

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

JUDICIAL SPOTLIGHT:

JUDGE PATRICIA STROWBRIDGE

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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 Patricia Strowbridge, one of our circuit judges in the Ninth Circuit. Judge Strowbridge got her start in the legal field, working in private practice at Adoption, Surrogacy and Family Law Firm, PA. With family law being so close her heart, she went on to found, A Chosen Child, Inc., a nonprofit child placing agency where she served as both executive director and legal services director. Then in 2015, she got the call from the Governor to join the Ninth Circuit bench. I’m thrilled to have you in the studio today, Judge Strowbridge. Thanks for joining me.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Happy to be here.

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

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So my dad worked for General Motors, Oldsmobile Division, and part of his job involved him being transferred about every two years so I grew up in 14 different states.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. That’s a lot. It’s kind of even worse than being in a military family.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: It was a lot like being in a military family and it was okay when we were pretty young, but my sisters and I grew very tired of it when we were in high school. But I wound up eventually deciding that my hometown was really the town that my

grandparents lived in in Rock Hill, South Carolina because that's really the only home base that we had when we were growing up.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So where were you at when you were in high school?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So interesting that even though he got transferred about every two years, there was a period of time where he was originally assigned in New Jersey, got transferred to New York, and then back to New Jersey. And during that time period, which was almost six years, we stayed in the house in New Jersey. So I went to middle school and most of high school in New Jersey.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did you know from the beginning that you wanted to, you know, go to college and then ultimately law school?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: I didn't. I was somewhat hard-headed when I was a teenager.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, that just shocks me.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: I basically wanted to do whatever my dad didn't want me to do. He told me very clearly that if I was expecting him to continue to help supporting me, that I would have to be in school. So I was an accelerated graduate from high school, so I graduated high school when I was 16. It was just sort of part of the moving around that occurred. So I was very young to be in college, much younger than all the other people who were in college. So my dad made it clear that I would have to stay in school if I wanted him to continue helping me so I decided that I was going to enroll in the Joseph Paterno College of Beauty Culture. And informed my dad that it was a college and so he later would say that that's when he suspected that law might be the appropriate career for me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Because you were looking for loopholes.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Found that loophole. I actually did become a licensed hairdresser and I kept that license for many years after becoming a lawyer just in case, but I never actually worked as a hairdresser. So no, I didn't know that I wanted to go to law school. I did know that I had to stay in school to get my dad to keep helping me. So I took all the classes I liked. I took history and philosophy and political science. And I loved all those classes. And my dad would constantly roll his eyes and say, and we're going to do what with this. And so had no idea. One day I was walking across Michigan State campus and a guy was standing outside the doorway to a classroom and he said, bet you can't answer these questions. Had a little paper in his hand and I was like whatever, give them to me. And so he handed me a paper that had on it logic games from the law school admission test. I didn't know that at that point, but I looked at it. My eyes crossed. I couldn't answer the questions and I was very frustrated by that because I was somewhat competitive. So since I could not even begin to answer the logic games, I decided to go and sit in the classroom and listen to the spiel this guy was going to give which was a sales pitch for Stanley Kaplan law school admission test preparation. And so I listened to it. He taught us how to do the logic games. I was able to do them after he explained it and then of course he handed us all the sales information for this \$900 test preparation course. Walked out, called my dad. I think my dad was probably thinking this was the most promising conversation he had had with me in my entire life. So he –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Hey, dad, I want to take the LSAT.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Law School Admission Test from hairdresser. So I think my dad was kind of thinking this was just – could potentially be a good thing so my dad said, I will pay for the course if you promise that you will do every lesson and everything else they

recommend and you will actually take the test. So I did make the deal with him and I did do that. I was a senior at Michigan State when I did that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Now, you mentioned Michigan State. How did you end up there?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: My dad worked for General Motors.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: In Detroit.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Well, he was actually at that – he actually was doing a relatively brief stint in Lansing at that point, but always, regardless of where he was assigned, General Motors has a very close relationship with the State of Michigan so their executives have the option of their kids attending school as residents wherever they're currently assigned or in the State of Michigan. And so I was able to attend any school in Michigan as a resident regardless of where my parents were at that point. So something in my mind made me think that going to Michigan State would be a cool idea without any real appreciation of exactly how cold that was.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, I was going to say, that's pretty cold. I mean, New Jersey gets cold.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Not like Michigan.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON; But not like Michigan, yeah.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Yeah, it was very cold. I have a distinct recollection of waking up shortly after arriving at Michigan State and hearing the radio saying, guess what's the coldest state in the country today, folks. And I was like, oh, no, no, no. So it was Lansing, Michigan,

coldest place in the country. That was Lansing, Michigan that day and I tried to call my dad who at that point was now transferred to Missouri to see if I could move south and he said, no.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you took the LSAT. You must have done pretty well.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So I did absolutely everything that Stanley Kaplan was recommending that I do. I went to every class. I went to their lab to do the extra tests because I knew that – I knew that if I didn't do well on the test, my dad would suspect I hadn't done all that stuff.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So I took the test and then I wound up getting a call from a – an academic advisor at Michigan State who I had never spoken to because an academic advisor would actually want you to take classes toward some plan and I didn't have one so they wanted me to come in. I came in to talk to them and they said, oh, have you seen your LSAT scores and I said, yep, they look pretty good. And he said, it's the highest score I've ever seen.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: And so I said, oh, so that's good. And I said, so I can probably get into law school. Well, let's start with the top ten law schools in the country. So we applied to Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Cornell, NYU, and Georgetown. Now, from my perspective, Georgetown was the southern most school on that list and so I had –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Ergo the warmest.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: I had an interest in Georgetown to begin with. Well, I think Yale rejected me before they actually got the application. Harvard did however send me a letter

and told me that I was number 82 on the waitlist. And I called them to see what that meant and they said, that means you will always be able to say you were number 82 on the waitlist. So I said, never happen that 83 people rejected their Harvard admission. She said no. Whatever, the rest of them accepted me and Georgetown was the southern-most school.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you moved down to Washington, D.C. then I guess.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And how did you find law school? Having sort of, it sounds like drifted through college taking what you wanted to take. Law school is very regimented.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: It was a – well, so not only was it very regimented, but I went to law school in the 80s. And Georgetown had not been a co-ed school for that long so less than 15 years at that point. So there weren't a lot of women in my class. I'd say we were, at that point, about 25 percent female at Georgetown. They also were a very strict school. They had a very strict policy that first year students could not work. And they told us that at the start that at the end of the first year, 15 percent of the class would not be invited back for their second year. And at the end of the second year, 15 percent of the class would not be invited back for their third year. So it was more internal pressure for that and I got my first set of grades and law school was quite different from undergrad. I had some Cs and was a little struck by that. I had done really well in my classes at undergrad so I was a little stunned by those and realized I was going to have to start working a little differently and thinking a little differently. And so finally kind of got my sea legs and wound-up graduating in the top 25 percent of my class. So I did okay in law school.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, yeah. That sounds phenomenal. Did you do anything like moot court or law review, or anything like that while you were at Georgetown or were you just trying to get through each day and –

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So Georgetown prohibited you from working but by the time I went to law school, I was married and divorced and had a daughter.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So while my dad was willing to help with those expenses, I still needed to support myself and so I would – so I was going to school in the district. I was living in Gaithersburg, Maryland, was out of the district. And I was sneaking out of the district and working in a Studebaker's which was a bar so I was working as a cocktail waitress in order to have the money to pay my rent and all of that stuff. And far enough out of the district that I was hopeful that nobody from Georgetown would figure out I was actually working. So I was working so that made it hard to do a lot of that extra stuff.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you had a daughter.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: And I had a daughter. So I did – I did great on law review but it was a tax law review.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh...

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Yeah, it's as bad as it sounds. And so – but I accepted it because it sounded like it was something that should be on the resume so I wound up having to write a tax law review article which was one of the more painful things I did in law school. But that was it. That was the only extra activity I had.



CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you graduated from law school. How did you end up in Florida having really been all over the United States?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So while I was finishing up at Michigan State and then going on to Georgetown, my parents continued to move and so my dad got transferred to Orlando. And that's where they happened to be at the time that I was approaching graduation and that sounded good. So –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Another southern city.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: It was going to be – it was going to be an improvement over some of the places they'd been and so I was excited to maybe come down to Orlando. I was also a little worried about the fact that at this point I was now in my late twenties and thinking about starting a life in Orlando and realizing that they would likely soon be leaving because that was the nature of my dad's job, that he was always on the move. But as everyone knows, Oldsmobile Division no longer exists and so that was happening around the same time that I graduated from law school, is that there was restructuring happening with General Motors and his, basically, not just his job but his company was essentially going away because he was in the division as opposed to being in the upper echelon of General Motors. So he was right at the top of the Oldsmobile Division, so if he had been promoted one more time, he would no longer have been working in Oldsmobile, he would have been working for General Motors. But he was still in Oldsmobile. So they basically came to him and said, you're being transferred to San Francisco and you know we just need to let you know that you have an option to take an early retirement. If you do not take early retirement here in Orlando, you'd likely be forced into retirement in San Francisco because of the reorganization that's happening. So it was soul searching for him, very, very difficult emotionally for him because he was only in his late fifties at that point. They

decided to take that early retirement and stay in Orlando. So my dad passed away in 2015, but my mom still lives here in Orlando with me. Not with me, but near me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you moved down to Orlando. What was your first job as a lawyer?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: The first job that I had was with McGuire, Voorhis and Wells which is now Holland and Knight. And it was a summer associate position. At the end of the summer, they were willing to offer me a job but I didn't feel like that was a good fit for me. It's a big law firm. I think they at that time had about 60 lawyers which made them one of the biggest law firms in Central Florida. So I decided against that and I wound up accepting a position with Pitts, Eubanks, Hilyard, Rumbley, Meier and Ross which was another decent size law firm, not knowing that when I interviewed with them that they were in the process of splitting. So I interviewed and liked them, but then I left and went back to school to finish out. And I got a phone call from Al Pitts offering me a job, not realizing that Al Pitts had left Pitts, Eubanks, Hilyard, Rumbley, Meier and Ross and that Bud Eubanks had my resume, but Al Pitts had my cover letter. And so I accepted that job thinking I was going to work for this larger law firm. Came down and I was basically an associate with five other young associates working for Mr. Pitts. And so I stayed with Al Pitts for about a year and a half to two years but he was – I think he was probably wanting to retire more than run his own law firm and so at the end of a year and a half, I decided to do something extremely bold which was not done in the 80s. I went out on my own.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what kind of law were you practicing with Al Pitts firm?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Insurance defense.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Which is not what you continued to do, I don't believe.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: It is not.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How did you decide on the next step? You're going to start your own firm but what were you going to do?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So Al Pitts didn't want to do anything other than insurance defense. That's where he had spent his entire career. But by the time we got to about a little over a year of my working with Al, other associates that had come with him from the Pitts, Eubanks firm had left. And so it was just me and Al. And I was – I literally was working late on Chris – the day before Christmas Eve, or Christmas Eve, I'm not sure, and I got a phone call from a woman who was crying hysterically on the phone and saying, please don't hang up, please don't hang up and I said, okay. Everybody else had gone. All the rest of the staff was gone. I was the last one in the office. And she proceeded to tell me about how she had brought her daughter to visit with her father here in Orlando, but on her way back to catch her plane, she was served with custody papers for her daughter and a temporary custody order to her estranged husband. And so desperate for an attorney to help her and she said, you're the only one who's answered the phone. So I didn't know anything about family law but I figured, whatever, I went to law school. I know more than she does so I figured, see if we could figure it out. So I did contact Al and said is it okay if I try to help her and he wasn't thrilled but he was like okay, whatever. And so I started working on her case and we were able to win custody of her child back and allow her to go back to Illinois where she was living. And I kind of liked it. It felt more personal than the insurance defense stuff that we were doing so with Al's somewhat blessing, I took a few more family law cases. And also liked them. I liked the personal aspect of it and helping people who were – really didn't understand the system, what they were doing, so I enjoyed that. When I left

Al, he told me to take my indigent women with me. So I wound up starting a practice with just these little files of family law cases that I had and we just started working. And I realized that when it came to the practice of law, it wasn't just family law that I enjoyed. It was kids. I liked working with cases that involved kids, so very quickly found myself being in pretty high demand as a child custody attorney, which is a rough way to make a living.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Because it's –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's very emotional.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Very emotional, very aggressive. People are pretty charged up about their kids. And so –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Hopefully.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So I did that for several years and became board certified in Marital and Family Law in 1996 which would have been eight years into practicing. But there was a part of it that challenged me, which was the feeling that I was using whatever talents God gave me to tear families apart or to participate in tearing families apart. And that was just always sort of bothering me and I think I made a comment to my husband at one time and said, I'm worried about the legacy that I'm going to leave in this practice. And around about that same time I was asked to do some work in adoption which was intriguing. So I didn't know anything about it. Started working on it. Again, it was one of those things that chose me more than me choosing them. And I started doing that work. It grew very, very rapidly. Started doing it probably around 1996 – 97. By 1999 we were so busy in adoption work that we had to license an agency because we just literally couldn't do all the work out of the law firm. From there my

husband said, your grave marker is going to read, hopefully she put together as many families as she took apart. And so we started in that. I was very involved in adoption on all levels, but mostly litigation. So I would tell people later on, it wasn't adoption – the adoption work that I did wasn't always the smiling pictures of finalized adoptions in the courthouse. But often was contested termination of parental rights cases.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. And I know adoptions and helping children is your passion.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: It was. It was. I enjoyed it a lot. I had a statewide practice because as I would tell people, I was the ox in a ditch lawyer. When an adoption agency got the ox in a ditch, they would call me to try and get it out.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So I would try to salvage their adoption cases and make sure that they were on track to finalization, just not always an easy thing to do and it also involved a lot of appellate work. Cases would be appealed. We took appeals all the way to the Florida Supreme Court and handled those. I also had the opportunity and a crazy, wonderful opportunity to participate in drafting legislation in Tallahassee that dealt with adoptions. We spent a lot of time with lobbyists and with bill sponsors, being a subject expert for committee hearings, doing a lot of that up there, which given my – the classes that I had taken in political science, that was kind of interesting to do. And I did that and around 2002 to 2000 – from 2002 to 2012 or 2013, I was pretty active in Tallahassee too which was exciting work to be doing to help formulate future adoption practice with good laws, so we did a lot of that stuff too.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I usually ask judges you know, when did you decide that you wanted to be on the bench, but you have a unique path to the bench because you were married to Bob Wattles for decades.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: I was. And he had, as a practitioner, he never handled criminal cases. He was a – he did a lot of business litigation, commercial litigation stuff that he did, but when he went on the bench, he found his passion in the criminal court. And would do everything in his power to be assigned in the criminal division, irrespective of the rotation policies. He would finagle them try to always get back to criminal. And I think he did some time in family law. He did some time in juvenile delinquency, but mostly he served in the criminal court and just loved being assigned to the criminal bench.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: He loved being a judge.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: He did. He did. And of course, we had a lot of jokes about it because he was, in a robe, he was very you know impressive and intimidating and outside of the court he was just a redneck and so he drove a big dually pickup truck with you know with rusting fenders and we owned a piece of property one time, and a woman stopped by while he was cutting the grass out at the property and asked him for his business card. And when he handed his business card to her, she looked at it and said, gosh, I thought they paid you guys better than this. So it was – and he would always joke with people and say, yeah, when these kids get a little older, we're going to get her a job in the Ninth Circuit and then we're going to carpool. Right, whatever, and I would just laugh back and say, well, somebody's got to go to the parent/teacher conferences so he never could because he was always in trial. So –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you knew what a circuit judge did and what the life was like from an intimate perspective.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: I did, and it also felt like I was part of the Ninth Circuit family because being a spouse, I knew all the judges. I knew – you know, I knew their spouses so I always felt like I was part of the Ninth Circuit family. And then Bob got sick and when he was diagnosed with cancer, even more so, the Ninth Circuit family rallied around both of us and provided lots of support to us. You know, lots of times judges from the Ninth Circuit driving him to appointments, or driving him home, just really being there for him. When he passed away and he was still an active Ninth Circuit Judge, there was of course, our personal loss of him but there was also the loss of that family, that we were no longer part of the Ninth Circuit. And so it wasn't that I wasn't at all part of the Ninth Circuit, I still knew the judges. I still saw them but not in the same way. So he died in 2010 and I was just still working as a lawyer, still raising my kids. They were – the youngest ones were – the youngest one was 12 when he died. So I had a 12-year-old, a 14-year-old, an 18-year-old and then my older two girls were married and off on their own. But so along – a few years later, the youngest one, the 12 year old was now in high school, and I literally had a conversation with one of the Ninth Circuit judges saying, remember when he used to say, when those kids got older, they were going to get you on the bench and then you all were going to carpool and I'd be like, yeah, well, you know that would have been great if he was here to help me do that. But you know he's not so I just do what I do. And this was actually Bob LeBlanc who said, you know we could help you. And you know we could tell you how to do this. And so – and that of course was I think their way of saying you know he helped us a lot, we'd be happy to help advise you and tell you how to do this and connect you with the people you need to be talking to. So I started rolling it around in my head, and maybe I

could. Maybe I could run a campaign and get elected to the bench. So in the upcoming election, in 2014 I thought maybe I can do this. So there was going to be five openings. There were judges who were retiring so I put my hat in the ring. For nine months I didn't even have an opponent. Just me so I was like, I'm just going to walk right into this job. That would be great. And then things changed. One of those five judges who was going to be retiring at the end of his term decided to retire early. That meant that the candidate in that seat no longer had a seat to run for and she needed to either give up her dream of being a judge or she had to find another seat to run for. And that was Diana Tennis, and she decided that she would put in and run for the same seat that I was running for. And so the last eight or nine months of that campaign was a very, very grueling campaign of breakfast meetings, coffee meetings, lunch meeting, dinner meetings, social hours every day for months, putting out signs in the middle of the night, campaigning as hard as we could. The harder I campaigned the harder Diana campaigned. The two of us were just -- every place I showed up, there was Diana.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: The two of you were workaholics so I can imagine it would be very difficult.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: And it came right down to the wire and at the end of election night, Diana had 51 percent and I had 49 percent so back to my law practice I went. So still feeling you know, definitely I'm a person of faith, had prayed a lot about that decision before I did it and I just had this very strong feeling that this was God's plan for my life to go on the bench. So I was so bewildered when the campaign didn't go the way that I had planned for it to. But you know in the age of campaigns these days, there was a lot of conversation, a lot of people came to me about different campaign tactics we could take. And just going into negative campaigning, things like that. And I prayed about that and just felt like, that just wasn't the right



thing to do. And I knew the campaign was going to be close. My campaign manager told me, if we go with negative campaigning, you could probably win this. But if you don't, can't call it. But I just – I just kept feeling strongly that that wasn't the right thing to do. Unbeknownst to me, there were – there were a lot of powerful lawyers in town who were watching that campaign and I think they knew that it was so close, that negative campaigning was likely to happen. And he said, not on either one of our parts. So I think these lawyers came to the conclusion that both of us should be judges. So I had no idea. I went back to work as a lawyer, but about three months later, I get a phone call from a lawyer who's now passed away. He was with the Gray, Robinson firm, and he just suggested that I needed to put in an application for appointment. And I just don't see that happening because I lost an election just recently. But he said, you know, there – there's a lot of lawyers in this town who think that that was an unfortunate match up and that the Ninth Circuit would be better with both of you, not just one of you. And so I did. I put in an application for Judge Evans' seat when he announced his retirement and a number of lawyers that I didn't know were really supportive of me, went strongly to bat for me with the Governor and I wound up getting that appointment. I think I was appointed two and a half months after Diana started working so I was really close, right behind her.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I think people may not understand – they think it's difficult to begin working with someone that you had just had such a grueling campaign with. How did you find that because I know that both of you like each other and are friends?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So we were friends before the campaign. We were not friends during the campaign. It was hard. We both intensely wanted that job but afterwards I made a very conscious decision that this needed to be a mended relationship. I was going to continue in my mind being a lawyer in the Ninth Circuit. She was going to be a judge in the Ninth Circuit so

I called her and I asked her to go to coffee with me. And I think she was a little worried about you know, it might be an ambush. It had been a kind of an intense campaign, but I just wanted to tell her that I wanted her to do well. I wanted to do anything in my power to support her as a judge and that I wanted her to know that I would never be participating in anything that would undermine her success as a Ninth Circuit judge because I'm a member of the Ninth Circuit. And so it just for me, being a judge carries with it such a burden of integrity that you can't have people out there trying to undermine your integrity in the job and so I never once doubted Diane would do this job with integrity. And so I just wanted her to hear that from me and so it turned out that I did that believing that I was going to be a lawyer practicing in front of her. And at that point had no idea that I was actually going to do an application. When I went into my interview with the judicial nominating commission for Judge Evans' seat, they – the chair of the commission told me that Diana had personally called him and recommended me for the position. So yeah, it was a tough campaign and hard fought, but we liked each other before, we like each other now. She's hilariously funny and I enjoy spending time with her so yeah, we mended those bridges pretty quickly.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Even though you knew a lot about being a judge from being married to Bob, Bob Wattles, what surprised you when you took the bench?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So there were a number of things. The first thing that I found very funny and surprising was how little I knew about the backside of this building.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's kind of a maze.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Yeah, I never really thought about how much there is behind those security doors. So I was very surprised when they gave us these scan cards that open all

these authorized personnel only doors. And so I had been to Bob's chambers but you know, it was basically get off the elevator, go to his chambers, get back on so I was surprised at how big this building really is, much more than the public area that you see. I was – I thought it was hilariously funny when court administration came to me to ask me what kind of pens I wanted and I thought this is really an important question. I now know that is a very important question. What kind of pens you're going to use because you sign your name more times than you would ever imagine you would be signing your name. I learned that Patricia Strowbridge is entirely too long a signature, my real signature, so it's much shorter, my judge signature. So those were surprising and funny, things that we had to adapt. I learned – one of the things that I learned really quickly was how – that having to deal with pro ses, which when you're a lawyer, you're never dealing in a case that involves two pro ses. You're always the lawyer in the room. So cases with – my first assignment was domestic violence so most of the people were pro se. So it was basically a three-ring circus all the time. So people saying all kinds of crazy things, doing all kinds of crazy things. The rules of procedure and the rules of evidence don't really mean anything. And so – because they don't know them. But I initially hated the idea of being assigned to domestic violence, quickly realized that there was so much to learn in dealing with pro ses. The skills that I learned in that first assignment were critical. I learned a really important level of patience that I had not had before. I learned the importance of letting people talk enough to make sure that you understand what's going on because it's surprising to me how many times I'd think I know what's going on and then when people start talking, I realize there's more, a lot more. So that and really quickly learned the importance to people of being heard. People are okay if you rule against them if they think that you listened to them. If you rule in their favor but you didn't listen to them, they still aren't that impressed. So those were all things I never really

thought much about at that point. So still to this day amazed at the number of times I have to sign my name.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you've been in a number of different assignments. You've been in DV. I think you've been in general family at some point.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Nope.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Dependency in Osceola.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Dependency.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Civil.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Civil.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And now in criminal.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: Criminal.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Do you have a division, a favorite division where you believe that you're able to make the most difference?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So I liked them – I liked things about different divisions. So I wouldn't say there's a favorite because there's things I liked. I loved the intellectual challenge of civil. But there's a lot of work in civil. It's a very, very heavy workload. So pros and cons. I loved the intellectual challenge but I would have loved a little less of an intellectual challenge. I love dependency because it is an opportunity to make a difference of every minute of every day. But it's also my warm shallow pond. So as a professional there's not much growth room in dependency for me because I had done it for decades. So it's a positive and a negative too. If I were to think about where I'd like to spend the closure of my career, I would love to finish out in

dependency which is where I began my career. So I'd love that opportunity. But I've been thrilled being in criminal with the incredible amount I've had to learn. It was – as one of our other judges said, it's a little like drinking from a fire hydrant. When you're in civil for decades and then you go into criminal, as Judge Marques used to tease me about that I didn't know how to spell arraignment. Probably true. I had a lot to learn in a very short period of time so that was hugely challenging but it's been a – I've been there two years now. It's been a tremendous period of growth for me in criminal. So I've loved that. I've loved the personal growth that I've done in an area of law that I knew nothing about. I spent six months wondering if there was any way I was going to survive appellate review of anything I'd done. So to this point I kind of expect that I'm you know likely to be affirmed on a lot of my decisions now. So I've learned an awful lot in that process. So a favorite is hard to put a finger on it. And the other thing is, I've enjoyed the lawyers that I've worked with in all of the divisions. Obviously in DV I didn't have very many lawyers that I worked with, but in dependency, in civil and in criminal, I've enjoyed the lawyers that I've worked with. I've definitely had some favorite lawyers over the years that have really made my job a lot easier and helped me in my growth.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So we've talked a lot about your professional life. What do you like to do when you are not on the bench?

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: So you've already said, I am a workaholic.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: I do – I used to be the second to last car out of the parking garage because Keith White was always the last one out. He's now on the Sixth DCA so I am now typically the last one out as I am a bit of a workaholic. So that does create some challenges.

I'm always working on that, trying to create boundaries which doesn't work well for me but I do enjoy yoga. So I'm my own personal stress reduction. I like to do yoga a couple times a week. And hopefully helping to you know keep me mobile well into my older years is the hope there. I raise chickens so I have my own little personal backyard chicken coup which I occasionally bring in eggs for you and for some other people.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: We have enjoyed the eggs, thank you.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: My own organic eggs, my free-range chickens. I should put that on there. They're organic free-range chickens. So I currently have three laying hens. I know Judge Caraballo has a little bit bigger flock than me, but we both like to do that. I found that raising chickens is more successful for me than raising vegetables. I have not been as successful with those. They tend to wilt and die on me but the chickens do well. So I do enjoy that. And I love to travel. If I can get out of the country, I do love to do it at least once a year, and preferably twice a year if I can make it happen. I'm going to be taking a Mediterranean cruise in September of this year.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, I'm envious.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: That's going to be nice. From Lisbon to Rome.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, Judge Strowbridge, thank you for joining us today. It's been a really interesting conversation about your passions for the law.

JUDGE STROWBRIDGE: I've enjoyed it. Thanks for inviting me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You're welcome.

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