

9<sup>TH</sup> UNPLUGGED

RAFAEL BARRERAS

COURT INTERPRETER

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HOSTED BY: HONORABLE ALICIA L. LATIMORE

JUDGE LATIMORE: Hi, I'm Judge Latimore.

MR. BARRERAS: And I'm Rafael Barreras.

JUDGE LATIMORE: And you're listening to 9<sup>th</sup> Unplugged.

(Music)

JUDGE LATIMORE: So before we get unplugged, if you'll please tell our audience what your position is with the Ninth Circuit, what are your duties, and how long you've been with us.

MR. BARRERAS: Well, I am a state certified court interpreter. I'm a staff interpreter here at the Ninth. I'm actually pretty new. I started in June of this year, but previous to that, I worked for the circuit a little over ten years as a contract employee. So I'm not really what you would call new to the circuit; I'm just new as an employee. We interpret – I interpret Spanish to English in all types of, mostly criminal proceedings, trials, hearings, motions, child support. Basically anything having to do with a criminal proceeding or a litigant's rights are being challenged.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right. Well, thank you so much for your service and we're going to go ahead and get unplugged, and leave that a little to the side. How about that?

MR. BARRERAS: Yes, ma'am, sounds good.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right. Where were you born and raised?

MR. BARRERAS: I was born in Weehawken, New Jersey, however I did not grow up there. When I was about two years old, my parents moved to South Florida to Miami, and that's where I grew up and was raised before I moved to Central Florida in 1991.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right. My fellow Miami person, okay. So where again in New Jersey is it?

MR. BARRERAS: It's a town called Weehawken, New Jersey. It's right on the Hudson River, directly across from New York City.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay. And have you been back?

MR. BARRERAS: When I was twelve years old, I went back to see the place where I was born to meet the doctor that brought me into the world and to see the hospital, and obviously none of that's there anymore. The doctor obviously has since passed. The hospital was actually torn down and they built another hospital down the road. But I have been there and I've obviously been back to New York City a handful of times with family and stuff like that.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Anything special about Weehawken?

MR. BARRERAS: Weehawken, no. No, the thing that made it special was because the next town and a couple of towns over was an area that was called Havana on the Hudson, colloquially. A lot of Cuban Americans lived there when they migrated from Cuba in the late 50s and early 60s when Castro took over in Cuba. So there was a large Cuban population there similar to what Miami has, although Miami obviously has a larger population. But it was a similar – similar area.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay. Do you go back to Miami frequently?

MR. BARRERAS: I go about once a year. I have good friends there from my childhood. I have a couple of cousins. You know, again the Miami that I grew up in doesn't really exist anymore. It's turned into such a huge city with all the issues that a big city has so I'd rather you

know remember it the way I grew up and just go back to touch base with friends and family on occasion and not really spend a lot of time down there anymore.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right, so what do you do to kind of relax and enjoy yourself when you're off from work?

MR. BARRERAS: Well, one of the things that I enjoy doing which I kind of picked up as some people did during the pandemic, while we were quarantined, was gardening. We have a back patio on our house, we're blessed, we live on a lake and we have a little back patio, screened in patio. And I just started bringing in different kinds of plants, or growing them from seedlings or, you know, and so that's kind of what I do. I, sometimes, I get up early in the morning on the weekends and water my plants and fertilize them, and you know, just do – just to keep that patio pretty. It kind of looks like a little jungle back there.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay. And do you – I mean, is there a particular plant that you like more than others. I mean, do you have a favorite –

MR. BARRERAS: Well, my wife – I like it too but I kind of pay a little bit more attention to this plant because my wife likes it, which is the plumeria plant, which is the plant that has the flowers that they make leis out of in Hawaii.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Is it purple?

MR. BARRERAS: They have different colors.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Oh, okay.

MR. BARRERAS: The one that we have is more white with a little bit of yellow.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay.

MR. BARRERAS: And the one thing I like about this plant is this thing is the heartiest thing on the planet. Very rarely do you have to pay too much attention to it. And then in the environment that we are here in Central Florida is a perfect growing environment for it because it's similar to what it would be back in Hawaii with the humidity and the heat, and the temperatures that it survives in. And it doesn't really need a lot of attention. And it's a very pretty flower so I like that. I've also got a coffee plant that my mother-in-law gave us when my wife and I first got married a little bit over twelve years ago. And we planted it. It was a plant in a coffee cup. It was itty-bitty and we planted it and it just grew about six feet tall. And it even started growing little seedlings right next to it. Well, unfortunately, this plant got some kind of disease and it was dying. So what I ended up doing, I removed the seedling and I save it and I planted it in another pot so it wouldn't be affected by whatever was killing that plant. Sadly, that one passed away but now we have its little seedling and it's growing like crazy. So from this little coffee plant that my mother-in-law gave us in a little coffee cup, we've had these two giant coffee plants and they've actually given us coffee beans at one time.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right. How is the coffee?

MR. BARRERAS: I never – we never roasted them.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay.

MR. BARRERAS: But I've been tempted, but just never got around to doing it. I just thought it was cool that it gave me coffee beans.

JUDGE LATIMORE: That is. That is very cool. Do you grow any food?

MR. BARRERAS: I tried doing some peppers and bugs got to it and it didn't quite work out, so now I kind of stick to ornamental things. Things that flower and things that look pretty and you know, crotons with different colored leaves and stuff like that.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right, so I just want you to share this very interesting fact that I happened to read about you, about you officiating a marriage.

MR. BARRERAS: Yes.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Yes, and that's because you're a notary, right?

MR. BARRERAS: I'm a notary, correct.

JUDGE LATIMORE: So you have the capacity to marry.

MR. BARRERAS: Correct.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Would you share that with the audience? It's very interesting.

MR. BARRERAS: Yeah, so after about twelve years, my ex and I split up and we have a beautiful daughter in common, and about a year and a half later, you know we remained friends, as happens many times, you know couples seems to get along better when they're not together than when they are together. So we had a pretty decent relationship and she met someone who was a really great stepfather for my daughter. And they – they got married a year and a half later, and I actually officiated their wedding.

JUDGE LATIMORE: That is awesome.

MR. BARRERAS: So I officiated the wedding of my ex and her husband.

JUDGE LATIMORE: That is awesome.

MR. BARRERAS: So people here, they go what. I'm like you know, you got to understand, it was all good.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Oh, my goodness, if I could just take that and do a lesson in co-parenting, that would – I would invite you next time I have that topic. But that's wonderful and that's great for others to hear. If you could pick someone who was your hero, who would that be?

MR. BARRERAS: Probably my parents. Both of them. They've both since passed away. My dad passed away in 2020 and my mom passed away earlier this year in February.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Oh, I'm sorry.

MR. BARRERAS: And um, yeah, they were married for 73 years, 72 years. And just knowing – they had pretty much a full life in Cuba when – in their mid-30s when they had to flee due to communism. And they had to start over here and you know when I read back in some of my mom's and my dad's letters, and their pictures and stuff, I'm just amazed at how they overcame you know so many things that they had going against them as many you know immigrants and refugees from these countries have to deal with. And I'm just amazed at how they you know, they instilled in me my values. They instilled in me, I wouldn't be able to do what I do for a living right now if it wouldn't be for them because they made sure that I, not only was I able to speak two languages, but that I was able to speak them well.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Yes.

MR. BARRERAS: To the point where I'm able to do what I do today.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Have you been back to Cuba?

MR. BARRERAS: I haven't, 2014 I took my wife and my daughter, it was actually a gift to my daughter who was turning 18, graduating high school, and we went there for ten days and saw some cousins. And it was – it was quite a pilgrimage and I met family members that I didn't even know I had.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Yeah.

MR. BARRERAS: You know and I had a cousin who didn't even know – well, he knew I existed but his dad, my uncle had told him all about me because my uncle and my father were very good friends. They got along great and he never thought he'd ever meet me. He heard so much about me and never met me. And when I stumbled upon his house, he literally – he couldn't talk for the first 20 minutes.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Wow.

MR. BARRERAS: You know, like the words couldn't come out of his mouth.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Well, I'm sure it was an honor to meet you and it's been my pleasure to have you join us on 9<sup>th</sup> Unplugged.

MR. BARRERAS: Thank you.

(Music)