

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

BIDDING FAREWELL: LIFE BEYOND THE BENCH

FEATURING RETIRING JUDGE ALICE L. BLACKWELL

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HOSTED BY: CHIEF JUDGE LISA T. MUNYON

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 Alice Blackwell, who is retiring from the bench after 32 years of service. Judge Blackwell joined the Ninth Circuit bench in 1991, starting out in our Orange County criminal court. Since then, she has served in multiple divisions as well as serving as the Associate Administrative Judge for criminal and domestic relations divisions, and as Administrative Judge for the civil and domestic relations divisions. And as our circuit’s longest serving active judge, she has accomplished many things on the bench that we’ll be exploring in today’s episode. I’m thrilled to have you in the studio today, Judge Blackwell. Thanks for joining me.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Thank you, Chief.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you have been on the bench a long time.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: That is true.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you were – I don’t think you were the first female circuit judge but you were one of the first.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Maybe third or fourth, somewhere in that range, yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you’ve seen a lot of changes over the years. When you became a judge, you were pretty young.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: I think I was 34 years old, yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you took the bench, what was your vision of what your future would be on the bench?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Well, I certainly hoped to grow old and retire on the bench so that vision came true, so that was pretty cool. You know, it's interesting, I was going through papers the other day and I actually found handwritten, the remarks that I gave at my investiture.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Really.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yeah, I did. I found them and so I know exactly what my vision was and my vision was as a judge to follow the law, and to serve – and to be a judge who listened and cared about the people who appeared in court. And I've tried really hard to do that but I haven't always done that every single day. I mean, we all have good days and bad days as judges and I've had good days and bad days. I think what I hoped to accomplish as a judge professionally was to just really be a good, good judge in the sense of a judge who did excellent work, who lawyers were happy to appear before, who was a good colleague. And who people in the community could feel proud of and wanted to re-elect. I also wanted to somehow improve the court when I was there over the years. I wanted to leave it better than the way I found it. I didn't want to be someone who just put in my hours and went home. I wanted to be someone who when you left people could look back and say, boy, she really tried to make this better.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, you've never been one that just took your paycheck and went home. And I know that because –

JUDGE BLACKWELL: I hope not.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- I've known you since we were both lawyers.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Before either of us was on the bench. And you have been one of my mentors. You've been in so many divisions in the court. I think nearly every division. What was your favorite one and why?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: No favorite really because every division has pluses and minuses. The one where I stayed the longest was domestic violence as you know. And that was because I truly believed in my heart and still do to this day that a judge sitting in domestic violence can do more to help people who need it in that division than almost any other division that we have. I've always said that judges are given power by people, by the people of the state, in this case in our circuit, are given power and we then have to choose how we use that power. The people who come into domestic violence court that are true victims and survivors of domestic violence are victims of people who have inappropriately and horribly used power and control in bad ways against them. And what a judge can actually do is break off a piece of that power that we've been given by the people and hand it over to someone who lacks power. And in doing that we can actually sometimes save lives. And what we can also do is alter the course of life for other people who are impacted by domestic violence, including children and other people in that ambit, and sometimes we can break the generational curse of domestic violence for people who commit it. Because nobody comes into the world wanting to commit domestic violence. It's taught to them. And in that civil domestic violence arena a judge who's given power, if they use it well and carefully, and intelligently and mindfully, can actually alter life for people. I just don't think there's anything better and we save lives, and we've seen that because when we did it early on, when we weren't doing it mindfully, people were dying. And when we finally figured out that we needed to have judges that understood it and did it all day every day

as a steady diet, that we could get judges to understand it and do a better job, then we could help better. We saw a difference and kudos to you judge for – Chief for recognizing that, actually expanding the domestic violence court recently. What a wonderful thing to do for our community because people are desperate there. So I always felt it wasn't the easiest one, it wasn't necessarily my favorite, but it certainly was the one where I felt the biggest sense of mission.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Talking about domestic violence is one of your passions as a judge and I remember when I was a baby judge we were making a decision about how we were going to treat domestic violence cases in the future. Can you describe for us a little of the process that created the domestic violence court as we have it here in Orange and Osceola Counties?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Sure and I take no credit for that. That was Belvin Perry's leadership and Lydia Gardner, and the two of them put their heads together and they were visionaries. And they approached the county mayor and said, we need to change this. And from that was born the idea of a county-wide commission that was formed that by design would be the leaders of agencies in the county. And at Belvin and the Clerk's – Clerk Gardner's insistence, they would not let the leaders of agencies send their second or thirds in command. They had to be at the table. The Sheriff had to be at the table. The Chief of OPD had to be at the table, you know. If you were the head person at the jail, you had to be at the table. You know it was that kind of thing. And Harbor House, the domestic violence certified agency had to be at the table. The Chief Operating Officer had to be there; the Chief Executive Officer rather had to be there. And all of those people came together and said, what do we need to do in our community to make this better? And I got to serve on that commission. Bob Evans, Robert Evans, one of our other judges was one of the co-chairs. Dick Batchelor I think co-chaired it at that time as well.

And from that was born this idea of having a dedicated domestic violence court within our Orange County circuit court. And that's how it came about. And through Judge Perry's, Chief Judge Perry's leadership, and advocacy within our court and I helped him, as he told – you know as he directed me because he was a master at saying, okay, Alice, go work on this project, go work on this project. And then he actually got Orange County and their – and our county has always been a huge supporter of our courts. They're just wonderful to us. And one of things that Judge Perry asked me to do, he said, go around and find information you can about what a physical structure should look like to be safe, so that people can be safe. And I –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Physical structure of the courtroom.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Of the courtrooms, a receiving area, all of that. And so I went and found that information and came back, and the county said we can do this and it won't be expensive. So we were able to come to the judges and say we can do this, this is what it will look like. The county can build a structure for us, and to the credit of our judges they voted for it and said, yes, we're willing to support this. And it was – it's – it is recognized not just statewide but nationally as one of the best designed from a physical standpoint, but also one of the best trauma informed courts that exists.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So for those that have never been on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor where we have our family courts and our domestic violence courts, how does the physical space of the domestic violence court, how does that differ from your ordinary family court or ordinary other court in this building?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Well, it differs from the outset. As soon as – as soon as a party gets off the elevator, if they are a petitioner who is at that point presumed to be a survivor of

domestic violence, they're going to take a different direction into their waiting area than a person who is presumed at that point to be a perpetrator of domestic violence, who's going to go a different direction. So they're not going to meet --

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: They don't have to see each other.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: They don't have to see each other. They're going to separate waiting rooms where they cannot see each other. That's important because oftentimes a domestic violence perpetrator has even -- can even communicate threats and intimidation just by a certain look, or by a certain motion and so you don't want them to be able to even look at each other and any kind of intimidation or threat to occur just by any contact. So we have specially designed waiting rooms where the staff can see both sides, but the two sides of the waiting rooms can't see each other. And we have -- we have video -- special videos that play in right now I think English and Spanish. I don't know if we're doing Haitian, Creole yet or not, but we have that going on so that there's information given and quiet, calming beautiful music with little mountains and streams and things like that to get -- to set sort of a calming tone for everybody. There's a check-in process so the staff gets information, gives information, and we give people an opportunity so that we have information with regard to whether there's a need for child support, economic relief, other information that the judges are going to be able to have and use quickly so that we don't have to prolong the time in the hearing. Then our deputies are specially trained for domestic violence. We have two, and oftentimes it's been used, three deputies in the courtroom per judge. And we have extra staff available. The clerk and the DV staff work together so that we put out orders immediately so that we can serve the orders quickly and that way we don't have the problem of the sheriff having to go out try to find people to serve later. It's just a really nice streamline process. And because the deputies are trauma trained, they know

to help the petitioner get out and get to his or her car quickly so that they can exit the building, because we had a lot of problems happening over in the parking garage and so we learned a whole process to help people get away quickly without running into each other. We've got a process start to finish that helps keep people safe. That doesn't happen in a regular family hearing. The parties sit in the hallway, maybe around each other, maybe not waiting for their hearings. They leave. Nobody monitors what happens when they leave so it's a totally different process.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And we've replicated that process in Osceola County now.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yes. Yes, that was really wonderful, and thanks to the leadership of a lot of judges, but I know Judge Heather Pinder Rodriguez worked very hard on that one. She was the administrative judge down there and that was great.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes. And we ensure that when you're in a domestic violence hearing that you're not in the hearing with 50 other people watching you –

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Absolutely.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: -- and talking about these very intimate and embarrassing details of your life.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Absolutely.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Which is huge for this population as well.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Absolutely.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you've – how long were you involved in – or how long were you assigned to the domestic violence division?



JUDGE BLACKWELL: I don't know exactly. I think probably somewhere in the range for about nine to ten years off and on but I've stayed involved in domestic violence for probably about 20 to 25 years of my career, largely because I've had the good fortune at the statewide level to stay involved.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, not only were you involved in domestic violence court for a long time, you were in business court for five years which is –

JUDGE BLACKWELL: With you.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: With me, which is a completely – which is on a different spectrum of court appearances and court proceedings. Tell us about your time in business court.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: See it would be hard not to say that business court was my favorite too because we had a great time.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. We had a great time. Absolutely.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yeah, we sure did. And I still, I know you do, but I still get lawyers walking up to me saying, are you ever coming back to business court, we sure had fun.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: And, yeah, business court was amazing. So business court involves a piece of the civil court where some of the cases that require, because of the complexity of the issues, and the size of the, or the size of the number of parties and of the type of case, that it requires a more hands on approach by the judge. And so they get pulled out and they get more judicial handling. And I know you and I used to joke, we'd look at each other before we went into hearings and say, we know we're going to be the dumbest person in the

room when we go in because we had lawyers that were just so amazing coming into those hearings.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: From all over the country and the world.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Right. It was unbelievable. And that was really, back then we were like begging people to use remote hearing capabilities and people were like no, no, we'll fly in for our 15 minutes hearing from you know Washington State or wherever they came. But we would just have these amazing hearings. They were just – and people would give us this great briefing and the facts would be complex and the legal issues would be complex and –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And there would be no clear answer.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Right. It was like issues of first impression all the time and it was so much fun to wrestle with. It was just intellectually challenging in the most wonderful way. It was – it really was some of the most intellectually, interesting and stimulating work that we ever got to do, I think. And you and I worked together so well to try to harmonize our procedures and our judicial assistants worked together so well that I think we made it a welcoming court in that sense. And the feature of the court that was so much fun for me and that I thought worked so incredibly well were the case management conferences. Because we did really meaningful case management conferences where we required the clients to come and watch the case management –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Participate in it.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: -- process and participate and talk and be involved and buy into the deadlines that you and I held the line on. And so I just – the trials were fascinating. The issues were fascinating. That was a good five years. That was a really, really good five years.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It went so fast.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Didn't it though. I know. But then at the end, remember they dropped or we took on I think almost voluntarily all of the tobacco litigation. How many cases?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: We thought it was 50, yeah.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: That's what they told us.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It ended up being many more than that.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Like 130 –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: -- 130 plus, wasn't it?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. Yes.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: And so we took those on and set every single one of them for trial in the future, but we got them all set.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: And managed those.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And now we've gotten through all the tobacco litigation in the Ninth Circuit, thank goodness. And we've talked a little bit about, just very briefly, about your career on the bench. But there's so much more to being a judge than what you do on the bench, or there can be if you're one of those people that wants to make the system better. And you've been involved in the circuit judges' conference as chair, and you've been involved in

judicial education and you've been involved in branch governance. So let's talk a little bit about that. How did you get so involved in almost every aspect of the judiciary?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Well, I'm a bit of an extrovert. I'm not a real extrovert. I think I'm an omnivert is what, I think is the technical term for it. I'm an extrovert when I'm around people, but I need to then go home and like crawl under the covers and that kind of thing. But I enjoy teaching particularly, so I was drawn to the idea of teaching. And I got involved teaching in judicial education early and really liked it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And we have one of the best judicial education programs in the nation in Florida, I believe.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Oh, it's absolutely fantastic. And what makes it fantastic in a nutshell is that the judges who designed it decided that we needed to learn how adults learn and teach the way adults learn which is never just to talk to them. And so when you teach judicial education in the state of Florida you can't just be a talking head.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's not a lecture or reading the PowerPoint.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Right. And so that makes teaching so much more fun because you have to be creative and you have to figure out how to teach in the way that people really have to work to learn and that's just fun. It's challenging, it's exciting. And it engages people in a very unusual way. It's great teaching. So I liked that and I enjoyed teaching and it was hard work but it was to me worth it. So I started teaching and from teaching some of the Office of the State Court Administrator staff began to – and they observed the teaching. They're required to, as a part of the teaching, keeping, making sure that the teaching is done well. And they began to approach me and say, would you work on this committee, would you do this committee work,

would you help us with these areas. And from there I sort of got sucked into working on some of the statewide committee work. On a parallel track, Belvin Perry had become my very good friend and mentor. He from the beginning, when I first came on the bench, he and Dick Conrad just adopted me. I was a poor little mut because as a 34-year-old woman coming on to the bench, with a bunch of really pretty much old men, they said we got to take her under our wing and help her because I came into criminal from a civil practice and didn't know what I was doing. So they took me and helped me. And we sort of became a team. And Belvin said, let me get you involved in the conference, and the conference for people who don't know, there's a statewide organization of circuit judges that sort of governs circuit judges and does education and does sort of the business of circuit judges, including at that time a lot of lobbying for circuit judges. Including lobbying for pay and for things that circuit judges' thought were important to be done by the legislature. And so there was a hierarchy and he said, we need to get you involved and he would get people to have me do certain things in connection with that and then I began to move up in the track there. So that's how I got involved pretty much.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you became so involved that you became chair of the conference.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Eventually ran for chair, yes, and loved that. It was – although, it was right around I think – I was the chair 2008 and 2009, 2008 to 2009 was my – were my two years and everybody knows what happened financially those years.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: It was bad. So we ended up only having one conference that year which was unfortunate. We used to have two conferences a year.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, that was the year they changed it to one and it's never gone back.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: It never went back, yeah, that was tough.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So not only did you get involved in teaching in the conference, but you've done a lot of statewide work and committee work for governance of the branch. And many people may not recognize that the branch has a structure that was set up by the Supreme Court, a bunch of committees and commissions that basically do the work of the branch or make recommendations to the Supreme Court for policy in the branch. So what did you – what were you involved in during your career in that governance structure?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Well, the – I first – the biggest first thing I got involved in happened when the state courts were called upon to change the primary funding of the courts from county funding to state funding. And that was a revision that was made the state constitution to change that funding. And -- Revision 7 it was called to the constitution. And at that point the state courts were asked to study themselves and say how is it that – what is the base funding? Because courts were doing tons and tons of things. Lots of things, every court. And we had all kinds of programs and services, all of which were primarily county funded. The state funded not much of it. And the state didn't want to take on everything that courts were doing. So they said to us, what is the core function of a court, core constitutional function. And how much of this should a court do? So one of the first – so I got involved in that and one of the first things that I was asked to do was to chair a commission on the state trial courts that would travel around the state to different areas of the state with a fairly large committee of both individuals and court stakeholders to decide what is a constitutional court. And we talked about, can you put a judge

under a tree and have a constitutional court? Or do you have to have everything that everybody's doing? So we inventoried, what is every single court in the state doing? Every single one.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow, that's a big undertaking.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: It was crazy. And it was a lot. I mean, there were courts doing all kinds of crazy stuff. And we even, at our court here at that point, had a court care center here in our court, in the Ninth Circuit where we had psychologists on staff and psychologists in training and people who came to court for family law cases could get free counseling for up to like four or five sessions if they were experiencing stress.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: It was crazy. And we were doing stuff. And the county was funding it because they decided that was an important thing for us to do so we had our crazy stuff up on the board too. And I can remember we were in Miami holding a meeting and we were all talking about what's a constitutional court. And a member of our committee stood up and he said, he was a member of the public and he said, all you judges and all you lawyers in here, you can't tell us what a court does, you don't know? I mean, he was really distressed. You know, we're like well, no, we can't because we're just trying to figure it out. But over time we began to sift in the constitutional functions and the non-constitutional functions and began to sort of reach that agreement. But it resulted in a huge cut in what the state would fund. And so from that then, and that was a huge undertaking, and after that I got moved into the performance and accountability commission which became a counterpart to the trial court budget commission because the state supreme court then needed to revamp how are we going to be accountable to the state for our resources. And they came up with a primary, we were going to have to be

accountable by budget and we're going to need to be accountable by being able to describe how we're using resources and how we are doing improvement to the use of resources. So Belvin and a lot of people that were really good at budget stuff got put over in the budget commission and I was asked to chair the trial court performance and accountability commission and it was our job to say okay, we're going to put together standards, practices and best practices for how do you use – how are we going to be accountable for what we are given and for the practices that we're using. And so that's how I moved into the arena and I chaired that ten years, eleven years, some long time period until I finally said, somebody else ought to do this because I've done it long enough.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you remained involved in other smaller initiatives after that even, I believe.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: I did. And then I also got involved in more specific subject matter initiatives. I've served for a long time on the – on the – there's a family court steering committee and I've served on the family court steering committee for quite a while.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And that's a statewide committee.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: It is. It's a statewide committee and it reports to the Supreme Court on issues related to family courts. And I've always been involved in the domestic violence subcommittee of that. And then there's another Office of the State Court Administrator's workgroup on domestic violence and I've served on that separate one and from that one we do lot of work on resources for judges to self-train on domestic violence. And I do a lot of work with that, like reviewing materials that are going to go online for judges and I've got some videos particularly on economic relief because I really try to help judges do economic relief. And



with Dan Traver and Alicia Latimore and some other judges across the state, we've had what we call a traveling road show and we have – we've decided that one way to train judges on domestic violence is not to ask them to come somewhere, but to go to them. So we have gone around the state for quite a few years taking judicial training for domestic violence to circuits or like we'll go to a central area where three or four circuits can come there and try to do smaller group training that's very interactive so that judges can have a chance to practice domestic violence skills in a safe environment. And that's been very, very successful until COVID hit and then we had to convert that to an online process and because Judge Traver was involved, that became a very wonderful process where we did it very deliberately and it was really well done. So we've done – I've done a lot of work with that as well.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, taking it back to your investiture, all of your aspirations were with regard to the adjudicatory part of your job but your career has been so much more than that. How – I don't know how to ask this. But I would assume that you found those other aspects of your job to be very fulfilling.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yes. Yeah, I grew up in a family that believed in public service. You were put on the earth not just to work but to make the world better. And it was – it was really a responsibility of your faith not just to touch whatever was in front of you but to really work hard to make the world a better place. And so you didn't – you didn't let an opportunity go by not to do that. And so it was really important if you had an opportunity to make an impression on the person in front of you to do that but if you could make an even bigger impression, that's important too. And so that idea of having that opportunity to make a bigger impression or to have an opportunity to step into leadership if you were available to do so, I felt like I had to. I felt like I was called to that. Not just because of my family or not just because of something inside of me,

but because I think that's what God calls you to do is to do that if you have the ability and the time and availability. And so I always felt like that was part of the mission field that God gave me here. So I have wanted to do it so I'm glad that those doors were open for me and that I could step through them.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What have you seen change in the 32 years that you've been on the bench?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Well, I think some of the change has been fantastic. Technology is the best. Our court embraces technology better than anything I've ever seen so the technology that we have is great. My judicial assistant and I were laughing the other day. We were trying to explain to this very nice, very young person who is our case manager what it was like when people used to bring files in our office and set them on the desk with the mail clipped to them and the orders – the motions clipped to them and you had to go through them and flip through the files. You remember?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Rolling baskets with files.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: People would roll huge baskets through. And we said it's so wonderful when you can just click on a file and open it and everything's there. It's just – I mean, that – the technological changes and being able to do hearings remotely and all of that, that's just fabulous. Some change is so great. What is not great, is volume. We are way too lean and we are pushed – judges are pushed way too hard to do too much too fast. And we have lost the ability to slow down and do things right, and I hate that feeling. I hate that feeling I've got to shove those bons-bons in the box too fast. I had a hearing today in a guardianship case and I was pushing, pushing, pushing to get to the next thing. And a lady walked in, she's the guardian of her elderly

mother and I looked at her and I said, how is your mom. And she burst out crying. And I knew I had to stop and just let her talk and I just sat there with her. And we talked about her mom. She talked about what her mom was like when she was a young person and she told me about how it took three of them to take her mom to the doctor and how hard it was. And she just needed someone to sit there with her.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And we've lost the ability to do that with the volume.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: I hate it. I hate that, Lisa. I hate that. And I hate feeling like when I look at an order that I need to sign that I have to weigh speed against getting it right. And we're there and I don't like that. And I wish – I wish our legislators could see the agony that that causes inside of a judge when he or she has to look at an order and go, am I going to let this one slide and sign it because it's probably okay or am I going to be able to take the time because oftentimes we can't take the time. And that one just kills me. I hate that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And that has changed tremendously in the past 30 years, even in the 20 years that I've been on the bench.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yeah, we used to think a heavy caseload was a third of what we have now. I was looking back and thinking it's just unbelievable. And you know it's just – I don't think the legislature is uncaring in any way. I think that they are well-meaning in what they're doing. I just think there are unintended consequences that don't become apparent and some of it's because we care so much as judges. We push and we just keep going and going and going. But I do know, I sit down with my young colleagues and say to them, please take a vacation. And they will say to me, I can't take a vacation. And I'll say, you've got to take time off for yourself. And a young county judge grabbed me about a month ago and said, Alice, I'm

taking a vacation. I'm so excited. I said, how long? And she said it's been over a year. I haven't taken a vacation in a year. I said, that's ridiculous. Please take a vacation. And that's not healthy. It's not good. It makes for bad judges and we need to not let people do that to themselves.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So that's some advice you'd have for our young colleagues. We have a lot of young colleagues.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What other advice would you give to those that are new to the bench or are hoping to come to the bench?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Well, here's my favorite question to ask judges after they've been on the bench for about six months. What's different about being a judge than what you thought it was when you came?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Because it's always different.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Oh, it's totally different. Because when you're a lawyer you look at a judge and say, boy that job looks good. They just sit there and make wise decisions and they have no idea that sitting on the bench is like ten percent of what being a judge is. And then when they come to the bench it's like, oh, my gosh, I had no idea that there's all this other work that goes on.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That nobody sees.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: That nobody sees. It's all the preparation and it's all the paperwork, it's all the ruling that has to be done and it's all the – you have to manage people and you have to be involved in committee work internally in the circuit and you know you have to

work with your colleagues and help people and ask questions. You know it's all this other stuff that goes on. So what I would tell young colleagues is don't be surprised that this is not an 8 to 5 job. This is a lifestyle. Being a judge is a lifestyle. It is a lifestyle and it is a profession. You are going to live this job and you are going to need to work as hard as a lawyer works. Maybe harder.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Maybe harder.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yeah, I think it's harder. And you – you're not going to make as much money as your colleagues who are at a professional level like you and I will never make as much money as the people who are our age and are working in major firms or even have their own firms. But the rewards are worth it because you're serving people and doing things without having to worry about making a dollar. And you're getting to do what's right. But when you are starting this job as a young judge, you have to develop good work habits. You have to care deeply that you're making the right decision. You have to care deeply about knowing the law as well as or better than the people who are in front of you. Preparation, just like practicing law is the key. You have to read everything and know everything. And it's unrelenting. You can't let up. You have to keep going. You have to keep trying.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What will you miss the most when you start the new season of your life?

JUDGE BLACKWELL: It's a cliché; it's the people.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: People, yeah.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Yeah, everybody says that because it's true. I mean, it's my colleagues. It's the people you work with every day. It's the trial clerks. It's you know, it's the

deputies. I had a deputy in my office yesterday showing me pictures of his children's wedding. I knew his kids when they were five years old. I mean, it's –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Court admin staff.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: It's everybody.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: It's everybody. It's even the people, you know, like I've watched one of the – one of the staff in the building who like fixes things and paints things and does that, I've watched his child grow up. I have pictures of her on my bulletin board in my office from when she was 8 years old and now she has graduated and has a job. And he brings me pictures every year and he stops by and tells me what's going on with her all the time. I mean, that's – and you – of necessity, I will lose contact with those people and I hate that. That's the worst part.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, my dear friend I will miss you.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: I'll miss you too. You're killing me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, thank you for joining me here today. It's been an interesting conversation.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: You were special from the beginning when you were my division chief. I said, nobody like her.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I don't know about that. But...

JUDGE BLACKWELL: For sure.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Thank you so much for joining me today.

JUDGE BLACKWELL: Thank you.

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