

**OPEN NINTH:
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM
BREAKING BARRIERS
EPISODE 104
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HOSTED BY: DONALD A. MYERS, JR.**

(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 Don Myers.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Hello, and welcome to Open Ninth. Joining me today is LaShawnda Jackson, a partner at RumbergerKirk and the incoming president of the Orange County Bar Association. Her installation, which is just a few days away, will make her the first black president to serve the Orange County Bar Association since its establishment in 1933.

I am thrilled to be able to have you here today, LaShawnda, and thank you for joining me.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Thank you for having me.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So I’m looking forward to our conversation. You and I just spent some time together in a conversation with the folks that you’ll be the president of, the Orange County Bar Association, and I thoroughly enjoyed our interaction in that and appreciate your leadership on that. And so let’s just jump right into it.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Okay. I’m ready.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: All right. LaShawnda, you find yourself at one of the peaks or pinnacles of accomplishment in the -- in your career. But let’s go back. Why the law? What got you started in where you are?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: It would be who, and that would be Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson was my 11th grade Civics teacher at Astronaut High School in Titusville, and I had done a -- we call it the beach class -- but the marine biology class with her daughter during the summer. And then when I got into her classroom, you know, we started to talk and interact.

And one day she came up to me and told me I had a big mouth, and I said yes. And she said, why don't you use it to join my mock trial team and argue cases for me. And I said, okay.

Had no idea what that was, but went Saturdays to her house to practice arguing in mock trial competitions. And I went before one of the judges in Brevard County in a competition once, and he nicknamed me Bullets. And I said, why. He goes, the way you fire those questions, you should go to law school. And I said, okay. And that's -- I was on the path to go to law school.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's incredible. So you -- where did you do your undergraduate?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: University of Florida.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: All right. Go Gators.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Go Gators. I'm a Double Gator, student athlete, so I bleed orange and blue.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Awesome. Student athlete. So what was your competition of choice?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I was on the track and field team. I was a hammer thrower and a shot-putter.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Okay. Cool. So any collegiate competition records or anything like that?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: No real records. I actually only learned the hammer throw once I got to college. When I was in high school, I threw the shot put and the discus and had a state title in each one of them. But I hated the discus, and my college coach said, well, if you learn how to do the hammer you won't have to throw the discus anymore. So I learned how to

throw the hammer. And I think I was like fourth in the SEC in hammer throwing by my junior year.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Wow, that's incredible. But there obviously is a competitive spirit to you.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: You took it out on the sports field -- or on the track, and now in the law.

Tell us, best moments for you in the law. What are some of the -- what are the highlights of some of the things that you've done since you've been in practice?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I think I've just been very, very fortunate about where I ended up practicing. I've been at the same law firm for -- I think August 23rd will be 18 years.

When I was coming out of law school, I really wanted to try cases. It's what I did in high school, and I wanted to do it for real. And they said, you know, we'll put you with the guy who goes to trial the most if you don't go to the State Attorney or the Public Defender's Office, because that's where I wanted to go. And they said, we could pay you a little bit more.

So long story short, I ended up, you know, actually going to Rumberger. And one of the great things about it, they did put me with the attorney who, at that time, went to trial most; it was Scott Kirk. And I think one of the greatest things I had was I had a lot of responsibility as a young lawyer.

And I remember being sworn in in October and doing my first mediation in November. And I -- he let me do the opening statement -- went with the client, did the opening statement. And then he looked at me, he said, I don't know why I'm here; I'm leaving. And he left. So, you know, a little nervous, you know, with that experience. So, for me, it was great because here

I was arguing my first mediation, where a lot of my classmates or people who had graduated with me were probably still doing research or, you know, paperwork. So I thought that was very fascinating. That's really one of the great things.

I also got my first trial within my first year.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Wow. A jury trial?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Jury trial. And so I was so excited about that. And I'd done trial team in law school, and one of the most interesting things about it is -- again, I have eight months in, and it was a big trial. I still remember to this day the parties involved. And actually it was -- Nick Buoniconti, who's now a mediator, was the plaintiff's attorney.

And I had a trial in over in Daytona Beach -- it was a 16-year-old kid who was a quadriplegic after an accident at the beach -- and I got ready to go prepare for trial and Scott Kirk looked at me and said, you're going to handle all the experts. And I said calmly, oh, that's no problem. And he walked away, and I was literally almost crying in my office, like, oh, my gosh, what do I do, how do I handle experts.

And so, you know, I asked the paralegal, where are the depo transcripts, so I can prepare, because that's what we learned in law school. You take the transcript and you -- it's like our client was too cheap to let us depose them. So I think that was probably one of the biggest highlights all within the first year of practicing, being able to go to that trial, get up and make arguments and question experts, which --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: And so we have a lot of folks who listen who don't practice law necessarily, so you and I understand that lingo of handling the experts.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: What kind of experts would there have been in a case like that?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Oh, boy. There was a neurologist, there was a life-care planner, there was an economist, maybe some others. And again, it was just -- I had never -- I didn't really know what a neurologist was, you know, I had to look that up.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Because they don't take us to medical school when we're in law school, right?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Exactly. And I actually still remember one of the questions I asked the expert. And I don't know how I came up with it. You know, they had -- the life-care planner had this elaborate plan that, you know, this person was going to need for the rest of his life. And I think I turned to the neurologist, I'm like, how many of your patients have this Cadillac plan that they're proposing here. And she just looked and goes, none.

So it was quite interesting. I still remember that. Will always remember that. Again, it's my first trial.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Sure.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: But I was very young in my practice and being able to do that.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, I competed on the trial team at Florida as well when I was there, a few more years than 18 ago. But I will always remember that time with my classmates, late at night, up arguing about evidentiary questions and issues, and researching the law, and really pushing and sharpening each other.

What a great experience that was to prepare for you to come out and participate as lead attorney or as handling the experts in a trial. That's tremendous.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Yes. I mean, you say staying up late at night, we actually used to go by -- went to University of Florida, we used to call them the stone tables behind the cafeteria. And one day our torts teacher actually, you know, walked up on us, you know, outside and she's like, what are you guys doing. We're like, we're arguing the cases. She's like, what do you mean. I'm like, they're the defense, we're the plaintiff today. And we're back there arguing, you know, against each other, and she just thought that was fascinating.

And to be able to, you know, envision yourself or think about this and you had done this, you know, for competition but now it's real, you have clients, people depend on you. And all that comes back, all the hard work you put into it and you remember those nights you sat up arguing and -- you know, with your classmates.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah, absolutely, so some of your best moments.

What have been some of your biggest challenges as a lawyer?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I think, early on, probably some challenges was people not taking me seriously. Probably, again, I got thrown into the legal practice as a young person doing a lot of things that probably not a lot of young lawyers did.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Um-hum.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: But I can remember, you know, a story -- I remember within my first year or two going in and we represented a department store, and I was deposing the plaintiff, this woman, and she looked at me and she goes, you're their lawyer. And I said, yes, I am. You know, again, I don't know if it was because I was just young or -- you know, I think it was, because I think she said, so, you know, like, how long have you been practicing. You know, I -- one or two years. So those have been some difficult things, I think, I've had in the past.

Of course, being identified as the court reporter; a room full of men, you walk in and they're like, you're the court reporter. You're -- no, I'm not. And that was just always my answer, just, no, until they got to the -- okay, you're the witness. No. Oh, I'm so sorry, you're the lawyer. Bingo, you got it.

So I think those are some -- probably some of the challenges.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, you know, that's something, as a male lawyer growing up in the practice, nobody ever asked me if I was the court reporter showing up in a hearing. And I've heard stories like the one that you just told me from other women lawyers, and it just is just incredible to me that in the 1990s and the 2000s and now into 2020 that that still continues to happen.

And here we find ourselves in a legal community where there's a very significant percentage of female lawyers. I mean, if it's not 50 percent, it's got to be close, right?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Correct.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah. Just shocking that that sort of thing can still happen.

You faced additional challenges, though, as a black female lawyer. Have there been challenges associated with that, that you would just say that you were maybe shocked or surprised by?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Certainly, you know, other comments about, you know, things -- not even so much -- I don't know if people understand and realize it. They may not say things intentionally to be hurtful or to be discriminatory, but they just don't realize what they're saying.

You know, I've had -- even with, you know, where I work, somebody say to me, you know, you're actually a pretty good writer. Why wouldn't I be a good writer? What about me would signal to you that I wasn't a good writer?

So, yeah, you have those kind of things. And it's -- for me it's just been -- you know, I -- it's a simple question. You know, yeah, a pretty good writer. I work hard at it and I think I'm good at it, and nothing's going to limit me. I don't let my race or my sex limit me. I know some people have more of a challenge with that. They feel isolated or they feel like they can't stand up for themselves. I'm lucky enough to have the personality where I can stand up for myself, and that's what I've done.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, I was privileged when I was in private practice to have a case with you, on the other side.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Yes, I think it was the Marriott.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: It was the Marriott case. I'm impressed with your memory, because I know you've handled a lot of cases since then.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: I mean, I have, in this different context. But I have to tell you that my sense was very worthy adversary. That we litigated hard on a case. I think it ultimately settled. I don't think we had to try it.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: It did.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: But I enjoyed the experience. And it's funny, I don't associate the terms woman lawyer or black lawyer or woman black lawyer with any of that experience. You were just a fine lawyer. And so the concept, I think, can be foreign sometimes to some people who don't think in those terms.

But I recognize, having been in a courtroom as long as I've been at this point, more than 30 years, that there are too many times when we still continue to hear questions that are asked, for example, during trials that relate -- even -- and sometimes I don't know if they're intentional or not, but they relate to a witness's race or a party's race and some characteristic that isn't fair to evaluate based on race.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Right.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: It just is stereotypical, I suppose.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: And there are not people like that. I can share a pretty funny story with you, just recently, with the founding partner of our firm, Bud Kirk. He -- I got a call from him -- I hadn't talked to him in a week-and-a-half, just checking up on him. And he called me back one day and I couldn't answer, so he sent a text message, call me immediately. And I was like, okay. I call him back and he's like, I got a call from the Orange County Bar Association. I'm like, okay. He's like, they want to interview me. I'm like, okay. About you being the first black president. I said, okay. He goes, I don't care about that; I care about you, just you.

So you do have those types of people. And I had to say to him, you know, Bud, it's been since 1933 there's not been one, so it kind of a big deal. And so he goes, I guess you're right; thank you.

But, you know, so you have them on both sides. And I can truly say that I -- you know, I -- that's not my everyday experience. And it's -- you know, I don't know if my maturity or, you know, I've been practicing a lot longer, I don't see it as much or at least they don't say it to me or say things to me. But I do know it still exists and it still affects a lot of -- especially a lot of young lawyers -- a lot of young, minority lawyers who have those issues.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Let's talk a little bit about our local community of lawyers and diversity and inclusive -- or inclusion-type issues. What is your perception -- and let's just talk perception; not numbers but perception.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Um-hum.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Are we a diverse bar?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I think we are a diverse bar. I think one of the misconceptions where people might not see us as a diverse bar, because we have so many different other smaller bar associations. And I remember, you know, on my uphill travel to where I am for the Orange County Bar Association, a president had actually proposed, why don't -- why do we have a Paul C. Perkins, why do we have a CFAWL, why don't we just make them sections of the Orange County Bar Association. And so we had to explain to them, you have to remember the historical context.

And my experience was with the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association and, you know, he just never thought about it. I said, do you understand that the National Bar Association was created because black people couldn't become a member of the ABA. He said, okay. And do you understand that the Virgil Hawkins Florida Chapter National Bar Association is a Florida affiliate of that organization that was created because black people couldn't be a part of the ABA. Do you understand that the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association is an affiliate of Virgil Hawkins. So there's a lot of history there.

You know, people like Judge Emerson Thompson, who helped founded the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association, had a reason for it. And we have unique needs -- our community has unique needs and issues, and so, yes, they belong. But we're all still one bar. We have crossed

over where members of Paul C. Perkins are members of Orange County Bar. I'm a member of CFAWL, Paul C. Perkins and Orange County Bar Association.

So I do -- I think -- don't get me wrong, we have a lot of work to do when it comes to diversity. But I think the pipeline is there to be more diverse and more inclusive.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: It's interesting, one of the topics that comes up frequently in the form typically of a criticism of the judiciary is the lack of diversity. You know, that the local judiciary doesn't necessarily reflect the diverse makeup or composition of the community that we serve.

And I think there's certainly some accuracy to that as well. As a percentage, I think that we don't have as many black judges as we do black citizens in our community -- or as a percentage. The same could be true, I think, for Hispanic representation in the judiciary. Not true of gender equality. We are one of the few circuits, I think, in the state where women are represented very strongly, and we are roughly 50/50 male and female judges in the circuit.

And I -- my typical response or the thing that wells up in me is it's difficult for us as judges to be representative of the community in the same proportions when the bar that we draw on isn't representative of the community in those same proportions. You have to be a lawyer to become a judge, and unless we have a sufficient number of lawyers in those different diverse ethnicities, then it's tough for them to become judges and for us to match that.

When you think about topics like that as it relates to lawyers, what are the solutions? I mean, what are the answers to getting that level of diversity?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: You mean as far as the judiciary or --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Oh, the bar.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: -- the bar?

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Let's just start with the bar. Yeah, I mean --

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Okay. We start with the bar, it goes into, you know, who's in the law schools. If the law schools are -- you know, don't have the numbers, we're not going to have the graduates who now become lawyers to have the number. And so it -- use the term pipeline, and I only say that because I've been working on, you know, one of the -- National Bar Association, I had to do some scholarships calls, you know, a couple nights ago, and that's the pipeline; getting minority students interested in the law.

Street Law, great program, Paul C. Perkins Bar Association. We used to go the -- a lot of the community centers here in Orlando and talk to the kids, you know, about law. Not even just being a lawyer, but just in different aspects of the legal field.

My firm actually does a Street Law program where we go out to one of the high schools and we bring kids back and we teach them about the law, and we're happy that we -- every year we leave with one going, I think I might want to go to law school.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: I think I've come as a judge to participate in those events at your firm, so -- yes.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: You have, so thank you.

And so it's starting at that age with somebody like me, because I'd never thought I would be a lawyer. The only black professionals that I knew growing up were teachers. My next-door neighbor happened to be a science teacher at the high school, and I had two or three black teachers from probably elementary school through high school, and so I probably thought, well, that's all I can be, I'm just going to be a teacher. Because that's all I knew.

But it was when somebody exposed me to something different, asking me to join a mock trial competition is where -- when I got in my mind that I want to be a lawyer. So I think it starts

a lot lower than, you know, what's happening now in the legal community. It's trying to get young children who are diverse to be interested in the legal field, helping them through that process, and then that way we have people now -- the numbers are changing in the law schools, so now we have more graduates who are minorities, and they come out as lawyers, and then what do we do to train those lawyers.

And going back to the judiciary, what do we have in place to help them. They may not have the resources that other people have. They don't have connections at the Governor's Office. They never ran a campaign. What are we doing to teach them. And it also starts, also, with diversifying the Judicial Nominating Commission. That's where, primarily, a lot of the judges come from. If we don't have a diverse JNC, we're never going to have a diverse judiciary.

I served for five years on the JNC, and somebody told me I might have been the first black here in the Ninth Circuit. You know, and it wasn't that I promoted black people just to promote them, and in fact I probably ostracized a couple of them with my first interview that I did. We had somebody who'd come in and wasn't very candid, and I called him out on it, and I gained the respect of everybody who was in that room that I wasn't just going to advocate for a person because they were black, because they were Hispanic. I know that they're qualified and they would do just as good as a job, but I had to get in that position. And so it is encouraging people to do that as well.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So, and again, you and I talk about this at a level of familiarity, but I don't know that the average citizen knows that there are two paths to get to become a judge -- a seat on the bench. And one is the appointment process with the JNC, or the Judicial Nominating Commission, and the other is through election in the community.

And I think you're absolutely right. I think most of our judges ultimately come through the JNC as opposed to outright election. And I'm trying to think of the current makeup and composition of our local JNC, and I don't know that it is as -- there is some diversity.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Yeah. There has always been women. There have been -- and even behind me, there -- you know, when I came on, I think, you know, they had some other minority. There are men and women. A lot of good people there. I'm not saying they are not great people that are there. But there is diversity now.

And I think somebody -- how I got there, quite honestly, on the JNC is I got a call from then Mayanne Downs, who was on the Florida Bar Board of Governors. And there was a big push by the Florida Bar to get minorities on the JNC so that we could have a diverse judiciary. And I had no idea who Mayanne Downs was, but she sounded stern and she sounded like I could not tell her no. And she called me up and said, I want you to apply. And I did. I got appointed and, you know, I -- it was a hold-over, so I did five years instead of four.

But it is important, so --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's awesome. What -- tell us a little bit about your work with the Orange County Bar and maybe kind of the steps that you've taken to find yourself in the place of president-elect.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I can actually tell you, I remember my first Orange County Bar Association meeting, and I was not a lawyer. I was actually a law student who received the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association Scholarship. I think now they limit it to Barry and FAMU students, but back then it was open to any Florida student and I applied and I received the scholarship, I got invited to the luncheon.

Justice Peggy Quince did the swear -- you know, the -- you know, she was speaking, it was during the Black History Month luncheon, and I just remember being there and looking in awe going, oh, my gosh, this is so cool, look at all these people, they're lawyers. I saw different races. I probably saw more of a diverse group because it was Black History Month and the Paul C. Perkins joint meeting, and so I got very excited about that.

So then when I came back the next summer, I worked -- I stayed at Rumberger, I was a summer clerk there, working as a law student, and everybody said, Young Lawyers, you got to -- if you want to be in, you got to hang out with the Young Lawyers. So I went to Young Lawyers meetings, and I can remember too it's -- Yvette Rodriguez Brown, I think, was the president at the time. And she said to me, personally, this is a great organization, when you come back make sure you join, volunteer to be on committees, some day you'll be a chair of the committee, like, who knows, you'll be on the board some day. And she stopped short of that.

And then lo and behold I came back, I did that, I joined the Young Lawyers Section, so I was in. Some people thought I may have been there too long, always asked me, like, are you still a Young Lawyer. So I transitioned -- I worked my way up. I did the committees, I did the committee chairs, made it onto the board and then was elected president.

And I didn't want to stop there. I wanted to continue because of the -- being the president of the Young Lawyers Section, you're a voting member of the Executive Counsel of the Orange County Bar Association. And so that, to me, was intriguing. I really enjoyed it. So when my position came up as the president of Young Lawyers Section, I ran for a seat on the Executive Counsel as an at-large member, did the committee work, and just worked hard and saw it -- saw a lot of great leaders before me and just decided this is something I want to do for myself, so --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's incredible. We have had the opportunity in the past to interview Jenny Brown, who's the Executive Director at the Orange County Bar Association, and just had a great conversation about what the bar means to the legal community but also to the community at large. The incredible partnerships that you have with the Legal Aid Foundation, with lawyers in this community that are so -- such an integral part of providing services, pro bono services in so many instances, but also benefits to lawyers to be able to help them to connect in the profession, to have a mentor/mentee relationship, to be able to participate in activities that -- where you develop bonds but also referral relationships and invaluable friendships that last a lifetime. And it sounds like you've taken full advantage of all of those things along the way.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I certainly have. And, you know, it's seeing the great things that the Orange County Bar does. I was actually a member of the Young Lawyers Division of the Florida Bar, and by access to that I got to know a lot of other Young Lawyers across the State of Florida. And when we would talk to them about what Orange County did, a lot of the member benefits we had and a lot of the great things we had, they were in awe. And it dawned on me, like, we are an elite group, this is pretty awesome. So -- and I just really, really enjoy -- and doing the great things that we do for our community as well as the legal community.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So you've served in this role of president-elect with Tony Sos as the acting president. When is your -- what's your date of transition or investiture into that new role?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Oh, Tony would like me to take it today. Officially, Monday, June 1st, is when I officially take over.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Great. And ordinarily, we'd get the chance to celebrate that with you at a luncheon where a couple hundred members of the bar would come together to celebrate. And sadly, as we find ourselves in the middle of the COVID-19 virus and all of our social distancing restrictions, we're not able to do that this year. But I do hope that some point in the -- during the time that you're in the presidency, we'll get a chance to do that together and celebrate. I think that would be very meaningful.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I was okay with just letting it pass, but there were other people who wanted to make sure -- they kind of twisted my arm -- we are going to have, you know, an installation luncheon. So right now, we've moved it to tentatively be August 27th, and we're very hopeful, by that time, we'll at least be able to have, you know, maybe not the couple hundred people but at least a substantial amount of people. And it's also because I want to also recognize -- it's not about just me. We have a new president of the foundation -- the Orange County Bar Association Foundation, which does great community work. We've got the Legal Aid Society -- was it second executive director ever.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Ever.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: She's doing an awesome job. I want to recognize the people -- the Board of Trustees who work with her to make sure, you know, (indiscernible words). We've got Brandon Sapp coming in as the Young Lawyers Section president; very, very proud of him, so we want to honor and acknowledge him as well. So we're going to try to do that on August 27th.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So every president that comes in to the Orange County Bar has a list of priorities or a vision for the things they want to accomplish during the course of their year. Could you share just one or two of those with us for what your plans are?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Hoping the pandemic doesn't get in my way, you usually, generally do have some plans. I can tell you about one that I really, really wanted to do, and it goes back to your -- not so much about diversity but inclusion. One of the things I've noticed -- and I love that we all have the unique, different bar associations, Hispanic Bar Association, GOAABA, and all these organizations, but I -- my concept is we're all still one bar.

So I really wanted to do a community project where we go out into the community -- every single one of these local bar associations could go to their community and we're all going to do the same project. I think for ease we thought about making it a will-writing project. So Hispanic Bar Association goes to their communities, Paul C. Perkins Bar Association goes to theirs, and on this one day or this one week we give back to our community by doing a service project, because we are one bar with one community.

That was one of my biggest things I wanted to do. We will still look at it. I think I tapped somebody to be the chair of that and she actually called me back up and said, you know, are we going to do this. We can certainly still try. So that's one of the main things I wanted to do is to bring all of our local bar associations together.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, what a tremendous reflection of your character for that primary goal to be one of service and really one of the best leadership qualities, I think, to have a servant-leader heart. I think that's incredible.

We talked -- we've talked a little bit about the pandemic and the virus, and it -- clearly, it's impacting the courts and I know it's impacting our lawyers in this community. What do you -- what's your perception of the biggest concern of the bar as it relates to the pandemic and the virus and its impact on their practice? Is it economic? Is it driven by something else?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I've talked to lots of friends and other people dealing with this, and I think it is economics. A lot of people were afraid -- they're still afraid; what's going to happen to them when this is all over; will they still be able to practice. We have some people who have very unique practices; will that unique practice go away because of this.

We're seeing and hearing about firms doing layoffs, cutting hours, cutting salaries, so people are concerned. But they're also concerned about health. You know, we've had -- I think -- well, I'd known that there was a lawyer here in town who had COVID-19, and a lot of people were concerned. I still hear people concerned about whether or not they will have to go back to work. I pretty much told my firm I'm not coming back till August. But people are concerned about their health.

But I think mostly they're just afraid. Nobody's ever envisioned, you know, that this would happen during this time period or we would have to experience it. And so I get a little -- people who wouldn't necessarily -- I would think, wouldn't say to me, I'm afraid, have said that. And it's -- they're concerned about what's going to happen to them in the future, their families; will they be able to feed their families; will their practice go away; what else will they do; will they have to transition; you know, what can they do.

And then we have the other people who -- how can I help my clients, how can I help the people out there; what are we going to do to help the -- you know, help these people. And there's a lot of questions.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: No doubt. There have been a lot of people impacted by the virus in so many ways, but certainly in terms of legal needs in the community. There's been a lot of delay notwithstanding the, you know, tens of thousands of cases have been heard during this time. There are limitations on what we can do here in the courthouse, and those limitations

ultimately are imposed on the lawyers who are representing clients. So I can certainly appreciate that.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: And I think they all appreciate information. It's kind of hard to be in the dark. You know, they want to know -- it's sort of like the Town Hall today, a great example. I think you said 260, 270 people, because they want to know. They're all worried. They're all concerned about, you know, when they come back, what's going to happen to them there, you know. Will they risk -- you know, be at risk, will they put their families at risk. And so it is a concern. I think everybody in every industry has those same concerns.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, I chuckled a little bit when you said you told your firm that you thought you'd be back by August. Because I know the role of the president of the Orange County Bar Association is such it's not likely for you to be back until next June.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: That is true. They've been given fair warning. It's -- the last two weeks -- I mean, I've talked about Jenny Brown. Jenny Brown had me up this morning for a conference call; been, you know, through weekly conference call, agendas. I've already done a new board member orientation on Tuesday. I don't even know what day of the week it is. So it's rolling pretty quickly, lots of emails now coming in. And I've got 200 emails -- at least 200 emails work-related, now I'm getting the bar emails; people have suggestions, people have concerns, and I certainly want to be able to address them. So, yeah, it's -- do understand it's going to be a tough road ahead, lots of work, but I am willing to take the challenge.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: I hear you.

Let's talk for just a minute about you personally, LaShawnda. I think in this time it's so important for us to look behind the profession and the career and the fear and the challenges to just talk about people. And so you're a person in the midst of all of this in transition into a pretty

significant role. Tell us something that -- little-known fact about you; something that folks wouldn't know about you.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: That's hard.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: I know one.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Okay. Okay.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: I don't think --

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Okay.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: I mean, obviously, your friends know this -- your close friends know this. But you are not under the age of 18, and yet you were recently adopted.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Pretty cool ceremony. That was really an exciting story.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Right. A lot of people -- you're right, a lot of people do not know about that.

I -- my father died when I was three years old, and I was raised by his sister, who I've always known to be my mom. And a good friend of mine, we were just talking one day, and I don't know what it was about. I think I was probably thinking about this will project and getting wills done and all this. I'm like, oh, my gosh, what happens if a bridge falls down on me, who's going to have the wrongful death lawsuit; my mother, she's raised me all this time; you know, what's going to happen. And so, you know, we're just laughing it off --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Only -- wait. Now, only a lawyer thinks those thoughts, but okay.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Yes. Crazy, crazy thoughts going through my head. And we just -- I started talking with my friend about it and, you know, she's like, well, what

happened. I was like, well, I was a ward of the state until I was 18 years old, I do know that for sure. I was like, it helped me with getting financing for college; that's all I ever knew. And she's like, well, you've got to take care of that; you need to figure this out and we've got to figure it out.

And I said, yeah, can you do an adult adoption. And she said, yes. And so she had me, you know, start doing research to finding paperwork. And I remember, you know, one Sunday going over to my mom's, over -- and I said to her, what do you think about adopting me. And she said, you mean adopting a 40-something-year-old. And I said, yes. And she says, okay. And I said, well, we've got to find out the paperwork; I've got to figure out what happened way back when.

And so I pulled up a piece of -- you know, we went through all of her filing cabinets and actually found the temporary order giving her custody of me from 19 -- I think it was either 80 or 81, somewhere around in there. And, again, I just thought, well, gosh, yeah, if you can do an adult adoption, let's just do it. And I was very excited about it, was -- wanted it to be low-key, but of course my friends wouldn't let that happen. They wanted -- they -- I don't know how they did it, but they pulled it off, they got the 23rd Floor Courtroom with Judge Davis presiding. So it was a great event. So that would be a little-known fact. I got adopted after the age of 40 by the woman who raised me.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's awesome. What a great event, and what a great story. I mean, that's just so cool.

What do you do in your free time? What's something that you enjoy?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I am an avid college football fan, big, big Gator fan. I have season tickets, so if it's a home game I'm usually there. I'm crossing my fingers, knocking on wood, hoping there's a season this year and plan an away trip. Love, love, love to do that.

I'm also a big rollercoaster fan, which most people -- like, that's odd, out of nowhere. I sometimes will, you know, pick a Saturday and I'll go out to Universal or one of the other parks and I'll ride two rollercoasters and go home. That's just stuff that I like to do.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's awesome. And how about -- how do you manage stress? I mean, we're in the middle of a pretty stressful time. So what are the things that take you away from that?

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: I have one good example. Unfortunately, because I've been working from home and it's just me, I literally work long hours, probably a lot longer than I did before. And so my friends were realizing that I was working way too much, and so one of them actually bought me a puzzle. And it was actually a pretty neat puzzle. It was a -- it's about women in history and had their bio, and there's a little book that came along with it where you can learn about, you know, who they were. It's a stress reliever -- it was supposed to be. She said she did hers in three days -- three -- in three hours. It took me two days.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That just sounds stressful.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: And so I kept sending pictures. But it did get me away from work. I was determined to get it done. I showed updated pictures. So I do like to do, you know, some of that.

Stress -- I just -- a lot of times I just -- you know, I try to change the subject, change what's in my mind, call up somebody just to chat who I haven't chatted with before, or go to the theme park and ride a rollercoaster. That will get my mind off of whatever is bothering me.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, LaShawnda, thank you so much for coming and sharing with us about you, about your time with the bar, about those things that matter to you. We're grateful for this time, and I'm excited for the next year for you, for the opportunities that lie ahead.

I can just tell you, as a leader in the community navigating the courts through all of this, it's stressful and it is challenging. But this is an incredible place to be, this is an incredible time to be in. And we'll be watching. So thank you.

LASHAWNDA JACKSON: Thank you.

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