

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

JUDICIAL SPOTLIGHT

FEATURING HONORABLE ANDREW L. CAMERON

EPISODE 166

NOVEMBER 30, 2022

HOSTED BY: CHIEF JUDGE 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. I’m here today with Judge Andrew Cameron, one of our Orange County Judges in the Ninth Circuit. Before joining us, Judge Cameron worked as an Assistant State Attorney for the 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit until 1993 when he made the jump over to owning his own practice. He stayed there for nearly 20 years before he decided to take his career in a different direction, becoming a county judge. I’m thrilled to have you in the studio today, Judge Cameron. Thanks for joining me.

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, I’m thrilled to be here. Thanks.

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

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, I grew up in Detroit, Michigan.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Ergo the Michigan State.

JUDGE CAMERON: Michigan State everything.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Everything, yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: And then I attended Michigan State University. But I grew up in Michigan, in Detroit. My mother was a schoolteacher and a school librarian and my father was

an electrician. And I went to public schools and I went to Michigan State University as we've just learned where I majored in political philosophy.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. So growing up in Detroit, did you like cars? I think of Detroit and I think of cars.

JUDGE CAMERON: Yeah. It is the motor city.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It is the motor city.

JUDGE CAMERON: It is. It is. I'm kind of a car guy. I like cars. Really, everything in Detroit is very car-centric. When I looked for work, after I graduated law school, I looked to go back home and all the law firms and all the industry is car-related. But this is going back years. I think maybe it's a little more technical – technological now.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you grew up in Michigan. Obviously, very cold.

JUDGE CAMERON: It is very cold.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you went to college – you went to undergraduate in Michigan at Michigan State?

JUDGE CAMERON: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And why did you decide to go to law school? Not that you can do a lot with your undergraduate degree other than going to law school, but why did you decide to go to law school?

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, so I major – so my major at Michigan State University as I said was political philosophy. I was enrolled in a small residential college at Michigan State University called James Madison College. And James Madison College had five cores,

International Relations, Urban Studies, and one of them was political philosophy and so what attracted me to Michigan State was this college. It's a residential college where the classrooms and dorms are in the same building. And it's small classes, professors, and I enjoyed that course of study but I realized that it really didn't qualify me to do anything. There really isn't a market for standup political philosophers so ...

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, you either teach or you do something else but all of it requires more schoolwork than an undergraduate degree.

JUDGE CAMERON: Exactly. And it's interesting, I meet young lawyers and law students and they all say, well, from the time I was in the second grade, I always wanted to be a lawyer. And I didn't have that drive. I think I developed that sometime around my sophomore year in college.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And what – what helped you develop that drive?  
Was it a person or a course of study?

JUDGE CAMERON: What a great – what a great question. It's – I studied, with philosophy, I studied a lot of government. I actually was going to pursue a career in government. And what I learned was that the policymakers and the people that make a difference in government are lawyers. And this isn't quite so far removed from the Watergate Era and when I was a kid, I was fascinated by Watergate. And I watched all the hearings and I saw the lawyers. And the lawyers all seemed to do something very important. So I thought, I think – I think I'd like to be a lawyer. I think law would be an interesting course of study.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So if you developed that about your sophomore year in college, did you start kind of branching out and trying to find out more about being a lawyer and where you wanted to go to law school, and meeting lawyers?

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, I didn't know many lawyers. I grew up kind of working class and there weren't lawyers in my family. I didn't know any lawyers, so while I was in college, to supplement my studies, I worked for lawyers. I worked for a lobbyist. I worked for a lobbying group called Common Cause. I interned with a state legislator, which is where the law is made and so that really I think, added to my interest, if not passion, for the law.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And where did you go to law school?

JUDGE CAMERON: I went to law school at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Another cold place.

JUDGE CAMERON: It's – it's getting warmer though because it's going south. And it's in southern Indiana so southern Indiana actually considers itself to be northern Kentucky oftentimes except in basketball season. And it's much warmer there. It doesn't snow as much as it does in Michigan.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did you enjoy your course of study in Indiana at law school?

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, the further away and I think most lawyers you talk to feel this way, the further away you get from law school, the more you enjoyed it. I don't think I enjoyed it at the time.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I would agree with that.

JUDGE CAMERON: Southern Indiana, if you've never been, is a beautiful place. It's just – it's scenic and it's hilly.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Kentucky is a beautiful place.

JUDGE CAMERON: It is. It's very beautiful. So I enjoyed the campus. I enjoyed the university. It's a great university. I think by probably my second year I was starting to enjoy law school. But I really enjoyed going to school there and part of the reason I picked Indiana University is Indiana had a good experience with the James Madison students, the college that I went to and so they said send us all your students. We're very interested in them.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, that's pretty cool.

JUDGE CAMERON: Yeah, so that helped me a lot.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I bet it did. So after you graduated from law school, what did you do? What was your first job?

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, my first job was really not suited to me because again, not knowing any lawyers and not having a mentor, I interviewed with a lot of law firms at law school because I had an interesting resume. But I didn't get a lot of job offers so I ended up going to a firm that was not – that I was not well suited for in Detroit right downtown. It was a firm, at that time was considered a very large firm, had over 100 lawyers in one building. And I went there to do what I thought would be litigation. I thought I would be going into the courtroom and litigating. And they ended up putting me in appeals. And that's not really my

strength. I'm not really an appellate mind. I'm more – I'm more of a people person than a book person.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. So how long did you stay there?

JUDGE CAMERON: I stayed there one year and two weeks because I put in my year and I said I got to give these guys two weeks' notice. And I don't know how I would have lasted two years. It was – it was not the right place for me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And where did you go after that?

JUDGE CAMERON: That's what brought me to Florida. I was looking around and as is usually the case when one is looking for a job, the economy wasn't great in Michigan. The auto industry was taking a dip and everything was related to the auto industry, except the job that I had. Having just told you that everything in Detroit is motor vehicle centric, I actually worked for a firm that represented hospitals. So part of my job working for that firm and part of the reason it wasn't a good fit is my job was to go to court and kick people out of the hospital when their insurance ran out. So that was – that was really not a fun job. So – but I had a connection to a law firm doing plaintiff's personal injury work in Central Florida. So it was October, November in Detroit, which you can imagine is beautiful, and it was October, November in Florida –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Which is always beautiful.

JUDGE CAMERON: Which is always beautiful and so I came down, and said, I think I could get used to this lifestyle.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what was your first job when you got to Florida? Did you do PI, or did you do something else?

JUDGE CAMERON: I did personal injury exclusively. And so I hadn't yet passed the Florida bar. I just passed the Michigan bar a year and a half before. So I did a lot of – I wasn't – I couldn't go to court so I did all the litigation prep.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. And drafting.

JUDGE CAMERON: And drafting. Demand letters and so once I passed the Florida bar, then they gave me a caseload of about 350 to 400 personal injury files so it was a lot.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, that is a lot. Sort of learning on your feet as it were.

JUDGE CAMERON: It was – it was because the only experience I had with personal injury was the other side because the firm that I worked for in Michigan did insurance defense, which was helpful. I got to know what the other – I had an idea what the other side was thinking.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And doing appeals you get to read what the other side had done.

JUDGE CAMERON: Exactly.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What they had done well and what they had done poorly.

JUDGE CAMERON: Correct. Correct.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how long did you do PI work.



JUDGE CAMERON: I was there about two years. That also was not a good fit for me. But I was smart enough to realize that my first job wouldn't be my last job and so I left that firm and then went to work for the State Attorney's Office.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And that's the one in Seminole County.

JUDGE CAMERON: Correct. In Sanford. And that was, other than the job I currently hold, the best job I ever had because they threw me into a courtroom with no courtroom experience. I had not been outside of an office and they said, here's some files –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Here, go.

JUDGE CAMERON: Prosecute these people.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, that was my same experience here in Orange at the State Attorney's Office.

JUDGE CAMERON: Did you have an interest in criminal law when you went to the State Attorney's Office?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: No, not really. Did you?

JUDGE CAMERON: No.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I assumed I would be a civil litigator.

JUDGE CAMERON: I did as well. I really thought I would be. It wasn't something I was interested in in law school. I wasn't passionate about it. But –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: But it was a great job.

JUDGE CAMERON: What a great – best job.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: All the cases you can eat. They just give you all that you can possibly do.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And a lot of fun people to work with and to bounce ideas off of and with and ...

JUDGE CAMERON: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you can learn, especially when you're a new lawyer, and you have cases that are not as serious as you will have later in your prosecutorial career so you can learn without doing too much injustice in the world.

JUDGE CAMERON: Right. And then also everyone you're working with is about your same age and your same experience level so there's a lot of forgiveness there. You're not getting taken advantage of or taking advantage of anyone because everyone is sort of reading from the same sheet of music, from the same playbook.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: So...

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Absolutely.

JUDGE CAMERON: Yeah. And since I'd had two prior law jobs, I was a little bit, I think a little more mature even handling small cases in county court so I think I recognized early that my job as a prosecutor was not to win all the time but to do justice.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes. So I assume that you did not stay in county court for very long since you had some experience.

JUDGE CAMERON: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you're very good in the courtroom. So did you – you moved up to felony, I would assume.

JUDGE CAMERON: Correct. I actually went from misdemeanor to juvenile, which was a lot of, no juries but a lot of court experience and a lot of judge time so I really got a lot from prosecuting juveniles. And some dependency work in there. And then I went to felony and then in felony, you know I tried just about every case there was – type of case there was to try. I was in the extradition bureau for a brief moment. So I got to see how extraditions work. I got to work with some really experienced lawyers, so I think I got some seasoning on my trial practice.

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

JUDGE CAMERON: I was there almost four years, which was just about the right time. I was looking around at supervisory positions, being a division chief. I really wanted to be a division chief with a misdemeanor division so I could work with brand new lawyers and share with them what I had learned. But I was looking around and all the lawyers that were in a supervisory capacity had all been out to a law practice and come back and they were all, from my perspective, then old. They were probably younger than I am now, but they weren't going anywhere so there was no place for me to rise there.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. So is that when you decided to leave and start your own practice?

JUDGE CAMERON: I did. I did. I looked at other job opportunities and there was nothing there that interested me. And I thought well, I've got this experience from having done insurance defense, and doing plaintiff's personal injury and doing criminal defense. So I just

figured I'd open up my own law practice and do what we refer to as threshold law, anything that came over the threshold.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes, having done that I know it's exciting and scary all at one time.

JUDGE CAMERON: It's equally terrifying and exciting.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. Yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: When you opened your practice, did you take some cases that in hindsight you realized you should never have taken?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, absolutely, don't we all.

JUDGE CAMERON: Yeah, I did. I found myself in federal court defending a federal civil rights case my first six months of practice.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE CAMERON: And I had never been in federal court – well, I had been in federal court when I was in Michigan and I was – I ended up in trial, which I thought would never happen. I thought well, I'll file a motion to dismiss. I'll get my client out of this case and move on to the next thing. And then I found myself in trial with two co-defendants and I was the only lawyer there representing themselves. So that was – and it was in front of Judge Fawsett.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE CAMERON: So that was quite a learning experience.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I bet that was a learning experience. So what kinds of law did you end up sort of honing in on as your practice matured?

JUDGE CAMERON: I think I always considered myself a criminal defense lawyer. I think that's where my passion ended up.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I think that's where we met.

JUDGE CAMERON: I think so. I think so. Maybe when you were prosecuting.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, absolutely.

JUDGE CAMERON: So I really always considered myself a criminal defense lawyer that did other things. I, for a while rented space from a very experienced I think board certified family lawyer who couldn't handle all the work that she had so I took her leavings, her crumbs, whatever she couldn't – people that couldn't afford her or that she was too busy handle. So I picked up quite a family and marital practice, which I didn't really enjoy but I think I was good at. You did some family law, didn't you?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I did, yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: You didn't enjoy it, did you?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I did not.

JUDGE CAMERON: No, it is not enjoyable. But I think you probably would find that as an experienced criminal lawyer, criminal lawyer isn't the right word. It makes you sound like a criminal. As a prosecutor or a criminal defense lawyer, knowing the courtroom makes you – gives you an advantage over family lawyers who don't go to court.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Absolutely.

JUDGE CAMERON: And don't know the rules of evidence.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Absolutely. I would agree with that. So ...

JUDGE CAMERON: I did some personal injury and I did some general civil litigation, some cases like that federal case I had no business doing but some juvenile delinquency and dependency. Really just everything other than tax, guardianship and probate and real estate. I didn't do any of that. The world is probably a better place for that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how long did you have your own practice?

JUDGE CAMERON: I had my own practice for about 18 or 19 years.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. And what made you think that maybe I want to be a judge?

JUDGE CAMERON: You know that's a great question. It takes me back to something you asked me earlier which is I meet law students and college students and young lawyers, and almost very consistently I hear that they've wanted to be a judge since they were a child. And I don't understand that at all.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: No. That was not my experience either.

JUDGE CAMERON: No. So I think that having practiced, at that point I was in practice for about 25 or 26 years. I don't know about you but when I first started in court, I was very intimidated by judges and I always thought that judges had a magical ability to know the answer. And if I lost, it was because I was supposed to lose and if I won, it was because my client had a greater right to win, you know. And then you practice long enough and you start realizing that judges are just people and they make mistakes and there are really, really good judges that you

learn from. And really, really terrible judges that you learn from. And I thought, you know what, I think I can do that better.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: I can do that as well. It's not beyond my ability.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you decided to run a campaign.

JUDGE CAMERON: I did. I actually – I was waiting; I thought the magical age to be a judge was 50.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, yeah, little did we know.

JUDGE CAMERON: We didn't know. At 50 – at 50 I was already an old judge. I didn't realize that but there really wasn't an avenue for me through the appointment process. I wasn't going to be appointed so I decided I would run.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you decided to run for county court.

JUDGE CAMERON: Correct. And that's the only – that's all I was interested in because I – the county court is – there is a perception, I think, from some people in the public, from some judges, from many lawyers that there's a distinction between being a circuit judge and a county judge. That somehow being a county judge is like practice to become a circuit judge. And they talk about, do you want to be promoted to be a circuit judge. Many of us in county court don't see it that way at all. We really do quite a different thing.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You do. It's a different – it's a different practice as it were.

JUDGE CAMERON: It is. It very much is. It always seems to me maybe going back to my background in government, it's almost like a bicameral situation of legislature where there's

a reason you have a house of representatives and you have the senate. They're both members of congress. But they do different things.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. And just because you do civil in circuit doesn't mean you know anything about doing civil in county court.

JUDGE CAMERON: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I know on a rare occasion I might have had something to do with a PIP and I was like, oh, I got to ask one of my county court colleagues what in the world this thing is that I don't have to deal with ever.

JUDGE CAMERON: Exactly. Exactly. But no, I wanted to be a county judge because I like people and I like problem solving and there's plenty of that in county court.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: A lot of people and a lot of problems to solve.

JUDGE CAMERON: And their problems tend to be on – in the scheme of things smaller problems relative to larger problems. But they tend to be bigger problems for the people that are facing them. By that I mean if you're in a dispute over – I had a hearing this afternoon over \$135.00, which too many people is not a lot of money but to this litigant, it was the world. And he took it very seriously. And I took it very seriously because I understood it was important to him. So I like the volume. I like the pace. I like the individuals. You don't get many corporations in county civil. In county criminal, you get people that – maybe good people that had a bad day.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Had a bad day, yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: As opposed to people that that's their lifestyle.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. So how did you find the campaign?



JUDGE CAMERON: A lot like law school. At the time it was horrible. And I hated it and it was – it was exhausting. I ended up losing about 12 pounds just from – because it was during the summer and I was knocking on doors and it was – it was exhausting. But like law school, the farther away I get from it, the more – more of a positive experience it was. I met a lot of really great people. I got to talk to a lot of people. And it reaffirmed for me why I wanted the job because these would be the people that I'd be meeting, people that don't know what judges do or what their power is, or what their authority is, or what they can do to help. And I found it interesting that running a campaign, and running for judge is difficult because the rules require that you can't tell people what you would do if you become a judge so it's kind of hard to get somebody's vote when you want to tell them that they should vote for you but you can't tell them why.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. So campaigns are exhausting for everyone. But you're clearly an extrovert so I think it would have been energizing in some way to just meet all of those people.

JUDGE CAMERON: It was very energizing. I'm not sure that I started as an extrovert. I think that I pretty much am now but I think through developing my legal career, and I –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Trial practice does it.

JUDGE CAMERON: It does. And I had an interest in trial practice so maybe that's my inner self-telling me that that's what I should be doing. But I did find campaigning very energizing. I found knocking on doors a little terrifying because you don't know what's going to be on the side of the door. But it's interesting because you don't know what's going to be on the other side of the door and so I met a lot of interesting people.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, you've been a judge now for almost ten years. Isn't that hard to believe.

JUDGE CAMERON: It is almost impossible to believe.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Because time just goes so quickly.

JUDGE CAMERON: It goes very quickly. I remember the first year very clearly and the second year kind of, and then there's a blur and now it's been almost ten.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You probably remember the first day.

JUDGE CAMERON: I do.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What is the most memorable thing about the first day?

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, there's a couple things about the – let's go first week.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay.

JUDGE CAMERON: The first day, so I hadn't worked in the government for quite a while and you've got to go through the process and have your photo taken, get your ID and this is your desk, and this is your office. And this is your computer. And so I had a lot of supportive people showing me where everything was and what I remember is, this is your office and this is your computer and you know select a password. And then I turn the thing on and it had all these different things that I wasn't used to. I was inside now instead of the outside looking in. And I remember turning around to ask the person that was there to help me, and they were gone. And I was quite literally by myself looking at my computer, well, what do I do now. And then that first week, I remember that I had hearings because I started in county civil which is where I returned after a stint in criminal. And so they wanted to know if I wanted to see the files because that's a

lawyer's work is, everything is in a file. So they wheeled in all the files for the next day's hearing and I said so is this for the week and they go, no, this is just for the morning. And the files, now everything is electronic –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE CAMERON: And so I go through all these files and start at the back and work my way forward and try to acquaint myself with what was going on and then –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, judges don't get asked that question anymore.

JUDGE CAMERON: No, no. And then of course the hearings, half of them would cancel.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE CAMERON: So I learned how to do that. And then the last thing I remember that's most memorable about my first week is I had a case where the county wanted me to enter an order to put a dog to death.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Those are hard.

JUDGE CAMERON: It was very hard and this dog was a bad dog. I'm a dog owner. I love dogs but this dog had severely injured a child and bit her in the face. And it became clear to me as the process – as the hearing was unfolding because I had never done this before. I didn't know what my role was – I knew what my role was but I wanted to let everything play out, everybody has a right to be heard. And it became really clear to me really quickly that everyone was really in agreement that I had to put the dog – I didn't have to physically personally put the dog to death, but it would be my job to enter an order –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You signed its death warrant.

JUDGE CAMERON: I did. Make me feel even worse about it. But everybody wanted – everybody knew that had to happen but I was clearly the one that had to do it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: Even the dog owner who implored me not to put the dog down understood that the dog was a danger because it was her daughter that had been attacked.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE CAMERON: And then I thought that was a Wednesday but I've not heard of a single county court judge in the last ten years who's had to do that, so apparently I was the lucky one.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow, well, I'm surprised you came back for your second week, except that you worked for it for so long and so hard.

JUDGE CAMERON: I did. I did. You know, that's a good first week I think.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So being a lawyer is different than being a judge. What differences have you seen between your two roles?

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, when I became a judge, if I can think back all those many years, my concern was – because I had done plaintiff's work and I had done defendant's work, and I had done prosecutor's work and I had done defense work. I had done a lot of different things. I had been on both sides of divorces. And I was an advocate. And so I knew what it was to take on your client's burden or claim or –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Cause.

JUDGE CAMERON: Cause, thank you. And advocate. I was a little concerned as a judge that I would pick sides, that I would – that I wouldn't be fair. And what I found was interesting. I think all judges find this, that little part of your brain kind of switches off and the only goal is just to make sure that you don't make a mistake. That you don't make reversible error so that then the case has to be appealed and you have to do it all over again. So I found it different from being a lawyer. I wasn't an advocate any longer. I would watch lawyers that appeared in front of me and I was sometimes pleasantly surprised at how good the advocacy was, and often times so disappointed that how poorly prepared and just how the level of lawyering wasn't great. But I had an opportunity to maybe help some of those lawyers out, particularly when I went to the criminal bench and I had young prosecutors and public defenders.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What do you enjoy most about your role as a county judge? Is it helping young lawyers?

JUDGE CAMERON: I think –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Or helping people.

JUDGE CAMERON: I think helping people. And helping lawyers and getting to the bottom of what the issue is. A lot of times, the lawyers get wrapped up in advocacy and they don't really understand or they – or they can't seek compromise. Sometimes the personality of some lawyers is to win all the time. It's not always about winning. Sometimes it's finding justice. I don't like – that's kind of a loaded term, justice. But – so compromise. I think there's a lot of room – I think more as a county judge than a circuit judge and more I think in the civil arena than the criminal arena to find a compromise where both sides are equally unhappy or happy. I find it very satisfying at the end of hearings, even when I evict somebody or rule against

someone or make someone pay money to someone else, they thank me. In criminal court, I'll put people in jail and before I put them in jail, they'll thank me. Not because I put them in jail or because I evicted them from their home or because I cost them money, but at least they felt heard.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, you listened.

JUDGE CAMERON: Correct. And I – so we talked about the difference of being a lawyer and being a judge and all judges go to judges' school. And the way timing works is you actually are a judge before you go to judges' school so some of the lessons you need to learn about being a judge, you haven't learned yet. Not too reversible, irreversible. But – and you may have seen the same thing when you were in judges school, but they showed us a video – tell me if you remember this. They do this video and it's sort of a play. And they put on – they have a reporter. A young lady – I still remember, she was wearing khakis and she has a ponytail and she's got a clipboard. And she's meeting with the judge. She goes to talk to the judge first. I'm here, I'm reporting on how the court proceedings went. You just had a hearing and it only lasted about ten minutes. How do you think it went? And the judge was, you know, it was very good. Justice was done. We handled it efficiently. One side didn't show up. I entered a judgment for the plaintiff that did show up. I gave her everything she asked. I think that's a good day. And then they have the same reporter go out into the hall talking to this woman who clearly is the plaintiff that the judge was just talking about. And she's got a big pile of papers and photos and documents, and she's just – she's just beside herself. She's almost hysterically upset and the lady's like, can I talk to you. What happened? Yeah, I was just in court and how did it go. It went terrible. The judge wouldn't listen to a word I said. I carried all this stuff in there and he wouldn't look at any of the documents I brought. He wouldn't look at any photographs and he

wouldn't let me talk. And well, how did it go? Well, I don't know. I don't know what happened. He just – that was so profound that little skit that they put on because it was really important that judges permit people to be heard. It's all about being heard. So even if you lose and you're heard, that's – I think that's your job. Sometimes when the other side doesn't show up, I let them introduce their exhibits and photographs and take a look at them and mark them into evidence because that's what they expect and they want to make certain that they've been heard and that they've been seen. So – I can't even remember what that question was. I don't think I answered it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you've been a judge for quite a while. And you sort of – the quantity of work that we see has exploded over the last ten or fifteen years. Have you seen a change in county court over the volume of work that you're expected to get through while still making sure people feel that they've been heard?

JUDGE CAMERON: Oh, absolutely. I'm so surprised at how much – how much more work there is. And I'm – I was just thinking today, is there more work or am I just more tired from doing the work or was I more energetic because my first three years were in civil and then my most recent years have been in civil. So just comparing year one from civil to year ten in civil, it's just – the amount of work is just – has ballooned. What's interesting is when I started, we had four county court civil judges. Just four. And each judge has a judicial assistant and that was it. And we had clerks.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE CAMERON: Now we have eight, going on nine judges. We have one general magistrate. We've got some caseworkers and so returning to civil, I thought well, this is going to be less work. But it seems to me that it's more work. There's more people doing more work.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, stirring up the old files, stirs up the old files.

JUDGE CAMERON: That's true. Well, part of that is good because I think COVID – what COVID did is it put everything on a pause and caused us to look around, us being you and the people that run this place. And see that there's things that need to get done that have not – things that needed to be addressed and closed and finished, and so...

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I don't think it's your imagination that there's more work. I was in circuit civil about the same time that you were in county civil your first time. And I went back probably a year, year and a half ago and looked at – it won't surprise you that I kept statistics from then.

JUDGE CAMERON: I'm shocked.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I know you're shocked. So I went back and looked to see what the typical caseload was for circuit civil then as opposed to what it was you know eight years later I think at that point. And it had nearly doubled what was coming in every month and the caseloads themselves. And I know county civil probably experienced more growth than that, especially with the change in jurisdictional limits. And then there's a new change in jurisdictional limits coming very soon.

JUDGE CAMERON: Right. So we're getting some of the circuit work because I was just going to ask you, has circuit civil stayed about the same – so it's doubled from your first year in



circuit civil, so when you went back and looked at it and it had doubled, does it appear as though it's on the way up, it's plateauing? It's going down.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's still trending upward but not as quickly as county court.

JUDGE CAMERON: That may be why they gave us new judges.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, and you know, who knows, it may start plateauing after the new law take effect. We'll see.

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, there's no shortage of work.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: There is no shortage of work. And I would – a lot of what – I don't know if you've noticed, but there is so much work that what probably should take you 20 minutes to do, you're forced to do within about five because you just don't have the extra time to devote to that one case because you have a zillion more following it.

JUDGE CAMERON: It is – it is a little loopy in the chocolate factorish, if that reference makes any sense to some people. But – yeah, and I think the advent of virtual court is both helpful and harmful. It's helpful, I can do more more quickly. Again, in civil since I can do more virtually and electronically, I get orders submitted to me electronically so I can do it all on the computer. I can sign electronically. I can review electronically –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, 24/7 365.

JUDGE CAMERON: We can. And that's part of the problem.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That is part of the problem. So what advice would you have for some of our new colleagues that are joining us very shortly, new judges on the bench?

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, I think a lot of the things that we were talking about that I realized, I don't know – so I have an older person's view of younger people. Is that a thing? When I was a young lawyer, I don't think I had the confidence that the young lawyers have now, the self-confidence. It could be –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Whether justified or not justified self-confidence, yes.

JUDGE CAMERON: Correct. They appear to be so confident for no apparent reason. Particularly if you rule against a young lawyer, and I try to be as clear as I can and thorough as to why I'm ruling the way I am, and some lawyers appear to have never been told no or that they are capable of losing or they're not the best. So generally speaking, and I'm not thinking of our particular colleagues, but we were talking a moment ago about how 50 is not the magical age to be a judge. It's now 30 or 35. Many of those judges that are now judges may not have had the numbers of years of experience that someone in my position had. I did a lot of things before I became a judge.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That life experience does help.

JUDGE CAMERON: It helps a lot and I draw upon that. I surprise myself by how much of my life experience I draw on on a daily basis when resolving disputes between people. And so – and also, all those years of practicing law and knowing what I wanted the judge to do if I were them. My concern is that younger judges may not have had that amount of experience. They may have only had one job. Not that having many jobs is the solution. I had many jobs because that's just what I did, but maybe – maybe younger judges don't know what they don't know. They think they know everything. They're going to change how everything is done because they clearly know more than these old – older judges have been. So I think just realizing that their job

is really important and that if they're elected, the people that elected them probably don't know what their job is or why it's important that they're doing what they're doing. If they were appointed, maybe they feel special, that they were picked because they had superior ability. So I think humility is important. I think experience is important. I think worldview is important but I think mostly just realizing that what we do is really important work. And it may have absolutely nothing to do with us.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE CAMERON: You know, sometimes – sometimes I will – I will encounter a judge who's been reversed on appeal and they're unhappy about that because they somehow feel as though that's an attack on them. And I've never looked at that that way.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's not personal.

JUDGE CAMERON: It's not. It's not and there's an appellate judge that we both know very well who's very funny and very clever and he once told me that – I was talking to him about reversing – reversing lower court judges or him being reversed. And he said, that's why they call it an opinion. If I'm wrong, it's just my opinion. You'll tell me I'm wrong. And what's interesting is I was reversed on two appeals in the same week and they don't tell you when you've been appealed. You just get the mandate and it says you were either upheld or reversed. And they happen to come in in the same week. And I looked at them and I read one. The short version is the one I was affirmed I think I was wrong when I read the briefs. And the one that I was reversed on I still think I was right. But it doesn't matter what I think.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So we've talked a lot about your legal career and your judicial career. Do you have hobbies outside of the law?

JUDGE CAMERON: I do. I do. Mostly I'm trying to stay young so I'm doing things to stay in shape. I run. I bike. I snow ski.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE CAMERON: I hike. I do a lot of – I like to travel. And I like to eat out. I like to dine.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, all of those will keep you young except maybe the last one.

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, I exercise a lot so I eat –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So that you can eat a lot.

JUDGE CAMERON: -- a lot. So we had a great trip the last – three out of the last five years, we went on a bike trip. I have a group of friends that are also very much into exercise and fitness. And they skew a little bit older so there's nothing that hurts your feelings more than working out with somebody in their twenties because that just hurts your feelings.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE CAMERON: So these folks are all 40 to 70. And so we've been on three bike trips out west. So it's a fully supported bike ride and you ride 30 to 40 miles a day for four or five days in a row.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That sounds fun in some ways. You certainly would have to work your way up to it.

JUDGE CAMERON: You do. You have to train for it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I bet there are actually hills which we don't have a lot of here.

JUDGE CAMERON: There are hills. This summer we did the Cascades in Oregon and Washington State and that was –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I bet that was hard.

JUDGE CAMERON: That was hard. It was very hard but it was – it was – it's so exhilarating and so exciting and so much fun.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's hard to train here, I would think for that sort of thing. I mean, if you are hiking or going to Machu Picchu, you can at least climb up and down the steps in the courthouse repeatedly to work your way up to it. A bike, that would be a little harder to do.

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, Clermont is very hilly and so we usually train – we ride to Winter Garden and ride and then afterward, drink and eat. So it's really – it's like the best of all worlds.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, thank you so much for joining me here today. It's been fun finding out a little bit more about you.

JUDGE CAMERON: Well, thank you, Lisa. I appreciate the opportunity. This has been a delight.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Thank you.

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)