

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

GRASSHOPPER, LET ME LEARN YOU SOMETHING

EPISODE 37

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HOSTED BY: FREDERICK J. LAUTEN

>>Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida.

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

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I’m here today with Judge Tanya Davis Wilson who is our most recently invested circuit court judge and for our listeners, I use the word invested, because an investiture is the ceremony where you are enrobed in your official garb as a Judge and you take your oath of office. We had that recently and it was a fabulous ceremony. So I want to introduce our listeners to Tanya Davis Wilson and welcome.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Thank you very much for having me.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So it’s great to have you here. Tell our listeners a little bit about your legal history, and well, actually you can tell them about your history growing up in Florida, but I know they want to know about your –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Legal history. Well, I can start with growing up in Florida. I was born in Quincy, Florida which is right outside of Tallahassee, maybe about 20 miles. My dad was in the military so we moved to Kansas when I was about three. We moved to Louisiana when he was stationed at England Air Force Base, which is in the middle of Louisiana. Left there when I was eight and moved to the Panhandle, Fort Walton Beach so I grew up in the Panhandle.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right. So you went to high school in Fort Walton Beach.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I went to Fort Walton Beach High School. We were the Vikings. I played the French horn in junior high school and then in high school I danced during football season. And then in the second part of the school semester, I played my French horn in symphonic band.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow, that’s cool. So from Fort Walton Beach High School to where?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** This is funny. I was a huge Florida State fan.

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Because every summer we were in Quincy at my grandmother's house. So it was Florida State everything.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All the way, right?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** All the way. When I was sixteen, I had Florida State sheets, pillow cases, curtains. I remember I had a waste basket; everything was Florida State. In December of 1985 they had a German measles outbreak, so I thought, maybe not, but then I got two acceptance letters. One from Florida State and one from Florida. And the one from Florida, I got a scholarship. So I was – I remember –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, boy, here comes the heresy.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I remember standing in the foyer going, mom, mom, what do I do? I got – I'm accepted to Florida; I'm accept to Florida State and Florida State gave me money –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Florida State or Florida?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** No, Florida gave me money. And mama said, oh, well baby, you're a Gator, that's all it is.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That was pretty quick.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** And so it was just that quick. I had to – our little tradition at school, when we were in high school, wherever you got accepted, the next day you wore –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Your garb.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Your garb.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, that could be dangerous.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I didn't have any. So I had to go to – go to the Santa Rosa Mall and get this loud orange Gator sweatshirt. And I didn't tell my best friend who is Michael O'Neal. I didn't tell him, because he thought if he was at Auburn and I was in Tallahassee, it would be great. So I just showed up in class, and he looked at me like I had seven heads.

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** So that's how I got to Florida.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay, so off to Florida. What did you major in there?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Majored in journalism after I was woefully inadequate in business administration.

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Majored in journalism. I worked as an editor my last two years because my dad had retired in January of '87, went to work for a defense contractor and lost his job when they downsized. So to make ends meet, better than what I was doing, I got a job at the Gainesville Sun as a copy editor, sitting on the rim. So I'd go to school during the day and so Judge Lauten, around 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon I'd wake up and I'd get dressed and I'd go to work at the Sun.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow, that's fascinating.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Um-hum, that was neat.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So when did the – when did law school come into focus for you?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I always wanted to be an attorney.

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** And I give that – it's sounds so cliché but I literally was watching TV with my grandmother. We were in Louisiana. And my grandmother came and lived with us for a little bit when my youngest sister Connie was born. Watching Perry Mason, grandmamma, what does he do? Oh, he's a lawyer. Okay, that's what I want to be. And that was it. I hadn't – I was just trying to act like Perry Mason. So when I left UF, I went to the Palm Beach Post and I worked there for about six months.

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** That was – That was really interesting because it was during the time of the William Kennedy Smith rape trial, and so we were getting a lot of stories to edit. And I was new, so I'm not going to get one of those types of stories.

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** That's clearly a 1A story. That's, you know –

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** It's above the fold. And I got one, and I was so excited. I'm like, oh, my gosh, I got a story. And I thought I was going to be like on 1A of the Palm Beach Post, my story. It got cut so much, it probably shouldn't have even made it, but it was okay. And while I was there, I ran into Willie Gary.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You did, wow.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Met Willie Gary and he was just talking about his experiences at Shaw University, and how he didn't have money for school and he ended up working with a janitor or meeting a janitor there, but that was his inspiration, to just keep on fighting. And he talked about how it's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog. And I remembered that and I walked up to him and I said, hi, Mr. Gary, I'm Tanya Davis, and you know, I really want to go to law school but I think maybe I should work a little bit. Work? Work doing what? And I said, well, I'm a journalist at the Palm Beach Post. When is the next time for you to take the LSAT, or when is the LSAT going to be offered? I said, oh, it will be offered in June, but I'm not going to take it. Yes, you are.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, amazing.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I said, oh, okay. So Mr. Gary I credit with pushing me along faster. I would have gotten there eventually, but Mr. Gary was just so stern and Tanya, you will go. I was like, well, I guess so, sure, I'll take the LSAT.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Did you keep in contact with him?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Not really. I met him once – a few times more, but not really. I met him – the last time I saw Mr. Gary was in 2008. That was the last time I saw him.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So in case some of our listeners don't know, so Willie Gary is one of the preeminent plaintiff's lawyers, personal injury lawyers in the state of Florida, has amassed a small fortune, to put it politely –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yes, he has.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- or tactfully. He's very wealthy.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** That's good.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And very well known as a magnificent trial lawyer, plaintiff's trial lawyer.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I would like to think some of it rubbed off, maybe just a little bit.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Maybe some of it did. So you go – so where did you go to law school?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I went to the University of Florida. So I'm a double gator.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Awesome, double gator. Then you got out of there. Did you come to work here in Orlando right away?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** No, I went home and I was watching soap operas with my mom and my grandmother, and I thought –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You got to stop watching TV.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I know, TV is really getting me. So I thought I'm going to go crazy here. So I just started applying to different places, and that's really not how you get into a law firm is just by coal calling or sending out your resume like that because I never did a summer internship. A friend of mine called, he was at the public defender's office and said, hey, there's some openings, do you want to apply here? I'm like, well, I've already applied. Why hasn't anyone called me? And he said, okay, are you sure you've sent your resume in? And I had. I sent my resume in to the state attorney's office because I thought that's what I would do. Never got a call there. I'm like, well, somebody please hire me because I cannot sit here and watch All My Children, One Life to Live and General Hospital all day every day, and sure enough I got a phone call from Mr. DuRocher to come down and interview. I stayed with my

Godmother the night before, interviewed, and that afternoon he called to say, hey, you want to be an assistant public defender?

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yes.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So our paths crossed shortly after that –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** It did.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Not immediately.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Not immediately. When did I come – when – I was with Judge Halker Simpson in Division 61. So that was January of 1997. And somewhere in there she rotated out or something and then you were my County Judge.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. So I was on the county bench from '93 to 2000.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I went to felony in '98, so it had to have been –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Probably '97, around '97 sometime. So I remember distinctly you trying cases and I thought there's a future superstar. And you stayed at that office, but then you moved over across the street.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I did.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Tell our listeners what that means, across the street.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Well, I went across the street, meaning I went under I-4 and I started in the federal public defender's office which is a really – it was a really awesome experience because it's a – it's obviously a different sovereign and your rules of criminal procedure are very, very different. Rules of evidence, that was okay. But the rules of procedure were different. And the stakes were so much higher. You would have an individual who could – maybe they had five grams of crack cocaine. They're already looking at a minimum mandatory sentence. Then if they had two prior qualifying felonies, they become career offenders which jacks up their mandatory sentence because the guidelines were mandatory at the time, where they could end up with easily 188 months just like that.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And this is in the federal system?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** And that's in the federal system. And so it was a lot harder there.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** How long were you an assistant federal public defender?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Not very long. I was there for about two-and-a-half years, but as soon as I started, I had to stop. In July of 2001, I started there. And I was having symptoms, health symptoms, didn't really – I thought it was – I was on the carbohydrate addicts diet so me losing a pound a day, that's what I was supposed to be doing. Didn't know I was actually experiencing symptoms with colon cancer. So three days before my 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday I called my doctor because I said, I'm not going to pay a \$20 copay for you to tell me something is wrong with me. So I called and I begged for them to tell me what is it and they told me I had cancer.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I didn't know about this.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yeah, so that was – so September 5<sup>th</sup> of 2001, I found out I had cancer. I met with my surgeon on the 7<sup>th</sup>. My birthday was the 8<sup>th</sup>. 9-11 happened and I had surgery the next day on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And the surgery –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Was successful.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- got everything?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Got everything. It was what they referred to as stage 2, or Duke B, colon cancer. It had – it was the size of a baseball and had grown outside the colon wall, but it had not metastasized to the liver or to my lymph nodes.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's good.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** And so I'm able as a sixteen year survivor to be able to sit here in front of you. A friend of mine who was diagnosed two months before me passed away five years after her diagnosis because it had metastasized to her liver, so I'm considered very blessed to be here.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yes. So then – well, first of all, we're thrilled you're here, and I'm glad that that turned out the way it did. But then, you did something I think is a



little uncommon, maybe not unheard of, but a little uncommon. So having been a state public defender, assistant public defender in the Ninth Circuit, and then a federal public defender, you then became an assistant US attorney. And I'm very curious about that track, because that's an assignment that always intrigued me when I was lawyer. I was a state prosecutor and assistant US Attorneys are kind of coveted positions, I think. So talk to me a little bit about that.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I really – I can't even put my mind on – or can't even put my finger on how that actually started, but I had an opportunity to – that they had an opening. I can't remember who left or what, but they had an opening in the Orlando office. And I applied. I had worked – obviously, they were able to see the work that I had done. I won one trial which is rare as a federal defender. You're not – we didn't win a lot of trials just because by the time the US Attorney and the federal agents had their case put together was almost wrapped in a nice little Tiffany box, so the clients were really, almost dead ripe from the beginning. I had won one trial, and I think maybe it was just them, having known the work that I did, was able to switch sides. And at first I thought, what in the world am I doing? Is this – how does this work? But if you think about it, as a public defender your job is to protect the constitutional rights of those people who are indigent and are your clients. As a federal prosecutor, my job there was to seek justice and there is no justice if a persons' Fourth, Fifth, Sixth Amendment rights are violated. So I had the opportunity to work my cases from the beginning, from the investigative stage, hey, no, that's not how we're going to do it. Let's get a search warrant. Don't just go into the house or don't just go into the car. So I was able to do a lot more directing like that, a lot more investigating. And Judge Lauten, that was – I had a wonderful time. I met a lot of good people. I learned a lot about our federal government and why things are, like why you're off on Thanksgiving and then you have to work the next Friday because Congress has a law that says banks can't be closed for three days in a row. So you're like, oh, that's why. That's why I'm in at work on a Friday. So it's – there are just different things that I learned from agents with secret service, FBI, DEA –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Treasury.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Treasury. Oh, it was – it was a really good job.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** How long did you do that job?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** From January 26<sup>th</sup> of 2004 until the day I was appointed, so May of 2014. So a little over ten years.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah, so before you took the bench, just roughly how many jury trials had you done on both sides of the courtroom?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I wish I had my application because I had to figure that out. I don't – you say roughly.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah, just roughly.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I think it was like 40 there, maybe 50.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** As a prosecutor?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Oh, as a prosecutor.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, no, 50 total. Right, right. 50 jury trials.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** 50 total, but probably about – maybe – maybe ten, fifteen, maybe. Those numbers just don't make any sense, but I can remember specific trials. Like, I can see people's names and I can see myself arguing.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So trials in federal court, just for our listeners, they tend to be longer than state court trials so you –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** They are.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** It's not impossible, but it's rare in a state court if you have a three week trial, but a federal three week trial, nobody bats an eye. That's sort of – almost par for the course over there, or longer.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Well, when you hear of a multidistrict litigation, there was a federal judge who had one, and I think Judge Conway was the Chief Judge at the time or maybe soon to be the Chief Judge, had a multidistrict litigation case that was several months long. No one envied her with having to deal with that one, but we would consider that one long if it were, you know, several months. But many of us had a two week trial. You could do a drug case, sometimes it would take three days to do that. Because in federal court you are making a mountain out of a molehill. You are making sure your case is air tight; because the stakes are so

high, the last thing you want to do is to actually get an indictment and a conviction on someone who is innocent, or get your indictment and a conviction and the way you got it was improper or violated someone's rights. So you put all of your evidence together so you have your air tight case and sometimes that takes a couple of days, maybe three days, but over here, they're much more quicker. We do try cases much quicker here.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So you're working as an assistant US attorney. There's a county court opening in Orange County and you apply. Got nominated.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I got nominated, and –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** This was your first time up, wasn't it?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** No, no, no. Oh, no, I – as a matter of fact, I found my first application for circuit court, which was in 2010, and I looked through that and I'm like, wow, this is my first one. I think I'm going to shred it. And my JA said, no, don't shred it, keep it. That's your first one. But I didn't get it. She says, it doesn't matter. That's all part of the process.

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** So –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Plus you don't want to have to recreate that all over again.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I know, don't you. So I applied in 2010. I made the short list, but was not selected.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. I'm sorry, I was wrong --

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Oh, no, you're fine. I just stopped. I don't know why, I didn't try again. And I tell people now if you apply and you get on the short list and you don't get it, try again.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Absolutely.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Don't stop. And so I didn't start up again until 2013. I applied for the spot Judge Underwood has, for the seat Judge Tynan has and I applied for the county

court position. I didn't want to be a county court judge, but my husband asked, well, what do you want to do? Do you want to be a judge or you specifically just have to be a circuit judge? I'm like, no, I want to be a judge. He said, well, apply to the county position and I got it.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And tell our listeners when that started.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** That started in May.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** May of 20 –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** May of 2014. What happened, I was in my last week. I had a two-week mortgage fraud trial, and I had told my trial partner, I said, look, Sean, hey, if you happen to see a phone call from 850, could you just answer it? That might be Governor Scott. So he looks at my phone and there's a 239 area code, and Sean said, well, I thought about answering it but it's the wrong zip code.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wasn't 850.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Wasn't 850. So curiosity killed the cat, after I finished my closing, I kept looking at the phone. Like, who in the world – I don't know anyone in 23 – where is 239 area code? And as the attorney was finishing up, it dawned on me that the Governor is from that area. And I'm sitting there waiting, oh, please let us take a break. Please. Took a break and then I heard the voice mail message that I still have. This call is for Tanya Wilson –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Did he tell you –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** No, no, he said, this call is for Tanya Wilson. This is Governor Rick Scott. Please call me at whatever his number was.

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

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** And you know then. You know, the Governor is not going to call –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah, that's good news.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** -- you and tell you, you didn't get it.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Say you're the loser.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yeah, you're the loser.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Somebody else does that.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yeah, so that was very exciting. Then two weeks after that – well, about a week after that, I met Judge Perry to find out well, how does the transition work? And I started I think May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015 on the county bench.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Fabulous. And you didn't spend a lot of time on the county bench.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** No, I didn't. I did just two years, right. I can't add.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I think about two years.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Two years – three.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So then you applied for an opened circuit seat.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Right.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And you were nominated, and appointed to that seat. And that seat has some special significance –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** It does.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- to you. So let me tell you about my story. So I was appointed to the county bench, and then I applied for a circuit opening nine times in a row. I made the short list almost every time but I didn't get the appointment until the ninth time. But there were some really talented colleagues. I didn't make the short list every time but I started making short lists and not getting appointed. But I got the same feedback, don't stop, don't stop. If you really want that job, just keep at it. But you were a little more fortunate than that. You applied for a circuit opening –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yeah, I applied for the circuit opening after Scott Polodna passed away and made the short list. Went to Tallahassee in March of this year and he called March 31<sup>st</sup> at 1:36 p.m., not that I'm keeping track.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Well, having seen you try cases and knowing your reputation as a county judge, it doesn't surprise me that your first time up you got appointed.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Thank you.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** But what we learned at your investiture was that, of course, any appointment is significant in someone's life, but this appointment was poignant and significant. And so you told the story, if I can condense into, grasshopper, let me learn you something. So I want our listeners to know what that's a reference to, so as you mentioned briefly, there was an opening in the circuit court because Circuit Judge Scott Polodna died from cancer.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Right.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And so his seat was open and you applied for that opened seat and got that appointment. So why don't you tell our listeners a little bit about Judge Polodna, about where is he from, and how you got to know him, and then we're going to go into the significance of your getting appointed to his seat.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** All right. Well, Judge Polodna was born in Chicago. He moved to Florida as a child and he got his bachelor's degree in psychology and his law degree from the University of Florida. So he and I were double gators. He did teach at Valencia. He taught criminal evidence and he was a public defender for about ten years. He, after leaving the public defender's office, he worked in the county attorney's office for Osceola County, and that's when Governor Bush appointed him to replace James Henson. And he was re-elected back in 2014, and when was it – it was during the – I think it was during that cycle when Judge Polodna found out that he had lung cancer. And he was optimistic because he was doing new treatment and thought maybe at some point the tumor was shrinking, but ultimately he succumbed to cancer. He was only 51 years old, and he passed away last December on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And his lung cancer diagnosis, ten years earlier he had been diagnosed with cancer. I don't know if it was the exact same form.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** It wasn't. It was – it was like – I want to say, it was a different kind but it was not lung.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And he survived that.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yeah, he did. He went through chemo and that was before I – so that was before '98 when he survived that one. And so then it came back –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So he left behind a beautiful wife and children, and he was a beloved circuit judge in Osceola County, and an Osceola County resident. We don't have many judges who reside in Osceola County. Jon Morgan, Scott Polodna, Carol Draper, but we -- Margaret Waller when she did serve, but beloved in Osceola County, beloved as a circuit judge. He had a dry, fabulous sense of humor.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yes.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And he was a very smart guy.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Very smart. And he was also very protective of me when I came in because I was – I was new and you know, you have to –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** New when you were a judge?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** No, new when I was in the public defender's office.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right. So this is where –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** You know how you have to haze people. I mean, that's not a good word, but –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Well, you have to test them and see if they're tough enough, and have the metal and –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Right, well, one of our prosecutors was – was classic. She – she moved not and I went over to Scott, and I said – he says, what are you doing? I said, well, I'm going to trial on whatever the little case was. He says, why are you going to trial on that? I said, well, because that's the offer. Come here grasshopper, and so we went over to the prosecutor and Scott being the – the defender that he was said, you need to give her the same offers that you're giving us. You're only busting her chops because she's new. And the prosecutor said, oh, okay, well, I'll give you this. And that it.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's all it took?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** That's all it took. That's all it took. So I was, I'm like, thank you so very much, but life was good then. But I had to have my metal tested. Haze is not the word I want to use.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's right, okay.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Metal tested.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right. So that's – so you meet Scott Polodna.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yes, meet Scott.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And then he says – what was the phrase he used? Come here, grasshopper?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Grasshopper, let me learn you something. And that was – okay, I can't remember Karate Kid. I think I saw it one time, but I think the – Pat Morita –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah, I think that's it. I know it's Pat Morita. Yeah, that's it. Who was that young actor?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** It's not Scott Bios. It's Ralph something or another.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Ralph, what is his last name? But I know who you're talking about.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Okay.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I will think of it while we're talking.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Okay, so I think – so we're going to call them by their given names. Pat called Ralph grasshopper.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's right.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** And so – that's what Scott would call me because he thought that he could – he would take me under his wing and teach me everything. So that's how I became grasshopper. And even when I became a county judge, he would send me an email and he would say, grasshopper, comma, whatever he had to say and he'd sign off on it as chief, because he was



our division chief. So John Guidry and I called him chief. John was just John, but I was grasshopper.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right, you were grasshopper. So Scott was your mentor at the public defender's office?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yeah, he was. He really was.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And at least informally your mentor as a judge.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Um-hum. Because he was, like you said, in Osceola and I was here so he would just email.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So what are some of the lasting messages that Scott Polodna imparted to you?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I think, it wasn't so much what he said, as much as what he did which was, you know, whenever you could help someone, whenever you have the ability to help someone, make sure you do that. And he always helped me. You know, like I said at my investiture, Scott was on every one of my applications. And he was always willing to sit down and talk with me, and kind of prep me on questions that I might get asked in a meeting. So obviously, it's to help others but I think the most lasting one was when he passed away actually. When I would call Scott, even when he was sick, you wouldn't know that he was going through that.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I know that to be true too.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** He had – he had much faith and he was very grounded. No matter how adverse his situation looked, Scott never led on.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. So I remember visiting Scott, you know, as his health was declining, and you know, to tell it like it is, when you looked at him physically, there were days when you thought this looks pretty rough for Scott.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Yeah.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And I was, as Chief Judge, very concerned and I know you were too and many of us were because we were looking at Scott and, unfortunately, he was losing a tremendous amount of weight and yet, the most optimistic person in the room was Scott.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Was Scott. You were the one sitting up there crying.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** He was convincing you, you know, things aren't so bad.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** No, no, it's okay.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I know. He was an amazing – he had amazing strength that way, amazing faith and I remember leaving often saying, things – maybe things aren't so bad.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Right.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Because he was the one telling me about his treatment and the advancements, and how he was doing okay. The other thing that was amazing was a lesser person would not have been in the office half as much as Scott.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** They wouldn't have.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And so there were days when he couldn't come in, we all understood it. But there were days when I don't think anyone else would have come in and then you walked in and there was Scott at his desk.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** There was Scott.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE WILSON:** He loved being a judge. He loved the law, and like you said, he had this amazing optimism, and he never – he never asked anybody for sympathy. And if you came in and you were struggling with his disease, he cheered you up.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Right.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Which seemed to be a complete role reversal. Like, wait a minute, I'm not in here – why are you cheering me up? I'm here to help you on this path. So he had some unbelievable strengths. Well, so, who is your grasshopper?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Who is my grasshopper? I don't have a grasshopper. I don't have one.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Well –

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I would like a grasshopper. I need a grasshopper.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You have miles to go before you sleep and I'm sure the opportunity is going to present itself. It is a little – it's a little difficult – maybe we should tell our listeners this, it is a little difficult as a judge to mentor someone the way Scott mentored you as a fellow attorney.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Right.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Because we really can't take an attorney under our wings and say here's how you do it in court because we would be giving them preference over the multitude of other lawyers who we haven't told how to do it. So it's very hard to truly mentor a lawyer as a judge. We can mentor one another so when there are new judges, we all reach out.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Maybe that's what will happen.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I hope so.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I'll have a grasshopper judge one day.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I hope so. I'm sure you will.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** I hope so.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Is there anything about Judge Polodna we haven't mentioned for our listeners that you want them to know about him?

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** Scott had an amazing faith, which I think sustained him through what he went through. He was very funny, very – Judge, when you said dry sense of humor, you need to underline, bold, circle the dry part because he was – he was funny like that. It's just there are so many things that Scott was like. His rabid love for Florida. He played softball. We had a softball team in the public defender's office and true grasshopper, chief forum, he said, okay, look, you're batting wrong. I'm like, don't tell me how to bat, Scott. I played softball in

junior high school; you don't tell me how to – junior high school, I'm like twenty -- in my thirties. So he was – he was always a teacher. He was always not rudely –

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right, very gently.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** -- but always imparting, look, let me help you. Grasshopper, let me learn you something.

>>**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Well, that's a great legacy, and I think that his legacy is only enhanced in my opinion, and everyone who was at your investiture, by the fact that you have succeeded to his seat on the bench. And I can't think of anything more fitting than grasshopper occupying the seat that chief occupied in his career as a circuit court judge. Thank you so much for your time today and sharing all this with us.

>>**JUDGE WILSON:** You're very welcome. Thank you for having me.

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