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OPEN NINTH:
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM
A LIFE WELL SERVED
EPISODE 23
MAY 22, 2017
HOSTED BY: FREDERICK J. LAUTEN

1 (Music.)

2 >> Welcome to another episode of "Open Ninth:
3 Conversations Beyond the Courtroom" in the Ninth Judicial
4 Circuit Court of Florida.

5 Now here's your host, Chief Judge Frederick J. Lauten.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I'm here today with Justice Alan
7 Lawson, who last week was sworn in as Florida's 68th
8 Supreme Court Justice and has a tie to Central Florida, in
9 particular to Orlando. And Justice Lawson, if you'll permit
10 me a brief history lesson for our listeners.

11 So my research shows that you're the fourth Orlandoan to
12 serve on the Florida Supreme Court. If my research is right,
13 in -- from 1955 to 1970, Justice Thornal, who was appointed
14 by Leroy Collins, served on the Court. And then from 1979 to
15 1994, Justice Parker Lee McDonald, who was appointed by Bob
16 Graham, and then from 1994 to 2009, Justice Charlie Wells,
17 who was appointed by Lawton Chiles. And each one of those
18 justices served for 15 years.

19 And I snuck a peek at your age, so if I got your age
20 right, I think you can serve for 15 years because then you
21 reach that golden retirement age that's mandatory senility or
22 retirement. I don't know what they call it.

23 So you're the fourth Central Floridan to serve on the
24 Florida Supreme Court. Congratulations for that honor. And
25 thank you for joining us today.

1 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Thank you for having me. And I
2 think the official term -- or maybe the unofficial term is
3 constitutional senility.

4 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's right. Constitutional
5 senility. That's a great way to describe it.

6 So let's talk a little bit about your legal career
7 leading up to your appointment on the Court. I know that you
8 work in a private practice with Steel Hector & Davis. Is
9 that where you started your career in law?

10 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** It is. Right out of law school I
11 went with them. It was a large Miami firm with a few
12 offices; one in West Palm Beach and a very small office in
13 Tallahassee. I spent two years in Miami, then transferred to
14 the firm's Tallahassee office and was there through election
15 into the partnership of that firm in '85, I believe.

16 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So if we go back before that,
17 were you born in Tallahassee; is that correct?

18 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Born in Lakeland. My parents moved
19 to Tallahassee. Dad got a job in Tallahassee when I was two
20 years old. So I don't remember much before Tallahassee.

21 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right.

22 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** But I was raised there, yeah.

23 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And then Tallahassee, Leon High
24 School?

25 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Leon High School.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And where did you go to college
2 from there?

3 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** So I -- actually -- I intended to go
4 into the military.

5 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay.

6 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** And had -- the way the system worked
7 then -- I don't know that it works the same way now. Each
8 congressperson had appointees to each military academy, and
9 they would select a primary and then ten alternates. And I
10 was the primary for a congressman's appointment to the United
11 States Air Force Academy.

12 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

13 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** And when I did the testing at the
14 first part of that summer, the physical testing, I passed
15 everything except that they found that my kidney was throwing
16 off extra red blood cells, which was a sign of potential
17 kidney disease.

18 And when the regs were written, as I understand it, at
19 the Air Force Academy, they said that that was just an
20 automatic disqualifier because they didn't have a way really
21 of telling whether that would develop into kidney disease,
22 and they didn't want to take that risk.

23 At the time that I had that stop, they put me in the
24 hospital, did a kidney biopsy and said that it was not a
25 long-term kidney disease. It was an issue that would

1 resolve. I had probably had strep throat that went
2 untreated. And so I ended up asking for a waiver. Two weeks
3 before I was supposed to show up in Colorado Springs to start
4 my education at the Air Force Academy, I got the word that
5 they were not gonna give me the waiver.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, no.

7 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So I was disappointed but looked
8 around. Ended up very quickly entering the local community
9 college, Tallahassee Community College, and spent two years
10 there. Got an AA degree. And then finished at Clemson
11 University. Graduated from Clemson.

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And you had, just for the
13 record, an interesting major at Clemson.

14 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I did.

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** What was that?

16 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Parks, recreation, and tourism
17 management with an emphasis in natural resource management.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So tell us a little bit about
19 that choice. That's an interesting choice. Not an obvious
20 connection to a degree in law, so I'm very curious about --

21 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yeah. I had -- I had used the two
22 years while at TCC to figure out what I thought I wanted to
23 do in life.

24 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

25 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I had taken accounting courses. I

1 actually, my first year, took an emergency medical
2 technician, two-semester course, that resulted in
3 certification. And to check out medicine, I ended up
4 working, volunteering in the local hospital. And then
5 throughout the rest of my college years, I worked on
6 ambulances to help pay the bills and that kind of thing. I
7 ruled out medicine.

8 I took a business law class from an adjunct professor at
9 TCC who was a former Supreme Court Justice, Fred Karl, and
10 just fell in love with the law. And I decided by the time I
11 left TCC that I wanted to -- to ultimately go to law school,
12 and probably in Florida. Our roots go deep in Florida. I'm
13 a multigenerational Floridian.

14 And I went to the dean of the law school -- the dean of
15 admissions, Dave Dixon, at the time, was his name --

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** At FSU.

17 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- at Florida State, and said, what
18 should I graduate in? Because I'm coming to law school. So
19 what do I get my degree in? I have this AA degree.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

21 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And he said it absolutely does not
22 matter.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

24 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Well, come on.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** No, it absolutely does not

1 matter.

2 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Well, I mean, would English -- it
3 absolutely does not matter. But the broader you can get it,
4 the better off you're gonna be because as a lawyer, you're
5 gonna deal with all sorts of issues and topics in a variety
6 of fields. We'll teach you everything you need to know about
7 the law, but -- but, you know, so as broad as it can be.

8 And when I decided to go to Clemson, I looked around.
9 That degree was intended for somebody who was going to run a
10 national parks service one day.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Really? Interesting.

12 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So you had wildlife biology,
13 forestry, a lot of the science classes and administration,
14 finance. You'd have to, you know, run a budget and that kind
15 of thing. So it really -- a very, very broad degree that
16 touched on a lot of places. And I love the outdoors. I
17 still love the outdoors. I decided maybe my second choice,
18 if I wasn't going to be a lawyer, was to work in a national
19 park anyway somewhere, so I just chose that.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So today I get asked -- I'm sure
21 you get asked all the time -- what should I major in if I'm
22 thinking of law school. And it's many years later from when
23 you asked the question, but I say major in anything you're
24 interested in so you can get the best possible grades.

25 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Right.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And if you don't know, if you
2 absolutely don't know, I say you should take as many English
3 courses you can. Because the better you can write and think,
4 the better prepared you are. But there's no magic degree for
5 law school, is there?

6 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** There is not. No.

7 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

8 So after that but you knew you wanted to go to law
9 school. And had you pretty much narrowed it to FSU? Did you
10 know you wanted to go to school at that particular law
11 school?

12 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** I had selected a school to finish
13 my -- my undergraduate degree thinking I would probably come
14 back to Tallahassee, and I wanted the experience of being
15 away. So I was leaning in that direction when I left. I did
16 apply to a lot of places. I did have an opportunity to go
17 to -- out-of-state schools. I didn't apply to another
18 in-state school.

19 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

20 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** But in the end, just the finances
21 were such that it -- because I wanted to live and practice in
22 Florida, it didn't make sense to go to one of the
23 northeastern schools or --

24 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Just --

25 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- to me.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Just to affirm that the advice
2 that you got about it doesn't really matter what you major
3 in -- and I know you would not volunteer this, so I'm going
4 to volunteer it. So I know that you were second in your law
5 school class upon graduation at FSU; is that right?

6 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** That is correct.

7 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And so there is no magic major.
8 As long as you know how to study and you learn the discipline
9 of hard work, you can succeed in law school, and it really
10 doesn't require a particular major to attend.

11 All right. So you were successful in law school.
12 During the summer, what did you do when you were a law
13 student?

14 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Um, I -- I worked the first summer.
15 The second summer, I -- I went to Russia on a trip --

16 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** No kidding?

17 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- for most of the summer.

18 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I heard about a little bit --

19 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** A little bit.

20 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- at your investiture.

21 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** And then of course after my last
22 year, I was fortunate enough, the legal market was good, so
23 the firms were hiring you even before you passed the Bar. So
24 I went to work At steel, but they gave me time to study for
25 the Bar.

1 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And you hadn't been a summer
2 intern with Steel?

3 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I never did that. Yeah.

4 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So two years in Miami.

5 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Mm-hmm.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And did you ask to go to
7 Tallahassee? Was that an agreement when you started working
8 there or how did that work?

9 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I -- I did ask. They -- they
10 needed -- they didn't have a general civil litigator there,
11 and that's what I did. And they also needed some help. The
12 firm's predominant client was Florida Power & Light Company.
13 And several of the lawyers that were there did utility
14 regulatory work in front of the Public Service Commission.

15 And they -- they had -- frequently had some really big,
16 large cases that could use some extra lawyers. So they --
17 they had a need. But the main motivating factor was that my
18 wife, we had had our first child, and my wife preferred a
19 smaller town to the large --

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Big city of Miami.

21 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- Metro-Dade County area. And so
22 we moved for that reason, primarily.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So of course I know your wife,
24 Julie. And I don't know if all of the listeners know Julie's
25 pedigree. And I don't know whether you're comfortable

1 sharing it or not, but at least could you tell us how you two
2 met so we know that background story?

3 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yeah. We met in the years -- she
4 started -- we're the same age and graduated from high school
5 the same year. And she started in college at Florida State,
6 and we met while I was at TCC and she was at Florida State.
7 So that's --

8 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And her mom worked in
9 Tallahassee --

10 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yes.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- at the time?

12 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Her mom was a television
13 personality. She had the *Fran Carlton Exercise Show*.

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Which I watched as a young kid
15 here in Orlando.

16 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And then she also was the elected --
17 an elected state representative from Orange County at the
18 time.

19 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** One of the first women elected
20 as a -- not the first woman, but --

21 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Not the first, but, yeah --

22 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- but among that group of --

23 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- there were not a lot in the
24 Florida Legislature at the time.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So her mom was pretty much a

1 trailblazer --

2 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yes.

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- in a lot of ways.

4 Okay. Great. So you're working in Tallahassee. How do
5 you get to Central Florida? What's the story for that
6 journey?

7 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Well, this is Julie's home, where
8 she grew up.

9 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

10 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So -- and I -- when -- as a partner
11 in the firm that I was at, I had young children, and it
12 was -- it was a great firm and great people. It no longer
13 exists as a standalone firm. It merged into Squire,
14 Sanders & Dempsey. And I think that name changed. Really
15 great lawyers. I loved my experience there.

16 But like a lot of big firms, it -- I was working 67
17 hours, 70 hours a week regularly. And the partners who had
18 been there 10 years and 15 years longer were doing the same
19 thing, and I -- most weekends and most nights. And I really
20 wanted more time with my family than that, so -- so I decided
21 that we wanted something different in terms of lifestyle.

22 And as we looked around, Julie really wanted to come
23 back to Central Florida.

24 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So that was it.

25 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Again. Again. It got me here. It

1 ultimately did.

2 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And then you went to work for
3 the Orange County Attorney's Office?

4 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yeah. I spent four and a half years
5 there before I was appointed.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And what did you do -- what kind
7 of cases did you handle for Orange County?

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** They -- when I was initially hired,
9 they were working on the construction litigation surrounding
10 this building, the Orange County Courthouse, and they were
11 spending a lot of money. As I recall, about a hundred
12 thousand dollars a month on outside legal fees and were
13 looking for somebody who'd had some construction litigation
14 experience to come in and work with the head of the
15 litigation section at the county attorney's office at the
16 time on that piece of litigation. So really that's why I got
17 hired was to handle the Orange County Courthouse litigation.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Fascinating.

19 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** That was the first one.

20 I continued. After that case was over -- and I got
21 other cases, even while working on that case, but to do some
22 of the highway construction litigation, did ordinance
23 challenges regarding constitutional questions in federal
24 court, and a lot of things that were not very dissimilar from
25 the kind of business litigation that I had handled before.

1 But -- but basic government disputes that that office has
2 always done -- a lot of the inverse condemnation cases and
3 the condemnation cases relating to highway construction. I
4 had a few of those. Not many. But mainly I did general
5 things.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So then you make another career
7 shift?

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yes.

9 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And what -- was that 2002?

10 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I started the first of 2002. I got
11 the word that I was gonna be appointed in 2001.

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And you got appointed to the
13 Circuit Court here in Orange County?

14 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Correct. Mm-hmm.

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And with your vast civil
16 litigation experience, your first assignment, I think, was
17 criminal court?

18 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** It was. That's right.

19 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And looking back on it, what do
20 you think about the fact that you were kind of plucked from
21 the civil litigation world and put into a criminal
22 assignment? Was that a good thing? A bad thing? Would you
23 recommend that that not happen that way or do you think it
24 had benefits? What's your thought on it?

25 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I think it had benefits, you know?

1 Any judge -- any lawyer's going to come to the role as a
2 judge with a narrower practice probably than you're gonna
3 be -- you're gonna be deciding cases in an area of law where
4 you haven't had experience before.

5 And that happens when judges switch divisions all the
6 time. So the fact that the first division I was in was one
7 that I didn't have experience in was not a negative thing.
8 It just meant you do a lot of extra homework at the beginning
9 and learn that area of the law, which all judges do anytime
10 they rotate divisions. A little more work.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. And I've heard some
12 judges describe, you almost have to listen harder.

13 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** You do.

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I mean, which is a good thing.

15 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yeah, it is.

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Because that's mostly what we do
17 is listen.

18 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Right. And I actually enjoyed it.
19 If they had asked me civil or criminal, if those had been the
20 two options, I probably -- having done 15 years of civil
21 litigation, even though I was very comfortable with that,
22 probably would have chosen the new challenge of a different
23 area where I had not practiced law.

24 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So I heard one judge describe
25 judges as the last generalists left in the law. When you

1 practice law, you just can't have as broad a practice as the
2 kind of cases that a judge hears, just impossible
3 economically. You can't compete at that level anymore.

4 What do you think about that observation?

5 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I think that's -- that certainly is
6 true. It's even more true in the smaller jurisdictions.
7 There's still circuit judges in this state that sit in
8 smaller counties and do everything all at once. They
9 don't -- you know, it's only in the larger circuits --

10 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** They don't rotate. Right.

11 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- where they're -- you're assigned
12 to a division where you can focus on a particular area of the
13 law for a period of time and then move to a different area of
14 the law. So ...

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So how long were you here on the
16 circuit bench?

17 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Four years.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And then you got appointed to
19 the Fifth District Court of Appeals?

20 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Correct.

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And who was governor for that
22 appointment?

23 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Governor Jeb Bush.

24 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Governor Jeb Bush. And so that
25 court sits in Daytona Beach?

1 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Correct.

2 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** But I guess you can -- you
3 remained in Orlando because you could commute back and
4 forth --

5 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Right.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- to that Court.

7 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** It was about an hour door-to-door
8 from my house -- our house -- to the courthouse in Daytona
9 Beach. And most of the judges of the Fifth live somewhere
10 other than where that courthouse is. So we have judges that
11 live down in Brevard County, some up at the top level of
12 St. Johns County.

13 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Almost in Jacksonville.

14 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Almost in Jacksonville.

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Almost to Duval. Right.

16 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And of course the -- our district
17 stretches all the way over to the Gulf Coast with Hernando
18 and Citrus Counties. We have a judge -- there's a judge on
19 the Fifth now who's from Marion County. But most of the
20 judges, historically, have been from Orange County and have
21 made that commute. And there have been a few -- Judge Palmer
22 moved to Daytona when he got the appointment and moved from
23 Orange County. But most of them chose to stay in their
24 community and commute back and forth.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So what was the big change? Was

1 there a big, obvious change in workload or approach to work?
2 For our listeners, how would you describe the shift from
3 trial court judge to appellate court judge?

4 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Right. I -- I have regularly said
5 from almost day one on the appellate court that trial judges
6 have a harder job. It's not that they work more hours, but a
7 harder job because I found the most difficult decisions to be
8 the discretionary decisions that you made as a trial judge.
9 You know, how long a sentence do I impose here? Does this
10 person stay out on bond, the accused person, before they face
11 trial, if they end up in trial?

12 The child custody, I never sat in family, but I can just
13 imagine those very difficult decisions; the decisions in
14 dependency, does the State sever the relationship between a
15 parent and a child?

16 I mean, those -- where you're having to make a judgment
17 call that isn't necessary -- isn't just what's the law and
18 how do I apply it to these facts, but what's the right thing
19 to do are the kind of decisions that really weigh heavily on
20 our judges, right?

21 And at the appellate level, you don't have those
22 decisions. You are really answering legal questions in
23 almost every case. Did the trial judge abuse his or her
24 discretion? Did they get the law right? It -- what -- was
25 there sufficient evidence to support a decision? That's

1 almost an academic kind of decision-making process as
2 compared to the very difficult and sometimes emotional
3 gut-wrenching decisions you have to make as a trial judge.
4 So I found it to be more pressure.

5 There's the pressure to get it right as an appellate
6 judge.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** But you do that by just digging in
9 and researching and spending the time you need to with the
10 case. And there are definitely difficult decisions as an
11 appellate judge --

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Sure.

13 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- where the law is close or the
14 issue is close. And you do struggle with it, but not the
15 same kind of struggle that you have as a trial judge.

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So tell me whether this
17 observation is right or wrong because I want to make sure our
18 listeners understand this correctly.

19 A trial judge doesn't spend every single minute of the
20 day in his or her courtroom because there's office work to be
21 done.

22 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Right.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** But spends a lot of time in a
24 courtroom.

25 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Correct.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And has to make calls, very
2 often very quickly. Evidentiary calls you have to make very
3 quickly for the trial to continue. And with the caseload, to
4 impose a sentence on one case, you might do that ten times in
5 a morning.

6 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Right.

7 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** It seems to me, on the appellate
8 bench, a lot of your time is spent reading material -- a lot
9 of material -- reading briefs, reading case law. And then
10 the remainder of the time is spent thinking and writing and
11 not having to announce something immediately.

12 But if you were to, from 10,000 feet, look at a trial
13 judge, he or she would be in a courtroom kind of making these
14 rapid calls. And an appellate judge would be reading,
15 writing, reading, writing, reading, writing.

16 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Mm-hmm.

17 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Is that a fair description?

18 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** That's fair. And of course the --
19 you have the luxury not only of taking time to research an
20 issue, to read the record thoroughly, to figure things out,
21 but you have -- you know, the appellate courts decide cases
22 in panels of three.

23 So you -- you know, if you were over in Daytona, you'd
24 walk into somebody's office. If you weren't, you'd pick up
25 the phone and say, you know, listen, I'm struggling with this

1 issue. What do you think about this? What do you think
2 about this? And we had the luxury of talking things through.

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

4 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And it wasn't -- I mean, it
5 didn't -- most of the time, all three of us saw every issue
6 pretty much the same way and pretty clearly. But the more
7 difficult cases, sometimes it really wasn't until the writing
8 process when you had to try to write something one way and
9 realize, as I really dug in and put thoughts on paper, that
10 this just isn't right. It just doesn't work. And then would
11 end up going the other way.

12 So you have that additional -- it's usually not a
13 decision-making tool, but sometimes even writing can help you
14 reach the right decision.

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Speaking of writing, does
16 writing -- is writing a skillset that comes easy to you? Is
17 it hard work? What -- how do you feel about -- you know,
18 much of your work now is -- requires you to write.

19 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I -- I was -- took -- I was, like,
20 the editor of our high school newspaper, so I was writing in
21 high school.

22 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** At an early age.

23 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** At an early age.

24 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I see.

25 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And -- and felt like I had really

1 good writing skills, even through college and law school. So
2 it's not something -- I mean, it is -- it is -- it does take
3 a little more discipline. I mean, if -- if I'm ever gonna
4 procrastinate about anything in my job, it will be starting
5 to write a difficult opinion because you know you're going to
6 be sweating it out as you start.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** But, you know, like most of us, you
9 learn to just start. And once you -- once I start, I
10 actually enjoy the writing process.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

12 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So it's sort of like running. I
13 think you know that I run a lot. And I usually don't look
14 forward to running, but I usually enjoy it and I'm glad I did
15 it.

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

17 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So I have to exercise some
18 self-discipline to start, but once I start, I enjoy it.

19 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah.

20 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Writing's the same way.

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** We're going to come back to your
22 running in a minute.

23 I saw an interview with Justice Scalia once who wrote
24 whether you agree with his philosophy or not, most people
25 agree he was a fascinating writer and a phenomenal writer.

1 But he said writing was hard for him, that it wasn't an easy
2 process, that it involved a lot of hard work.

3 And I found that fascinating because when you read his
4 written material, you go, oh, this is amazing writing. Does
5 it just drip out of him? And turns out that apparently it's
6 a lot of hard work.

7 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** It is. I mean, it's -- just like --

8 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Just like I think running takes
9 a lot of discipline and a lot of hard work. But you probably
10 get better at it the more you do it, too, I would think.

11 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yeah. I mean, like to me, sitting
12 in a comfortable chair with briefs and reading things, I
13 mean, I am working and it's a necessary part of my work. But
14 that really doesn't feel like work. I could --

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I see. Yeah.

16 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I actually enjoy that. But writing
17 does feel like work.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** It's the work part.

19 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yeah, it's the work part.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you're -- you serve on the
21 Fifth District Court of Appeals. You were Elect Chief Judge
22 of the District Court of Appeals. I think you were serving
23 as Chief Judge, and a spot opens on the Florida Supreme
24 Court. And correct me if I'm wrong, but was that slot one
25 that had to be filled from within the Fifth District?

1 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Correct. Yes.

2 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right. So you apply. And
3 for our listeners that don't know, the process is that one
4 applies to a committee. A committee interviews candidates,
5 narrows the list down, and sends a list of multiple names up
6 to the Governor, and the Governor selects one person from
7 that list for appointment.

8 So how many people were on your list?

9 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** The judicial nominating commission,
10 which is that committee of nine people, sent up three names
11 to the Governor.

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. And then the Governor
13 interviews -- I think at your level, the Governor himself
14 participates at some point in an interview?

15 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** That's correct. And it -- that was
16 an -- the process, once it got to that point, went very
17 quickly. And it was a -- it was an exciting but stressful
18 week.

19 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I'm sure.

20 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** We had -- we had the -- I had the
21 interview -- well, first -- I'll back up. Because, you know,
22 I had interviewed with the judicial -- judicial -- Ninth
23 Circuit Judicial Nominating Commission and -- when I got
24 appointed to the circuit bench all those years ago.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

1 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** And then had interviewed with the
2 Fifth DCA Judicial Nominating Commission. And those were --
3 I mean, it's a difficult interview, but in both of those
4 experiences, there was no audience. It wasn't recorded or
5 reproduced or anything like that. So you at least had the
6 comfort of knowing this conversation that I'm having is with
7 nine people and me, and that's a little less intimidating.

8 With the Supreme Court, there was an audience, and it
9 was being broadcast live on the internet, so there was a
10 television camera --

11 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I didn't know that.

12 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- which changes the dynamic. So it
13 was a pretty intimidating --

14 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

15 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- interview.

16 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

17 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** And then it was very shortly after
18 that, once the three names went up that night, after our
19 judicial nominating commission, that the Governor's office
20 called and set up an interview for -- for the -- the --
21 interview with his legal staff. All the lawyers in the
22 Office of General Counsel, the general counsel and the
23 lawyers in the office, on a Wednesday -- a Tuesday afternoon.

24 And then for all three of us, the interview with the
25 Governor himself late on that Wednesday afternoon. And so I

1 went to Tallahassee, and, you know, like any difficult thing,
2 you wish it was first thing in the morning so you --

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Get it over with.

4 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So, you know, you lose a little bit
5 of sleep at -- you know, the night before sort of worrying
6 about --

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right.

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- what questions you might get
9 asked and how that was gonna go. And then you have all day
10 to think about it, which may not be a great thing.

11 (Laughter.)

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Your anxiety's building.

13 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And then you have that
14 late-afternoon interview. And then that night you lose a
15 little sleep thinking about what maybe you shouldn't have
16 said in the interview.

17 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

18 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And then --

19 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I wish I'd added this one.

20 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** The big one with the Governor
21 himself, I mean, that's a little intimidating. And so you
22 had that. And then the next night, drove back from
23 Tallahassee. Both of those interviews were in Tallahassee to
24 Orlando. And then the next morning, Thursday, over to
25 Daytona Beach for our annual holiday luncheon. And as the

1 Chief Judge at the time, I was the person --

2 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Hosting the luncheon.

3 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- hosting the luncheon and thanking
4 all of our employees and the kind of things you normally do
5 as the head of an organization that's having a holiday
6 luncheon with its employees.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And I got the call from the
9 Governor's office after driving back Wednesday night, 15
10 minutes or so before the holiday luncheon.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Announcing the good news.

12 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Announcing the good news. But not
13 with -- also, which is typical, they didn't want anybody to
14 know until they had a chance to tell everybody, and really
15 until the press announcement the next morning, this was gonna
16 be in Tallahassee.

17 So I -- I had --

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You had to sit on that
19 overnight?

20 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I had to make it through the holiday
21 luncheon acting like everything was normal, getting questions
22 like, so when do you think the Governor's gonna make a
23 decision?

24 (Laughter.)

25 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** One never knows.

1 (Laughter.)

2 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** These things do take time.

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** These things take time.

4 (Laughter.)

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, that's great.

6 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Could be soon. Could be later.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's crazy.

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And then trying -- then had to
9 excuse myself from the court. I mean, I was planning to stay
10 the whole day. But I told my staff that, listen, I'm just so
11 worn out, which was completely true.

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay.

13 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** After, you know, this week of
14 interviews and driving back and forth, I am just -- just
15 emotionally exhausted. I'm gonna go home and work from home
16 the rest of the day.

17 And so I left and then called Julie on the way home and
18 saying you can't tell anybody, but we have to get in the car
19 and head to Tallahassee. We're due at the Governor's mansion
20 for breakfast early the next morning.

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And at the investiture, you told
22 a charming story, I thought, about that breakfast. Maybe you
23 can just share that very quickly with our listeners. It was
24 very cool what the Governor did. Why don't you tell --

25 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yeah. At first he calls and, you

1 know -- about the fact that I was gonna get the appointment.
2 And he'd like it if I could come for the press announcement
3 the next morning. And then I got a call back asking if -- if
4 I would like to have my family. And at this point he knew I
5 had extended family in Tallahassee -- my parents live there,
6 my sister, her husband. If all the family that could come
7 would come to the mansion, I think it was at 7:00, for
8 breakfast before the press announcement.

9 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

10 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And so it was -- the mansion was
11 decorated for the holiday season, and it was really, really
12 cool coming in at dark. It was dark.

13 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

14 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** It was completely dark in the
15 morning at that time of morning -- that time of year. And
16 walking into the beautifully lit Governor's Mansion, the
17 Governor met us at the door. He had memorized the -- he
18 found out -- got -- dealing with his staff, I told them who
19 was gonna be there. They had asked questions. And he knew
20 who was gonna be there, had figured out how to identify each
21 person so that he could greet each person by name as they
22 walked into the mansion.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great.

24 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And then sat down for an hour and
25 knew enough about each person to engage in a really warm

1 conversation with every one of my parents, my brother-in-law,
2 my sister, and my wife, my son. And it really just was very
3 special.

4 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's great. That's great.

5 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yeah. Because we often don't see
6 those -- kind of behind the scenes of that.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So that's a ...

9 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you had your investiture last
10 week at the court?

11 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yes.

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And I was honored and privileged
13 to attend and to get to speak at it. And you did something I
14 think was -- had not been done at the court before. Many
15 justices invite judges from around the state to come up and
16 view the investiture or -- or participate in one form or
17 another.

18 But you invited all the judges who could come up to come
19 up, and then had a procession of judges in robes into the
20 courtroom.

21 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Yes.

22 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And that -- I was part of that,
23 and I've seen a few of those in local courthouses, but never
24 at the Supreme Court. And I thought that was really
25 impressive. I wonder what it looked like from your

1 perspective, because you were in the courtroom when we were
2 marching in. But it really looked cool.

3 What did you think of that?

4 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** It was very impressive. And I -- I
5 really wanted to do that because I -- I'm -- like most
6 judges, if -- you and I know this because we've worked in
7 judicial education. And one of the first things we do with
8 judges is get the personality test and talk with them about
9 how -- with their particular personality, what pitfalls there
10 may be on the bench and that kind of thing.

11 And most judges are introverts, naturally. And I am.
12 So the thought of an event with hundreds of people that's
13 gonna be televised live with me as the focus was not one
14 that -- it was very painful. It wasn't anything I was
15 looking forward to.

16 And -- but I thought, you know, it's something I need to
17 do. But if I could turn it into something that really
18 honored the branch and the good work that all of our judges
19 do, in addition to talking about me, that that would be
20 something that I would really enjoy.

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Well --

22 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And so I --

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- I was there, and it was
24 really impressive. And one of the first speakers was one of
25 our circuit judges, Dan Traver, who's one of the newest

1 judges on our bench. But -- the story is that you joined a
2 running club, as I understand it, here in Central Florida,
3 and Dan Traver, who ran as a collegiate track athlete, was
4 the coach of that club. So he told this charming story about
5 you coming out to run and not being very good at it when you
6 started.

7 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I was horrible.

8 (Laughter.)

9 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** But in your typical fashion, got
10 better and better and better, and now you are an avid runner.

11 So tell us a little bit about your running, how -- how
12 often do you run? How much do you enjoy it? And what did
13 you think of Dan's remarks?

14 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** No, I really enjoyed Dan's remarks.
15 But when I -- so I ran for exercise when I was in -- not
16 competitively at all, but just personally for exercise while
17 I was in law school. I spent a lot of time studying, and it
18 was just a good way to keep your mind fresh and let off
19 tension --

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Stay awake.

21 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- and steam and stay awake and
22 everything. So when I got into private practice and with all
23 that stress, I probably should have kept it up -- and I did
24 until we had children. And then with children, everything --
25 that sort of exercise dropped out of the picture. And when I

1 first started on the circuit bench, I just was adding weight
2 like crazy, because now I'm sitting almost all day --

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

4 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- in a courtroom.

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

6 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And very little exercise. And it's
7 a stressful job, as we talked about earlier.

8 And so I knew I needed something to get in shape, to
9 stay in shape, and to -- again, to relieve the stress and
10 just help clear the mind. And so I decided to go back to
11 running.

12 There was this running club at the downtown Y. Dan had
13 started it, I think. But he was like the coach and was a
14 fantastic runner. I mean, really good competitor, runner.
15 And so I started joining.

16 And literally, the first few runs around downtown
17 Orlando -- a six-mile run was the Monday night run, which was
18 where they had the most people.

19 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

20 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** At Monday night. Six miles. Start
21 at 6:00. And I could always get back to the Y, but I didn't
22 know what their route was because I couldn't keep up with
23 anybody in the group. So I couldn't see the person in front
24 of me by the time we got about four miles in. I mean, I did
25 about six miles, and I got back -- and most everybody had

1 left by the time I got back. This is absolutely true.

2 So when he said I was bad, I was really, really bad.

3 And I remember after a while, I kept showing up and I kept
4 showing up. And I still -- I got to where I could at least
5 see the people at the end of the pack and could --

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Know that you were on track.

7 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- and know that I was on track.

8 The -- I can see this conversation as clear as can be. As I
9 talked to Dan for the first time about how I might could
10 improve and he -- he sort of -- so what are you doing? I
11 come out and I run on Monday nights. When do you run? You
12 know, that's what I do Monday nights. So what can you do to
13 improve? Hmm. You might try running more than one time a
14 week.

15 (Laughter.)

16 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** If you want to get faster and
17 improve, that was his first advice. And it was good advice.
18 They had a Wednesday night track workout, and I started doing
19 that and added that and then added the Friday night. And
20 then, um --

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So did he also -- did he teach a
22 technique? Was technique the issue or was it really just
23 getting the miles in?

24 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** It was really just getting the miles
25 in. Yeah.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Well, I'm gonna shift gears a
2 little bit.

3 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Okay.

4 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Because one of the common themes
5 that I know to be true at your investiture is what a humble
6 person you are, and so I know that you're not gonna toot your
7 own horn, but if you're comfortable, I would like to talk
8 just a little bit about how you and your family volunteer in
9 Honduras in the years that you've been doing that and how you
10 first got involved in that.

11 So are you comfortable talking to our listeners a little
12 bit about that?

13 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Sure. Yeah.

14 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So how did you start your
15 volunteer work -- is it Central America?

16 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** That's correct.

17 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah.

18 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** So my parents have always, through
19 church and other things, been service oriented. I mean
20 service to the community and to others and that kind of
21 thing.

22 So I grew up and went on a trip to Dominican Republic
23 when I was actually too young to go on the trip. It was sort
24 of a mission trip where you helped people. I mean just
25 general mission trip. But they were chaperones. So even

1 though I was too young to go, I ended up going because they
2 were chaperones.

3 So I grew up with that experience. And those were
4 always very rewarding experiences to me. I always felt like
5 when I went somewhere where people had so little to give, I
6 ended up getting more back in return.

7 I remember going on that first trip, Henrietta -- and I
8 can't remember the guy's name, but there was a couple that
9 worked this little snack vending area at the camp where this
10 group stayed. And to this day, they were probably the most
11 joyful people I've ever met. And I saw their house. It was
12 dirt floor, one room, and no running water.

13 And so that contrast to our materialist society and
14 seeing people like that, I think I took more away from that
15 experience than we gave while I was there, right?

16 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting.

17 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** My wife did not grow up with that
18 experience. So after we got married and I had early on, you
19 know, two weeks, if I could get it, of vacation every year,
20 you know, I wanted to have some kind of experience like that.
21 And her thought was, you know, we have so little time off,
22 and if we're gonna spend time and money doing something, it
23 ought to really be a vacation, not going somewhere to work,
24 like build a house or build a school or something like that.

25 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

1 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** So she was sort of resistant. But I
2 had a friend who was a cardiologist, and he and I -- his
3 wife -- we had had similar experiences, the cardiologist
4 friend and I, and his wife and Julie had had similar
5 experiences. So he'd been wanting to do this kind of thing
6 with his wife for years like I had. And so we conspired.
7 They were good friends. And I figured if they were -- this
8 couple, these friends were going, that Julie would think it
9 was a good idea because it was gonna be fun with these
10 friends along for the ride.

11 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. It might be a little bit
12 like a vacation, right?

13 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** So we -- he found a trip with a
14 group called Surgical Medical Assistance Relief Teams, went
15 down and set up a clinic and took down surgeons and did cleft
16 palate and other surgeries. But they also had brought down
17 other sorts of drugs and had a pharmacist down there so when
18 someone was seen in the general clinic, they could give them
19 the necessary prescriptions and actually give them the meds
20 that they needed.

21 And so we went down there for a little less than a week
22 to work in that clinic. And this mom comes into the clinic
23 with a little girl who was 12 years old and 47 pounds and
24 just rail thin and blue, completely blue. I mean, she was
25 born with her heart turned around the wrong way in her chest

1 and was -- the way the cardiologist said it to me and -- in
2 non-cardiological terms, she was just plumbed incorrectly so
3 that her blood that was supposed to go to the chamber that
4 sent it to the lungs to get oxygen dumped most of her used
5 blood into the chamber that sent it right back into her body
6 without ever going to the lungs.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, my goodness.

8 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** As I understood it, about a third of
9 her blood ever got oxygenated. It was really miraculous that
10 this kid was even alive at 12 years old.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

12 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** She'd never been able to go to
13 school. She couldn't walk across the room without being --

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Exhausted.

15 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- completely exhausted.

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

17 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** She was exhausted all the time. And
18 so Julie, you know, just passionately came and found me and
19 said, you have to meet this kid and we have to do something.
20 I'm like, I don't know what we're gonna do. We talked to
21 the -- my -- our cardiologist friend, the missionaries down
22 there, and the conclusion was that she shouldn't be alive
23 now. If you could even get the approvals from the United
24 States Government to get a poor Honduran citizen into this
25 country for any reason, much -- even in medical necessity, if

1 you could get those approvals, that it would take probably
2 six months even to get the visa, and she shouldn't be alive
3 now, she's probably not gonna be alive for six months, and
4 she might not survive the flight.

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

6 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And so you're probably wasting your
7 time if you try.

8 But we both came back determined. I worked for the
9 county at the time, and Mel Martinez was a county chairman,
10 and I went straight to Mel. I had medical records in hand,
11 and I said could you call the --

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Someone in Washington.

13 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** Well, he -- yeah.

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah.

15 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** I used all the resources I could.

16 And he also helped get me in touch with the person that was
17 in charge of the -- Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital. They
18 had just started a joint venture with the Nemours Children's
19 Heart Clinic, and they had a cardiology team, a pediatric
20 cardiology team, that had the expertise to do the surgery
21 there.

22 And the cardiologist was from Chile and spoke Spanish.
23 He didn't -- we didn't -- when we finally got the medical
24 records -- I was trying to figure out how to translate these
25 medical records. He said, I don't need that. I can just

1 read them.

2 So -- but three weeks after we left Honduras, she was in
3 Orlando having open heart surgery.

4 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Amazing.

5 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And I'll never forget when she --
6 her mom saw her for the first time and she was pink instead
7 of blue, her mom just fell on the floor crying.

8 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, my goodness.

9 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And that kid has grown into --
10 that's been 17 years ago. She's a beautiful young woman now.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow. That's fabulous.

12 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And she ended up having a
13 complication. They went back. She had a complication,
14 needed to come back for a follow-up surgery, and her mom was
15 pregnant when she was here and too pregnant to come back when
16 she -- when her daughter came back. And so a missionary from
17 Honduras flew this child back again, and she ended up staying
18 with us for about a year total.

19 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

20 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** The full extent of her visa so that
21 the doctors could just monitor her here so if there was
22 another complication, they could handle it. So she -- we
23 didn't have an extra bedroom. She -- we actually did
24 build -- we closed in our garage to make a bedroom, but she
25 was so comfortable a family -- she lived in sort of two

1 rooms -- structure was sort of two rooms and no running
2 water.

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

4 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** But grandparents, there were --
5 when -- six siblings until the child was born after -- you
6 know, there was a child born when she was in the States.

7 The two parents, grandchildren, grandparents and another
8 half sister that was there part of the time in this
9 structure. So she was -- and they slept -- like, all the
10 kids slept on the same pallet. And so she was afraid to be
11 in her own room. She ended up sleeping --

12 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** She didn't want a room by
13 herself?

14 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- in my daughter's room the whole
15 time. So she --

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's amazing.

17 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- and my daughter became really
18 good friends. And she became like a daughter. So we started
19 taking teams back to do all sorts of things. The first was
20 to -- initially it was to build the house -- a house for the
21 family.

22 They -- the property that they had, which was far out of
23 town, didn't have running water, and it would have cost a lot
24 of money to get them water there. And we were able to find a
25 house, with the help of Make-a-Wish Foundation that needed a

1 lot of work.

2 But we loaded up suitcases with the electrical supplies
3 we would need and all that stuff and took a team of people
4 from my family, Julie's family, our church, down there to
5 rehab this house that Make-a-Wish helped us buy for the
6 family and move them in that second trip.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So how many times have you and
8 your family been to Central America? Is it an annual event
9 now or --

10 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** It was annual for a long time. And
11 then about five years ago now, our children are, at this
12 point, out of the house, and Julie got more involved with an
13 organization that helps train women, give them a skill, and
14 then gives them a micro loan to help start a business or --
15 or an internship that results in a job. They do cosmetology.
16 They do business -- like secretarial kind of administrative
17 skills. They teach -- they call them computer classes, but
18 that's the administrative skill thing. And then they have a
19 sewing school. You can actually make a living down there
20 sewing. People don't go out and buy new clothes all the
21 time.

22 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

23 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So Julie is an artist, and she added
24 a jewelry program. And so she teaches jewelry skills, and --
25 and then they've been able to employ a lot of women at a fair

1 wage down there through the skills taught through the jewelry
2 program and are now producing for some U.S. companies that
3 sell -- predominantly online --

4 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

5 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** -- jewelry here. So they -- the
6 organization really also now does directly employ women and
7 elevate -- elevate them.

8 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's fabulous.

9 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So, yeah, it's really cool. So she
10 spends a lot of time down there.

11 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So will you be able to continue
12 that with your schedule on the court, you think?

13 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** You know, as a District Court of
14 Appeals Judge in the electronic age, I had a lot of more
15 flexibility. We had fewer instances that required our
16 attendance at the courthouse.

17 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

18 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** And could do almost everything
19 remotely as long as we had an internet connection. The
20 Supreme Court's a lot more demanding than that.

21 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah.

22 >> **JUSTICE LAWSON:** So I will not be able to spend as
23 much time in Honduras.

24 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** We're gonna wrap this up today,
25 but I'm gonna try to get a commitment out of you.

1 So we haven't even touched on your address during your
2 investiture, which I want to talk to you about. And then I
3 want to someday talk about these demands that you've
4 mentioned as a Florida Supreme Court Justice.

5 But for our listeners, I'm sure now you have -- you're
6 able to conclude, as we all have who've met and worked with
7 Justice Lawson, he's a humble man. He's a brilliant man.
8 He's a lifelong public servant. We're as proud as we could
9 be here in Ninth Circuit that one of our own has been
10 appointed to the Florida Supreme Court.

11 I told the Governor this face-to-face last week. I'm
12 sure the choice is hard. I'm sure that very qualified people
13 are sent to him for selection on to the Court. And making a
14 decision like that, I'm sure, was a hard one for him. But
15 from our perspective here, he made the absolute best decision
16 that he could possibly make, and we look forward to least 15
17 years of service from you on the Florida Supreme Court.

18 And I know I speak on behalf of all of the judges here,
19 but really the entire legal community, how proud we are and
20 how much we wish you the best of success in your career on
21 the Court.

22 Thank you so much.

23 **>> JUSTICE LAWSON:** Thank you so much. Thanks for
24 having me.

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6 (Music.)

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