

OPEN NINTH:
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM
JUDICIAL SPOTLIGHT
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HOSTED BY: LISA T. MUNYON

(Music)

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

And now here’s your host, Chief Judge Lisa Munyon.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Hello, and welcome to Open Ninth. I’m here today with Judge Tarlika Nunez-Navarro who currently serves in the Criminal Division here in the Ninth Circuit. Judge Nunez-Navarro got her start on the bench in the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit in Broward County where she presided over both Juvenile Drug Court and Felony Drug Court. After three years serving the people of Broward County, she joined us here in the Ninth Circuit last October.

I’m thrilled to have you in the studio today, Judge Navarro.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Thank you. I appreciate you having me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me a little bit about yourself.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Well, I am a Columbian-American from Central Florida. My mother is fifth-generation Floridian, so I was raised all over the State of Florida. My grandfather, on her side, was the Colonel of the Highway Patrol, so she moved all over the state.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow, yeah, I bet she did.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I -- yes, I’ve lived in several, several different places in Florida. So I really am a true Floridian, fifth generation on my mother’s side but then first generation on my father’s side who came from Columbia via London where he went to medical school and was a doctor here in a very small town where I grew up called Lake Placid, and it’s right about an hour from here.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So with your father being a doctor, what -- was your mother a stay-at-home mom or did she have another career?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: So my mother was a photographer. But both of them were in the mission field, so my mom did a lot of trips overseas as a missionary, and my father as well, he worked in the Amazon. So they were both doing a lot of mission work before I came along. And then my mom pursued her photography practice and had a family photography studio prior to us all being digital and iPhones being out. She was a photographer.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what made you want to pursue the law if you had a photographer for a mom and a doctor for a dad who were very involved in community work because they were missionaries?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Most -- I believe most children of doctors go into the law because doctors always say, don't be a doctor, be a lawyer. So my father always said, don't be a doctor, be a lawyer, but do what makes you happy and serve your community. And I grew up following my dad around with his little, black bag. He would do house calls. And he would every day go to someone's house and stitch them up, and he would trade services for tortillas and guacamole. And I remember that. And he loved what he did.

So I wanted to as well love what I do. And I went into the law to serve people, and that's what the judiciary allows me to do.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So I assume you were a good student in high school, which would allow you to go to college. And you were probably a good student in college. So where did you go to college and where did you go to law school after that?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Well, high school was a little different for me. I went to the IMG Academy in Sarasota for tennis and golf. So it's a boarding school. And the way -- my

route there was different as well. My mother married a rancher and moved us to LaBelle, which is a very small --

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: -- very small town when I was in 7th grade. And from 7th grade on, I went to a different school every year until I graduated from high school. So that's a unique path to college, certainly.

But in LaBelle, it was a very tough public school and I was targeted by gangs. So I was in danger, pretty much, and I had to -- because of the groups, I was the only Hispanic in a white household there, which really made me a target. So I -- they had to -- my mother had to take me out of that school and I ended up at the IMG Academy. And there I had to go to a different school every year because of my athletic schedule.

So thereafter, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, were across the state, Bradenton, Sarasota, Melbourne. So I went to a different school every year --

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: -- sometimes two schools in one year. So when people ask, how did you just pick up and leave Broward County and come back to Orlando, it's really not --

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's a lifetime.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yeah. It's not that hard when you've done it your whole life.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you played golf in high school?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Um-hum. I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And --

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Tennis.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And tennis.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Um-hum.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how did you get involved in those?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: My mother. She was -- she focused on athletics over academics, and still does to this day. We'll go out and play golf and she'll still say, you know, you should have been a pro golfer. I'm like, well, mom, I'm a judge. She's like, well, okay, if that makes you happy.

So golfing I started when I was about three or four, same with tennis. So when I tried out for the IMG Academy, they offered me a scholarship for golf, not for tennis. But I was able to tag on tennis with my golf scholarship and actually ended up -- I played Maria Sharapova, Anna Kournikova, so I grew up with the top tennis players, playing them and just getting beat down and beat down over and over. So I tell people I'm really good at getting beat down and popping back up. It's a life lesson worth learning.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: But at least you were beaten by the top players in the world.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yes, 100 percent. Absolutely. And I still watch them, and I get PTSD every time tennis is on because I'm just like, wow, this is stressful. I'm stressed for them. I feel -- I have the empathy of being on the court.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did you continue playing sports when you went to college?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: So I burnt out of both probably around 16, and I did not pick up a racket again until I was about 25. Golf, I played a little bit here and there. But I really

burnt out, and that's why I try to teach on wellness and try to teach on burnout and focus my service on that towards the law, towards young lawyers, and towards the judiciary as well. That was something that I learned early on, wellness, mental health, well-being. Certainly at IMG, we were taught that. We only went to school a couple hours a day. We really -- we played or we conditioned six hours a day. So we would condition at 5:30 every morning, and we went until 6:00 every night. So it was a very thorough program.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. Very rigorous.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Um-hum. Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, you're obviously still an athlete, so I know you must have continued to do things even if you weren't playing tennis and golf as much as you played them when you were in high school.

So what did you -- what was your next sport that you took on?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I moved to California to surf.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh. Was that after law school or before?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I graduated high school and moved to California to surf. That was my main goal back then.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And did you surf professionally?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: No. I never made it on the pro tour. I tried. I was not good enough. I still -- it's probably my number one sport, golf and surfing. And I still travel around the world and surf any chance that I get. I just got back from Costa Rica with my husband.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how long were you in California after high school?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I was in California for three years.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you surfed the whole time?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I would assume that the waves are better there than in Florida since it is the Pacific?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Very, very good waves in California.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Do you --

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I lived in San Diego.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So do you still surf in Florida?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I do.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I'm sure there is really no comparison to much of the rest of the world, but where are the best surfed beaches in Florida?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Melbourne Beach and Sebastian Inlet.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Really?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Um-hum. Right here in our back yard.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Absolutely. I would not have guessed that.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: One of the best surfers in the world, Kelly Slater, grew up there. And I grew up surfing Sebastian Inlet. My grandmother had a house there.

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

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: St. Thomas University.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And when you got out of St. Thomas, what did you do?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: While I was at St. Thomas, I fell in love with mock trial, so I was one of those mock trial junkies. And I knew that I absolutely wanted to try cases, so it was either the Public Defender's Office or the State Attorney's Office. And I did my CLI at

the Public Defender's Office and eventually ended up at the State Attorney's Office because they offered me the job.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And CLI is a certified legal intern.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Um-hum.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And they get to try cases even though they're not lawyers yet, as long as the lawyer is supervising them.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Correct. I came out of the Public Defender's Office with 12 trials, and that was a really big deal coming into the State Attorney's Office back then.

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

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Three years. We had a three-year commitment there at the State Attorney's Office.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So I'm sure you made a lot of good friends.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: The State Attorney's Office -- I was at the State Attorney's Office here, and I know I made some lifelong friends during my time there just because of the comradery. Everybody's working really long schedules on really important cases and not making much money at all.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Right. It's the best time of your life. I tell all my interns you have to either do your CLI at the Public Defender's or the State Attorney's Office and do everything that you can to either work in one of those offices because there's no better way to come out of law school and create a foundation for what you want to do in the law and just figure it out there. Make the friendships that you just spoke about.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you left the State Attorney's Office, where did you go?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: So I was hired out of the State Attorney's Office by a very well-known defense attorney down south, Fred Haddad, who -- we had many cases together and we fought, fought and fought while I was a state attorney, so he hired me out of there and I went to work for him. And we tried cases all over the southeast, all over the State of Florida. I learned a lot.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Learning from a good defense attorney is just invaluable. I know that when I came out of the State Attorney's Office, I felt one of the hardest things to do was a great cross-examination. And a great defense attorney conducts great cross-examination.

Did you learn that from Fred?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yes, 100 percent of one of the best crosses and jury selection I've ever seen. He's a master. It's an art. And just watching him and learning from him was a wonderful experience.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how long did you stay with his office?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I was with his office about four years.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And then you went to your own office?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Then I started the Florida Women's Law group for women, because a lot of women were coming to me to sit on trials, just to be a woman on the trial team. And we were taking a lot of codefendant cases where I would need to separate, so we still worked together but I had my own law firm. And I was trying to go through that women's rights niche and help women and serve women and that type of thing when the call came from the Hispanic Bar Association to put my name in.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you loved being a trial lawyer, both on the state and defense side. What made you want to go to the bench?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Well, I had the opportunity to travel all over the state with Fred and to see our judiciary statewide. And I felt like it was time for a little more diversity on the bench. And in Broward, we had a couple episodes going on down there at the time where I don't think judges were putting their mental health first and foremost, which I -- which, you know, we've spoken about, I think is very important. So I said, okay, I'll put my name in and I'll try. And I did, and I got it. And it was really important for me to bring wellness to the judiciary.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you were initially appointed in Broward by Governor Rick Scott. And when you were on the bench in Broward, what was your assignment?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: My first assignment was Domestic Violence.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yes, somewhat of a hazing.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I guess so. And then you went to Drug Court.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Family law.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Family law?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Um-hum. Then I did a hybrid of Family and Domestic Violence, and I did two years in Family -- two, two-and-a-half years in Family, and then I took over the Drug Court Program during COVID.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay. So you have talked about your love of law and your love of criminal law especially, but you have a passion for wellness, both lawyer wellness and judicial wellness. How did that passion come to be?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Well, my father, like I said, he was a doctor. He was a holistic doctor, so I grew up in that -- learning about that field. He was psychiatrist, he was a pathologist, he was an internist, he was a -- then a general practitioner. So he taught me a lot. Before it was the in thing to do, I always had a choice. I could go to time-out or I could meditate. So I was meditating by the time I was in middle school and throughout my entire upbringing and certainly throughout law school. And so it was just really instilled in me.

And like I said, I was seeing on the bench when I was practicing that, you know, the judiciary really could use a little bit of wellness and self-regulation, daily regimens that would be helpful. And certainly law students could as well. So I started teaching at St. Thomas University. I co-chaired their mental well-being and Young Lawyer initiative for mental health, and then I just -- I was -- just started teaching judges as well. So it just kind of happened, but it's something that I really love and I find to be very important for all of us and my colleagues.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I would imagine sometimes we don't know when we need a mental health break or we need to practice wellness. What are some of the signs that lawyers and judges should look for to know that they just need some time away?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Well, I think everyone has different signs. I think it's very important to teach our colleagues and our young lawyers what some of the typical signs are. You know, mental health episodes, anxiety attacks, breakdowns, just exhaustion, pure exhaustion, feeling kind of like you're on that wheel and it's not stopping and you're just going through the motions, that's -- I think those are very important indicators that you need to take a break and take a step back.

And that's what we really try to teach the law students early on so it becomes a part of their daily routine. And I try to set them up for success on a daily basis, which means really

having your morning routine, and that's something that I learned from IMG. You wake up, you have your morning routine, you either -- and meditation looks so different for everyone. You can do any form of flow meditation that you'd like. You could do yoga, you could do breath exercises, you can do prayer. But really taking that time to focus on you and your setting yourself up for being on the bench that day.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's interesting. It's an interesting perspective and something that we don't really think about.

One of the things that the Supreme Court has required all circuits to do is to have a rotation plan. Do you think that rotating from one division to another also contributes to wellness? Because you might not recognize that you're burnt out in Criminal until you leave and go to Family.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: You know, I think that's very personal to the judge. It's hard for a lot of judges to leave a division that they've been in and that they know so well. It was hard for me to go straight into Family when I knew nothing about Family, and certainly Drug Court, I really didn't have any history with Drug Court or Therapeutic Courts. And I think that some judges that will trigger, you know, a negative response, and then some judges it will trigger a kind of a refreshed positive response depending on really who they are.

I personally think it's wonderful because it humbles you as a judge. And I think the Supreme Court also is in line with that thinking. We really take a step back. We're not on autopilot. We listen. We read. And we want to be taught and do the right thing when we go into an area that we have no idea, you know, the language and all of that. We're open to learning, which I think is really important as a judge.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Did you use some of what you know about wellness when you presided over Drug Court in Broward?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Oh, yes. I had people meditating, I had them walking. We would do -- you know, I would keep track of their exercise log. Whatever they liked. I wanted to know what would make them successful, so I wanted to bring a holistic approach to Therapeutic Courts. I wanted to know what my particular defendants enjoyed doing, whether it was weightlifting, or walking, or running. Whatever would get them in the flow that would take them away from whatever substance abuse that they would turn to. So we would work on that, and that was very exciting to bring that to the Drug Court Program in Broward.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what made you decide that you wanted to leave the bench in Broward and come to Orlando?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: My family is up here. And this is where I was raised. And when COVID hit, I left Broward within 24 hours obviously to come home and be with my family. Because I think everyone kind of clung to their loved ones and their family. And my mom had toilet paper, so I certainly had to get that.

And I came home and the world shut off for nearly, you know, over a year. And I stayed home and I ran Drug Court virtually. And -- well, I was in Family Court, and then I -- Judge Tuter put me in Drug Court and I took over the Drug Court Program virtually. And then when we decided to go back, I went back and I realized that I really missed my family and my husband, and there was this opening and I said, you know what, if I don't do it now, I'll never do it. Because the hesitation is my entire career is down here, all my friends are down here, my connections are down here. And if I didn't do it soon, sooner rather than later, I felt like I would regret it because -- and now I know for certain, on this side, I would, because now I get to be

with my family and my mothers and my brothers and my husband and my stepchildren which is really, I think, important for a work-life balance component.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Unlike the Ninth -- we had too many judges during COVID -- even if they were doing virtual hearings, were doing them from the courthouse. In Broward, the building pretty much shut down and judges could not go into the building, if I recall correctly.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yes, we were not allowed to go in unless necessary. And as -- obviously, as a Family Court judge and as a Therapeutic Court judge, that was not necessary.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So it gave you the opportunity to basically live down here for a year while still presiding in Broward --

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- or live up here.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Right. Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you were appointed to the Ninth bench by Governor DeSantis, and you started here in October. How is the Ninth different than the Seventeenth?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: The Ninth -- how is it different. Well, if we want to go into technology, I think it's a leading circuit in technology, which I've really enjoyed getting to know and have access to. I think it's wonderful for the judiciary.

And I think the Ninth is different than the Seventeenth in a kind of small-town feel. I don't know if I feel that way because I'm from here and it's a small town for me and my family is here, and there was like the big city where I went off to law school and practiced law. But I feel a very quaint, home-town feel here in Orlando.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And that's surprising because we're not that much smaller than Broward.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Even though Broward is big. It's the second largest circuit. We are the third. So it's still --

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: And growing.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And growing very, very quickly.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yes, we're losing our small-town feel very quickly. But I just think it's the upbringing. When my father -- when I was small -- younger, my father would bring me every Wednesday to have dinner in Orlando. And back then it was -- you know, it was just cow pastures and it wasn't the city that it is now. So coming back after 20, 25 years is really -- it's unbelievable how fast we are growing.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: When you came to Orlando, you were assigned to the Criminal Division. How did you enjoy sort of going back to your roots being in the Criminal Division?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: So exciting. I was ecstatic to be assigned to the Criminal Division. Because at home I had been a prosecutor, I had worked CLI at the Public Defender's Office, I had been with Fred Haddad, so I had touched many, many cases and it just wasn't feasible for me to go straight into Criminal when I was appointed down there. So I was very excited about the opportunity to sit in Criminal here, and I'm really enjoying it, just knowing the language and actually knowing, you know, what's going on is certainly helpful in being a judge.

And I'm enjoying all of the lawyers who are practicing in front of me. I think the level of professionalism is pretty high in this area, and I'm very impressed with the lawyers.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And of course you work with some just great judges in the Criminal Division.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yes, I do. Wonderful judges, yes. Absolutely.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I have noticed that you have -- you fit right in because you -- when somebody needs help, you offer to help, as your colleagues offer to help everybody.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I'm sure they much appreciate that, so thank you for doing that.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think that's very important, because we can get bogged down if we're in, you know, trials. And it's always very helpful. I recently came down with something, I don't know what it was, and they all stepped right up and helped me, and I appreciate that so much, so I always like to return the favor and help my colleagues.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes. I like to tell new judges that are coming on the bench that if you want help, you have to offer help.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: That is very true. Absolutely.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what goals do you have for your time on the bench?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Goals -- to be the best that I can be. To make sure that every single person that comes in front of me feels heard. To stay present every day in each and every hearing that I hear. And to just do a very good job at what I'm doing at that time.

I don't have -- I'd certainly love to sit in every division as a judge. I think that would be a wonderful opportunity, but I'm in no hurry to leave Criminal at this time because I'm really enjoying it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I am glad you're enjoying it.

You've also started doing some teaching at the Circuit Judges Conference and getting involved in some ways in the Circuit Judges Conference. Are you enjoying the teaching that you're doing?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Well, I haven't taught at Circuit Court Conference yet, but we are planning this Circuit Court Conference in August and I'm teaching on wellness with Justice Lawson and Judge Latimore, which I'm very excited about. Those are two outstanding jurists, and just to be a part of that team is really exciting. And, again, it's on something that I think is incredibly important for our judiciary.

And so I'm very impressed with our Supreme Court and how they are -- and the Florida Bar how they are highlighting these topics and helping our judges and our lawyers. Because if we are not healthy ourselves, we cannot serve our community the way that we should be and we cannot uphold the oath that we took as judges.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I know you talked to me briefly about your parents both being missionaries in Central and South America. I understand that you have also taught English in Central and South America and done some mission work yourself.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yes. That was very important for my parents. They're believers in gap years. So after high school, I travelled around the world. After law school, I went and lived in Columbia. And after college, I went and taught English throughout villages in Central and South America. So I've really, every step of the way, kind of taken that time to go

backpack in certain areas of the world and to teach and work my way through, which was very important to my parents. They didn't give me a lot, except the opportunity to go.

And, you know, looking back, that was before we had cellphones. So I got the airline ticket for around the world, where we would just get it stamped, and it was actually a paper ticket and we could just hop on, hop off. And that was -- yeah, that was before cellphones, so I would call home from payphones every, like, month. There were a couple internet cafés that I could hitchhike to, but that was certainly -- I think that's the gift that my parents gave me was, go.

And same thing with California. My mom just said, if you want to go surf, go surf. And she drove -- she rented a motorhome, and she loaded up all my surfboards, and she drove myself and my brothers out there. My brothers are younger, but she took them out of school and she -- we just experienced the United States, like literally from Melbourne, Florida, all the way to San Diego. So she's a special one.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It really is almost unimaginable these days to send your young daughter off with a ticket, no cellphone, and only hear from them once a month.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: I know. I know. Especially what I see every day.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes, absolutely. I'm amazed.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Yeah. It's -- when we talk about it -- you know, it's funny because I actually just went to Morocco surfing, and I -- for -- I think it was a couple years ago, well, pre-COVID -- and I told my mom, you know, I'm going -- on my birthday, I'm going to Morocco, I'm going surfing. And she said, okay, who are you going with. And I said, I'm going alone. And she said, no, I'm going to go with you. And I said, Mom, I've traveled the whole world and now you're going to go with me.

And it was an amazing experience. We went to Morocco, and she did -- she went with me and we had a great time. But it's funny over -- you know, now that I'm older how, you know, she wants to accompany me on these worldly trips, when back in the day, you know, I would go with -- I think it was a different time. We didn't think the way that we do now. We're so dependent on our devices.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: And that's something that I really try to disconnect from. When I'm away, I'm away. I don't look at my phone -- I try not to look at my phone. I try to get off the screen. I think it's very important neurologically speaking for our brain. We need that break.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Now, one of the things -- I have -- I've done several mission trips and taken my kids on mission trips. And one of the things that I always came away with was how truly fortunate we are to be here, because so much of the world has so little. What did you take away from those trips?

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Oh, wow. I mean, I've lived in villages where we didn't have roofs, where I was sleeping on the floor. But you know what? They were so happy. The families that I lived with, they took me in, they fed me, they showed me their culture no matter what country I was in, whether it was India, Vietnam, Cambodia, you know, Costa Rica, Guatemala.

I still to go Guatemala every year. I mean, I just love the people of Guatemala. They're happy people because they don't have the options that we have. They don't have the stress that we have. They don't have the pressures that we have or, like I said, the devices that we have. My takeaway is, yes, we are blessed and we have to make the most of it. We have to give back.

That's what's so important about the position. We hit the lottery jackpot. We are in America, the best country in the world, and it's our duty to give back and to serve others who don't have the opportunities that we have.

But my takeaway is how happy they are. And that's why I try to dial it back here, you know, to the basics.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: They don't need the clutter to be happy.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Exactly. I don't think any of us need the clutter to be happy.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, Judge Nunez-Navarro, it has been a pleasure to get to know you today. Thank you so much for joining me here.

JUDGE NUNEZ-NAVARRO: Thank you. I was honored to be asked. Thank you.

NARRATOR: Thank you for listening to "Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom" brought to you by Chief Judge Lisa Munyon and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram @ninthcircuitfl for updates on new episodes, and subscribe to Open Ninth on your favorite podcast service.

(Music)