but it would never be for a lack of effort. And then you know I came out on top. So I was really – I won that. I just turned 33 I think, yeah, just turned 33.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Were you the first Barry University graduate to become a judge?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: To win any election, yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's pretty cool too.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, it was really neat and you know I think that when you looked at all the kids that graduated in my law school class, you wouldn't have thought that I would have been a judge or the first judge. You know as a lawyer I think seven years or something at that point so I was fairly young anyways. But yeah, the school was great and they've been really supportive and yeah, it was great. I was glad to be able to accomplish that for them and you know for me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you were a litigator before you became a judge.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I was in the courtroom every day.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. And as litigators we think we know what happens. We think we know what judges do until we actually put on the black robe. Did you find it to be different than what you anticipated?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Well, I mean, the first thing was the Chief Judge in all their infinite wisdom put me in civil and I had never done anything civil.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: We like to do that.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, so – and then you know, it's funny, I have these – I feel old now talking to my lawyers, but I tell them, I'm like you know the new judges, there's no training. There's no manual. You show up, you shadow and then you put that robe on and you start. And I remember Judge Freeman, I looked at her, I'm like what do I do? She said you're the judge, do whatever you want to do and I just sat there. I remember – I remember the first day I come in and I'm looking at my docket, you know before I'm going to start and I'm in my office and I've got a motion for summary judgment. It's a PIP case. And I didn't even really know what PIP is and so I hit print because I'm going to print out this motion for summary judgment and I'm going to read it. And then two minutes goes by and the printer is still going, (making sounds of a printer printing), and then like what is happening? And I look and it was 103 pages because it had all the attachments to it and everything. And so I quickly unplugged it and I was like oh my gosh, I'm never going to you know be able to read this. And so it was – it was – obviously it was a big leap of faith and then you go to baby judges' college in, is it February and March?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: January and March.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: January and March. You're only on the bench a couple of weeks, I think.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. It might seem like forever.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So yeah, that was – that was interesting. And then – so I spent two years in civil.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How did you like civil never having done a civil practice?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: You know, it's – it's a lot of paperwork and when I had two law partners, we all had our strengths and weaknesses and it was great because we complimented each other. I don't want to push paper. I don't want – I like to do research. I don't like to write. And I love to be in the courtroom you know and so I tried all the cases that we tried that year. I was arguing the bulk of the motions, motions to suppress. I think I tried three cases – three or four cases that year. And so I – there's a lot of writing in civil.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: You know the orders are long. And at the time you would tell them to submit an order on a thumb drive – I don't even know if we have thumb drives now. But by the end of it I had a pretty good grasp and I think one of the neatest things that I did in civil is we had a number of PIP cases with the same plaintiff and law firm and the same defendant and law firm. And they were litigating the same issue. And so I said you give me a list of every case that you have and it was 900 and something cases --

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: -- between the four, there was four of us in county civil and so I organized a hearing with all four judges and I said you guys are going to come in, you pick any one of these cases, whichever one from each division and we're going to sit there as a panel and you're going to come and we're going to set it for two days, and you tell me everything you want, and you tell me everything you want and then we're going to issue an order. Each judge we're going to do our own order and we knocked out almost a thousand cases in two days.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And you know I think they all of course went up on appeal and everything else but we knocked those right off the docket. I think it was like 8 or 10 percent of our caseload we knocked out in two days.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And that became sort of a model for handling other massive things –

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Oh yeah. So the same thing kind of happened with glass cases. You would find the same, and so we did that. So then – I mean, but those were the biggest ones. Those two clients and those two firms, they were the biggest group. But we could find chunks of a couple hundred cases here, a chunk of a couple hundred cases there and just do that and we really got the numbers whittled down pretty good and that was a lot of fun. That was neat you know figuring those things out and I don't know – quite honestly, I don't know if the attorneys appreciated it because they can't bill on every case but that's not my problem.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. So you did county civil for two years.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Then you went to county criminal.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Um-hum. Yeah, I went to county criminal, division 85. I took over Barlow's division. And Doug Walker was my first PD in that division.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. Now, Judge Walker.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Who is now a county judge.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. And so Doug was my first PD in that division. And so I actually – I had a friendship with him and then when I was up for reelection and I – and that was contested – I had some firms approach me about hiring me and Doug was looking for a job. He was leaving the PDs office and I said, hey, this is a really good opportunity and I said you guys should hire him. And so they ended up, this firm hired him and I think Doug made more money in three years at that firm than I have in my 18-year career. So he owes me lunch or something. But yeah, criminal was good. I was at home in criminal and that two years went by pretty quick. It was pretty fun.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you've had the opportunity I think to do everything that we have to offer in county court.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I have done more than what you have to offer because I also did two years out at the jail –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And that's no longer an assignment. We just rotate.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.



JUDGE MCGINNIS: But – yeah, I like to move every two years. I don't want to stay in a division and – so I did, right, two years in civil, two years in criminal and then I went out to the jail for two years and I loved the jail. I still love going out there. In fact, I like to – I look for these new judges that get appointed and they come from these high-end law firms and they're scared to death to go to the jail, right, and I don't like to do paperwork and so I will swap my warrants and my emergency phone to spend a couple hours at the jail and they love to do that. And I'm like this is the deal that I want to make and so I've been able to find someone every year to make that swap with me. I'll go sit out at the jail for two or three hours on Saturday and two or three hours on Sunday and not have that phone for seven days straight. Oh, and the warrants now, it's like –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, almost 400.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Almost 400 a week.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: It's – I mean, you open it up and it's just – you want to cry sometimes. And then you get these phone ones and they're you know, so I love the jail. I love all the people out at the jail. I'm excited to go out there. I'm going to be out there the week after Thanksgiving and I had a great time out there.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you've also done the specialized division which is domestic violence.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Right. Yeah, so I came back and did criminal and now I'm in DV and then I was kicking going back to civil next year or not. It just kind of worked out that Judge Allen and I are swapping divisions and I'm going back to criminal in January.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, back to home.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Back to division 85 where I started in 2015.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's pretty cool.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, hopefully none of the cases are still around from when I was there in 2015 but you never know.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what do you do when you're not being a judge? What are your hobbies and your passions outside of work?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: So I still play soccer. Right now I'm down to one day a week, a lot of times it's two days a week and I'm up with the same team and it's a real good league out in Winter Park. And it's funny cause we're – it's co-ed. And so the average age of the guys on our team is probably mid – probably late 40s. And the girls are all younger. They're in their 20s usually cause then what happens is they get married and then they get pregnant and then they don't come back so we're always – so it's harder and harder to find girls in their early 20s that want to play soccer with us. But we get all these new teams that will come out and the guys are like, they're ripped and they got 7 percent body fat and then they got their fraternity t-shirts on and you know they're like 22, 23 but we've been playing the game for so long that you don't have to be fit if you know how to play the game. It's small fields and the rules are a little different so we love seeing you know the young faces come out and then just the look of disappointment on their faces when they lose to like we're old enough to be their father at this point and they're sweating and we're not because we're letting the ball do the work. So that's two days a week. And then I have a – my daughter turns 10 this week and so she plays competitive soccer, trial soccer and so –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's also a full-time job as a parent.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. Oh that's practice three days a week and then games sometimes one, sometimes two and then I live on a lake and so we've got a nice white board surf boat and we go surfing when the weather is nice. We were out on it for about six or seven hours this past weekend. So a lot of it is outside stuff, outdoor stuff.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Spending time outdoors and spending time with your family.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah. We do a daddy daughter camping group that's a lot of fun. That starts up in January. They do it when the weather is cooler. Nobody wants to go camping in you know June.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: No, with the bugs and the heat and the humidity.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, you don't want it, you don't want it. So yeah, most everything is outdoors, outside stuff. You know I hate to be inside.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, you've been a judge for over ten years and there's been a pretty big turnover on the county bench in the time that you've been here. So do you have any advice for your younger colleagues?

JUDGE MCGINNIS: You know, so when we did the draft for the –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Emergency duty.

JUJDGE MCGINNIS: -- emergency duty.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I think I was number 21 out of 65 which blew my mind. But when I first started, Alan Apte, he came to my office. A lot of – it was great, a lot of older judges came to me and talked to me. And Alan Apte, he came to my office. I knew Alan, I had tried a few cases in front of him. My wife had – was a PD assigned to him at one point and he came in and he says, do not get involved in office politics for one year. And that's kind of a piece of advice I give the new ones. I say listen, you know, a lot of them are appointed, hey, you've been politically active to get to where you're at and everything. Just show up at the meetings. You don't know what's going on. You don't know the back story. You don't know why this issue has taken two years to get to this point. Just hang tight for a year and just listen. Don't get involved. And I think very few have taken my advice but you know it is what it is.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, that is good advice.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I don't get offended. Yeah, I still try and stay out of politics.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, it has been wonderful getting to know something about you. I really appreciate you joining me here today.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Oh, my pleasure. I know we had – was it a doggie issue you had last time?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes. Yeah.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: I know we had to reschedule this.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Had to reschedule it because I had to take the dog to the emergency vet. Never something you want to have to do.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: No. I have a girl friend right now with an 18-year-old Chihuahua and so sometimes she'll go out of town and I got to watch this dog and I look at him, like you got to make it three days buddy. You got to make it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You can't croak on my watch.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: You can't do it. And she just went on a trip and she changed his medication like the day before. I'm like you can't change – he's 127 years old right now. His birthday was two months ago. He had like 30 people came to his birthday party – his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Holy cow.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: And I said, you can't do that. You can't change his medication right before you know and he was fine. It was good. So he's a happy dog and so – but you know it is what it is.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It is. Well, thank you and like I said it was great getting to know something about you.

JUDGE MCGINNIS: Yeah, well, thanks for having me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You are welcome.

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.