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OPEN NINTH:
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM
PINE HILLS PROUD
EPISODE 25
JUNE 20, 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:** Good afternoon. We're here
7 today with County Court Judge Gisela St. Laurent, who was
8 elected to the county court in Orange County in a race -- a
9 contested race in 2016. But I use that word guidedly because
10 Judge Laurent didn't have an opponent. There were four
11 county court races. Three of the judges who were elected ran
12 contested races. You filed for an open seat, but no one
13 filed against you, which I think speaks volumes to your
14 reputation in the community.

15 So welcome to "Open Mic."

16 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Thank you so much.

17 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So tell us where you were born
18 and tell us a little bit about where your parents are from.
19 And then we're going to work into your local community
20 involvement.

21 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Okay. Great.

22 Well, I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, which is much of a
23 surprise. I don't know anything about Cleveland. My parents
24 moved over there for business opportunities.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Where are your parents from?

1 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** They're from the Dominican Republic.
2 And so they came at different times in their life. My dad
3 probably came down when he was 15. My mom came down when she
4 was 15. My dad is two years older than her. And they both
5 came to New York City.

6 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Ah.

7 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** So all of my cousins and all of my
8 family, they were born in New York City, except for me.

9 (Laughter.)

10 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** So I was born in Cleveland, Ohio.

11 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right. So you're an Ohioan.

12 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Yep.

13 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And how long did you live in
14 Ohio? Do you have any memory of it or were you just a child?

15 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Not at all. Moved to Florida when I
16 was two years old.

17 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Two years.

18 Okay. So let's talk about Florida then. So did your
19 parents move to Central Florida when you were two?

20 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes. Again, for business
21 opportunities. My dad worked all his life in an auto body
22 shop, and so at that -- around that time, he had an
23 opportunity to come down here and learn from somebody and
24 maybe open up his own body shop, which he eventually did.

25 And my mom, her sister owned a dry cleaners, and it was

1 an opportunity for her to come down and own her own dry
2 cleaners --

3 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Really?

4 >> JUDGE LAURENT: -- as well.

5 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Interesting.

6 So where did you move when you located to Central
7 Florida?

8 >> JUDGE LAURENT: We first moved to Pine Hills.

9 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

10 >> JUDGE LAURENT: I lived in -- they've changed the
11 name several times. Back then it was called Georgetown
12 Apartments on Silver Star and Pine Hills.

13 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: And so your dad had a business.
14 Was that located in Pine Hills?

15 >> JUDGE LAURENT: It was Car-O-Van. They're still
16 there. It's at the end of Silver Star, I think, and John
17 Young.

18 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right. And then your mom had a
19 dry cleaning business. Was that in Pine Hills?

20 >> JUDGE LAURENT: That's Pine Hills/Lockhart area.

21 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

22 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Still that -- that area is still
23 zoned for Evans High School, but it was on Riverside Drive, I
24 believe, and Magnolia Homes Road.

25 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: And what year was that? When

1 did your family pick up and come to Florida, if you remember?

2 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** I was two, so it would have been '78.

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. So you're two years old,
4 1978, your parents move to Pine Hills. Do you pretty much
5 grow up in the Pine Hills area?

6 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes. And in the outlying areas
7 because we moved a lot. I mean, we never really owned
8 property or a home. We lived in apartments and duplexes that
9 we would rent. So I had chances to live -- you know, Powers
10 Drive, Silver Star. When we moved to, like, the outskirts, I
11 lived on Magnolia Pointe, which is Magnolia Homes Road, which
12 is closer to my mom's business. That was still zoned for
13 high -- so I went to Lockhart Middle School.

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. And then from Lockhart
15 Middle School, I guess --

16 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Evans.

17 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- Evans High School if you
18 lived in Pine Hills.

19 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes.

20 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And graduated from Evans. What
21 year did you graduate?

22 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** 1994.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And where did your journey take
24 you after that?

25 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Well, it's funny because, you know, I

1 dreamed of going to college, and my -- my mom, she -- with
2 her education -- my parents didn't have a high school
3 diploma, she really thought that -- and I think a lot of
4 people back then, 'til this day, old-school Hispanics think
5 that if you study too much, you just become crazy and you
6 become blind. And there's all these negative effects of
7 studying too much. Or you become old and no guy's ever gonna
8 want you.

9 So she wanted me to do six-month trade. My dad, you
10 know, he was my cheerleader, and he said, you know, you can
11 be whatever you want to be. That included college.

12 But I think that he kind of retracted from that because
13 he didn't want me to go away.

14 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Uh-huh.

15 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** I was accepted to University of
16 Florida. He didn't let me go, so I started at Valencia.

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

18 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** And that was a big letdown for me,
19 because at that time people used to say, you know, Valencia
20 was Crookman High School, and I really wanted to go to
21 college. And so -- but I did my two years at Valencia. I
22 showed my dad that this is something that I was about, going
23 to college. It wasn't just, like, a whim. And after I got
24 my AA at Valencia, he drove me to Gainesville as promised.

25 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow. That's great.

1 (Laughter.)

2 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So how many siblings do you
3 have?

4 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Four.

5 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Are you --

6 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** I'm the oldest.

7 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So the issue for your parents
8 and your culture was oldest child. So obviously the first
9 one, should our child, in our culture -- should we encourage
10 them to go to college or encourage them to stay local and
11 work in a trade?

12 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes.

13 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you kind of were the
14 trailblazer in your family.

15 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes. Yes.

16 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. And was that issue -- did
17 your siblings then go to college?

18 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** No. You know, we are still in our
19 infancy of bringing that to a full head because, um, my
20 sister, who I love very much, you know -- coming from a
21 low-income area, coming from an area where your parents are
22 working all the time -- my parents pretty much worked every
23 day -- there's a lot of teen pregnancy. So my sister became
24 pregnant at 15.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Was she in Evans High School at

1 the time?

2 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** She didn't make it to high school.
3 She was in middle school when she got pregnant.

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

5 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** So she went to Beta, which is a
6 program --

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

8 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** -- for teen pregnancies.

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

10 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** She went to school there. She got
11 her GED. And then she was, you know, hustling. She was
12 trying to take care of a baby. She had more babies after
13 that, and she didn't get to go to college until much later in
14 life. Now she has two Master's degrees.

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Really? Well, that's
16 phenomenal.

17 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes. Amazing.

18 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's quite a success story,
19 isn't it?

20 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** And she says because of me. Because
21 I was always pushing her to go to school, and I thought
22 that -- you know, especially now that you have kids, you
23 really want to be a good example to them.

24 My next sister -- well, my father had another sister
25 that was outside the marriage, and so she did go to school,

1 and she's living in New York.

2 And then my youngest sister, which is after the other
3 person, she, um -- she's -- did the trade, like my mom said.

4 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. What is she doing today?

5 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** She's doing several trades. She did
6 the hair school. She didn't like it. And then she's now
7 going back to school for, I think, criminal justice. But
8 she's not working. She works at the -- she works at a cell
9 phone store.

10 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you're -- if I understand it
11 correctly, you're really the first person in your immediate
12 family to go to college and graduate from college?

13 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yeah. From traditional college, yes.

14 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** From traditional college. And
15 that was at the University of Florida?

16 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes.

17 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And did you go straight to law
18 school from there? What was your career track?

19 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Well, I took a two-year break
20 because -- you know, I laugh at my mom and my family. And
21 it's a joke now, but, you know, when I graduated from college
22 at 21 years old, you know, in the Hispanic culture, a lot of
23 my family members believed that I would be an old maid
24 because I wasn't married.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Are you an old maid at 21?

1 (Laughter.)

2 >> JUDGE LAURENT: No.

3 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: That's not possible, is it?

4 >> JUDGE LAURENT: I think you are in Spanish culture.
5 Everybody in my family had children. Everybody was settled
6 down. And my mom felt like I was still trying to go to
7 school, and she was worried about my future.

8 And so I did get married. I did have two beautiful
9 daughters. But like most young marriages, that didn't last.
10 I had -- the University of Florida got me a great job with
11 KPMG where I was a forensic accountant. I took the job in
12 New York City. So it was like the dream job.

13 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Those jobs are hard to get.

14 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Yes. But the University of Florida's
15 great about their student resources and making sure that
16 their students, their graduates, have great jobs, and so --

17 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: So did you go up to New York
18 with two small children?

19 >> JUDGE LAURENT: I had them in New York City.

20 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: You had them while you were in
21 New York City? Okay.

22 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Yes.

23 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: While you were working at KPMG.

24 >> JUDGE LAURENT: KPMG.

25 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Yeah.

1 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** And then I realized that that was a
2 short-lived marriage, and I came back home so I can go to law
3 school, which was my original dream. Because I've always
4 dreamed of being a judge. And so I could have my children
5 with my family because all my family was here.

6 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you come back to Florida, go
7 to University of Florida Law School?

8 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes, 2000 -- I graduated from
9 undergrad in 1998. And then I started law school in 2001 and
10 graduated in 2003.

11 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right. So you step out of
12 law school into what field at that point?

13 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** I had a great mentor at the
14 University of Florida. I wanted to do international
15 bankruptcy law and travel the world, representing foreign
16 investors.

17 My mentor told me, you know, you really need to have
18 trial skills if you want to be a great attorney. If you want
19 to be a great judge, you have to know what the courtroom is
20 like. You have to be comfortable in the courtroom. And you
21 have to know how to maneuver a trial.

22 So I went to a public defender's office for my first
23 year.

24 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Here in the Ninth Judicial
25 Circuit?

1 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Yes. I worked for Bob Wesley.

2 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Bob Wesley -- okay. Right. And
3 I was a single mom at that time, so I definitely needed to
4 make more money.

5 (Laughter.)

6 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

7 >> JUDGE LAURENT: And I went into private practice
8 after my first year at the PD's office.

9 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: So what kind of practice did you
10 start?

11 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Family law --

12 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

13 >> JUDGE LAURENT: -- and criminal defense.

14 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right. And were you alone your
15 whole -- you know, solo your whole career?

16 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Well, I worked for Longwell & Gentle
17 for the first eight years after the public defender's office.
18 And then when I really started focusing on, you know, my
19 journey to the bench, I went out on my own because it's a
20 large investment of time --

21 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

22 >> JUDGE LAURENT: -- either trying to get appointed or
23 running a campaign.

24 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: So where along this track did
25 you meet Bradley, your husband?

1 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** We were coworkers at the public
2 defender's office. But there was no romantic relationship at
3 that point. I just knew him. I loved being in trial and so
4 did he, so every once in a while he'd come watch my trials
5 and I'll watch his trials, and we were just friends at the
6 time.

7 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. And then what year did
8 you-all get married?

9 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** So I left the PD's office in 2004,
10 and my husband and I got married in 2008.

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

12 So you said earlier you knew from a young age that you
13 wanted to be a judge. Not just a lawyer, but a judge. What
14 sparked that interest? What got you thinking about that?

15 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Well, you know, my father always
16 talked about, you know, what a professional woman meant to
17 him. And that was either somebody who was in the medical
18 field or someone who was in the legal field. And I knew that
19 the medical field was not for me because I fainted every time
20 I had to get shots or blood drawn or anything like that.
21 That was not my favorite place to be.

22 When I looked at -- even at children in stories,
23 whenever they had the judge, it was like the whole community
24 would come to the judge for a resolution. And, like, even in
25 children's books. So I remember one of my favorite stories

1 was about an aunt who broke her leg -- it's in Spanish.

2 But she would go blaming everybody, like the snow. And
3 the snow would blame the sun. And the sun would blame a
4 fence. But they would go to a judge with this issue, like
5 who broke the aunt's leg? Why did it fall?

6 And I loved it. I loved being part of that community.
7 My father had an auto body shop -- East/West Auto Body Shop.
8 And a lot of Hispanics would come to him. He had a softball
9 team as well. So there was a lot of community.

10 They would come to him for questions and answers, like,
11 if they didn't know how to do something. Like their Social
12 Security card, or where's the best place to get X, Y, Z, or
13 whatever. He was there for them.

14 And so I figured that's what I wanted to do. I want to
15 be a community leader. I love the legal field, and so I
16 wanted to be a judge.

17 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So I know, because we know each
18 other, that your reputation for community activity prior to
19 becoming a judge was renowned and well-known. It sounds like
20 you got that, in part, from your parents and growing up in
21 the Pine Hills community. Is that a fair statement?

22 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes, very fair statement.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So why don't you tell the
24 listeners some of your activities prior to being on the bench
25 with organizations in the community, in addition to

1 practicing law full-time.

2 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Okay. My first exposure of being
3 able to give back, even, you know, coming out as an attorney,
4 were backpack projects. And I really embraced the
5 opportunity through different organizations to operate in
6 backpack projects where I could actually, you know, by
7 sitting on the committee or the board of the -- they always
8 try to brainstorm, what school are we going to donate to? So
9 I would write -- say, I know this school. And take them
10 there. Because a lot of the kids, their parents either
11 don't -- can't afford to get all the school supplies for
12 school, or that's not their main priority.

13 So with the backpack projects, going back to the local
14 schools, we were able to give the child a brand-new book bag
15 filled with pencils, markers, crayons, little scissors. And
16 their eyes would light up. They would be so excited.

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

18 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** It was like Christmastime for them.
19 Because if not, they were going to go to school embarrassed
20 that they didn't have these things.

21 So I did that. I also volunteered a lot at the schools.
22 I joined Justice Teaching --

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

24 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** -- and I was able to go and teach
25 civics to the local schools, at Metro West Elementary, which

1 is close to Pine Hills, and go back.

2 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

3 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Not every school participates. So
4 Metro West was the closest one that I could do. And it was
5 great. I'd get bags of candy, and I would go into the
6 classroom and talk about petit theft. And I'd use Walmart.
7 I'd use the bag of candy.

8 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Interesting.

9 >> JUDGE LAURENT: We would have the jurors. We would
10 have the bailiff. Somebody gets to be the judge. And I
11 would just teach them about, you know, jury duty. And at the
12 end, after the -- they voted guilty or not guilty, then they
13 all got to eat the candy. So it was --

14 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: That's great.

15 >> JUDGE LAURENT: -- a lot of fun. I also -- the
16 Hispanic Bar Association is very involved in the community.
17 We would have a *conocer tus derechos*, which is a "Know Your
18 Rights" series. And in the infancy of the program, we would
19 actually go out to small communities and talk to people about
20 their rights. Now that the program has grown so much, we
21 actually do it on Orange TV because it actually --

22 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: So I know you were an officer in
23 the Hispanic Bar Association. What offices did you hold?

24 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Yes. I started out -- I did judicial
25 relations chair.

1 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Okay.

2 >> JUDGE LAURENT: I was very excited to do that because
3 I wanted to learn more about the path to the bench.

4 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

5 >> JUDGE LAURENT: So I was in charge of that program.

6 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

7 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Getting our judges, the Ninth
8 Judicial Circuit judges, to by volunteers, finding out what
9 were the different paths to the bench and educating our
10 community -- all lawyers. Not just the Hispanic Bar
11 Association attorneys. Anyone could come in. It was a CLE,
12 "On the Path to the Bench." So I did that for a few years.
13 And then I switched over to -- because there was a need. If
14 somebody else wanted to do judicial relations chair -- I
15 think I did public relations, which is very difficult.
16 You're in charge of, like, the email blast that come out
17 every two weeks. And you're always looking for content.

18 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right.

19 >> JUDGE LAURENT: And I -- there was something that was
20 closely related to public relations. I think it's, like,
21 community relations. Trying to find out what the need was in
22 the community. And bringing events to the community.

23 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Did you hold another office?
24 Any other offices in the Hispanic Bar Association?

25 >> JUDGE LAURENT: I don't think so.

1 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Right. Okay.

2 So growing up, what language was the predominant
3 language in your household?

4 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Spanish.

5 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: So when you moved here from
6 Ohio, did you -- were you bilingual by then?

7 >> JUDGE LAURENT: No.

8 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: You were two years old, so I
9 imagine it was mostly Spanish.

10 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Only Spanish. I learned English in
11 school.

12 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: And starting when you started --

13 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Kindergarten.

14 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: -- kindergarten through --

15 >> JUDGE LAURENT: Twelfth grade.

16 >> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN: Through elementary school and
17 into high school.

18 >> JUDGE LAURENT: I was kept in the ESOL -- I was
19 earmarked ESOL from K through 12. And so not that I enjoyed
20 that. I would have rather stopped ESOL at fifth grade, but
21 they kind of, um -- back then, I don't think so much now,
22 they would really coddle their ESOL students. They wanted to
23 make sure that you got enough time for testing and
24 everything. So they kept you in the program. You couldn't
25 get out.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So now you're one of the few
2 judges on the bench in this community -- well, first of all,
3 in Osceola County -- you're in Orange County. In Osceola
4 County, Spanish is the majority minority, and about 58
5 percent of the population speak Spanish. In Orange County,
6 the numbers aren't quite as high. But we have a large
7 Spanish-speaking population.

8 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes.

9 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you sit on the bench, and
10 you're bilingual and you can speak the language of many of
11 the litigants and witnesses who appear in front of you.

12 I know we use translators because we're required to, but
13 certainly you can communicate in both English and Spanish to
14 the litigants who appear in front of you, and you understand
15 their culture.

16 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** It's an amazing opportunity. I
17 think, you know, just when I say -- you know, this is a joke
18 that my dad used to say all the time. He used to say when I
19 was younger, don't make me use all my English in one day.
20 Because it's hard --

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

22 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** -- because it was difficult. And he
23 felt like he had only this little cup of English that he
24 could use at any given time for emergency purposes only. And
25 I feel that when the litigants come into my courtroom, even

1 by me just saying their name and they could hear that I know
2 Spanish. I can say their name in Spanish. And it calms down
3 their nerves. I can see like, okay, they feel much more
4 comfortable. Because it doesn't matter if you speak the
5 language fluently, if you're nervous, you're nervous.

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

7 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** And having a language barrier is an
8 additional discomfort that somebody will have when they come
9 to court.

10 And if we're waiting for an interpreter and someone's
11 anxious, I can tell them in Spanish -- and I ask everyone in
12 the courtroom, is it okay if I just advise them that we have
13 an interpreter on the way and everything's okay? And just
14 have a seat. Just wait a moment. We're going to have
15 somebody with you right away.

16 And, you know, I give the courtesy both ways. Whenever
17 a Spanish interpreter comes in, I have a roomful of
18 litigants, I let the English-speaking litigants know -- and I
19 ask them, does anyone mind if I take the Spanish cases first
20 because we have an interpreter, and she's in high demand in
21 the courtroom.

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

23 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** And everybody's like, no, not a
24 problem. But I don't want them to think, oh, just because
25 they don't speak Spanish, they get to go first -- or don't

1 speak English.

2 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** What lessons do you feel you
3 learned by being raised in Pine Hills and having attended
4 school at Evans and at Riverside Elementary and Lockhart
5 Middle? What lessons do you carry with you from those
6 experiences?

7 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Hard work. Hard work. You know,
8 nothing is a given, you know? Growing up in Pine Hills,
9 you'd see a family that you thought had it all together,
10 everything was fine. And the next day, they were getting
11 evicted and their stuff was out on the street and they had to
12 leave. So I think, you know, hard work, that never stops.
13 It's not like you get ahead of the curve and then you can
14 relax. I mean, you always have to be working hard, and I
15 think setting an example. And I don't take anything for
16 granted.

17 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So one of the disciplines that
18 you took away from your experiences is a strong work ethic,
19 which is a great one to have as a judge, because no matter
20 what field you practiced in as a attorney, you can't know all
21 of the law when you become a judge.

22 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** No.

23 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And so you have to have that
24 structure that you created over your lifetime to learn --

25 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Mm-hmm.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- new topics, and that's worked
2 to your advantage.

3 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** And I think another -- another layer
4 of that is just respect for time. I know that people in the
5 Pine Hills community, and in many of the low-income
6 communities in our area, they're blue-collar workers who are
7 hourly employees. So I really do want to work hard to make
8 sure that my courtroom is efficient because someone may not
9 be able to afford to come back to my courtroom multiple days.
10 It's very important for them to get --

11 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And tell our listeners what kind
12 of cases you're handling in county court.

13 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Right. County court criminal.

14 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right. And that's a
15 pretty heavy docket.

16 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** It is. It is.

17 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So I believe -- and you correct
18 me if I get this wrong -- that you're the first elected
19 Hispanic female in Orange County's history; is that true?

20 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** For county court.

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

22 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Judge Leticia Marques was the first
23 for circuit court. And I am the first female Hispanic for
24 county court. And it's an honor that I will always deeply
25 care about.

1 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And the community, I think, has
2 recognized your background and your heritage in numerous
3 organizations and through well-deserved awards.

4 But tell me what it means to you personally to represent
5 the community that you do represent? That is, both Pine
6 Hills and the Hispanic community.

7 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** You know, it's the center of who I
8 am. And if I can -- my career lifetime be a lighthouse to
9 any other, um, persons, you know, from the community that I
10 come from, Orange County, you know, female Hispanic,
11 minorities, if I could be a lighthouse and let them know, it
12 doesn't matter what your background is. It doesn't matter if
13 your parents didn't go to high school and your siblings -- if
14 your siblings didn't go to high school. You can set a goal.
15 You can reach that goal. It doesn't have to be, you know,
16 being a judge. That's great. And I like to tell people,
17 listen, you know, I'm the first. That means that all these
18 years that we've had this courthouse, the courthouses, the
19 justice system in Orange County, there has never been that.
20 You could be the first whatever you want to be.

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

22 **>> JUDGE LAURENT:** Just putting your mind to it. It
23 doesn't mean because no one else has done it that you can't.

24 **>> CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Is there any particular
25 challenge that you have as a judge that you didn't anticipate

1 that you would have now? Now that you have a robe and you
2 preside over court, is there anything you think, well, I
3 didn't quite understand that when I was watching from the
4 other side of the courtroom?

5 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Well, I think that, you know, um --
6 I've always been -- and I don't think this is really a
7 challenge, it's more like an awareness. I've always been a
8 people person. I love meeting people, talking to people.
9 And now I don't know when I'm out and about in the community
10 if people are going to come and appear before me someday.

11 So I think that now more -- I have more of an
12 appreciation that I'm always on. Like, I'm a judge wherever
13 I go. I'm a judge at Publix, you know? So I'm not just
14 going to go in my gym clothes to the Publix. I don't know
15 who's going to see me.

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

17 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** I think that that awareness, that
18 responsibility, at least that I take as a responsibility, to
19 me is an awesome responsibility because I always feel like I
20 have to go well dressed, well prepared, well versed. I don't
21 want to be caught off guard and see somebody.

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

23 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** I want them to say, that's the judge.
24 And then say, oh, yeah, she looks like a judge.

25 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you have, what, four

1 daughters at home?

2 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes.

3 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And you have a husband who's an
4 attorney. And the mom is a judge. Are they destined for law
5 or where are they headed, do you think?

6 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** You know, Judge Lauten, remember, I
7 said, I love hard work. I think they've seen me work, and
8 they've seen me -- how hard it was to get here, and I think
9 they're scared of that. So I still try to instill the hard
10 work in them.

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

12 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** But they really want a field that's
13 not as hard.

14 (Laughter.)

15 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. All right.

16 Understandable. That's understandable.

17 Well, judge -- and I want to congratulate you on your
18 election. And I want to tell the listeners that we are now
19 colleagues and you're doing a tremendous job as a county
20 court judge. And we're fortunate to have you. And as I
21 started off saying, I think it speaks volumes that when you
22 filed to run for an open seat -- meaning you weren't
23 challenging an incumbent judge, traditionally, lawyers
24 compete with one another in the elective process to be
25 elected to that position -- and your reputation was so strong

1 that no one filed against you, which I think says a lot about
2 who you are as a person and your reputation in the community.
3 And we're thrilled to have you on the bench. We're thrilled
4 that you are proud to be from Pine Hills.

5 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Yes.

6 >> **CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And that you have local
7 community ties. We're thrilled that you are the first
8 elected female Hispanic county court judge, and as Chief
9 Judge, I want to say that I think you've raised the image of
10 the judiciary by your presence with us. And thank you so
11 much for being with us and for sitting for this interview.
12 Thanks.

13 >> **JUDGE LAURENT:** Thank you, Judge Lauten. I was very
14 happy to be here.

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

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