

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

JUDICIAL SPOTLIGHT

MEET HONORABLE A. JAMES CRANER

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HOSTED BY: CHIEF JUDGE 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 A. James Craner, one of our circuit judges in the Ninth Circuit. Judge Craner is a graduate of the University of Akron School of Law. After receiving his juris doctor, he went on to work as an associate with Alan Robinson, PA before spending some time in the State Attorney’s Office for the Ninth Circuit. But in 1996 he made the jump over to private practice. It was after 15 years as a solo practitioner that he received the call saying he had been appointed to the Orange County bench. And in 2014 he received another call with news he had been elevated to the circuit bench. I’m thrilled to have you in the studio today, Judge Craner. Thanks for joining me.

JUDGE CRANER: Thanks for having me. Glad to be here.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up?

JUDGE CRANER: Born in upstate New York. Family moved to Columbus, Ohio in the mid-seventies. Went to school there and went to college in Northeast Ohio at Kent State, University of Akron School of Law and moved down here in 1988.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what took your family from New York to Ohio?

JUDGE CRANER: My mom’s family lived near Springfield, Ohio. Her family was in manufacturing and she wanted to be closer to her mother who was a widow at the time so we lived in Columbus, 40 miles from her. So we – my father and mother decided to head out there

and spend time with her side of the family. My father was an only child so he didn't have brothers and sisters in upstate New York to spend time with. So that's how we got there.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So, from one cold environment to another.

JUDGE CRANER: Yes. Lots of snow.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did you go to high school in Ohio?

JUDGE CRANER: Yes. Columbus, Ohio, went side of Columbus.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what entertained you while you were in high school?

JUDGE CRANER: I spent a lot of time with cars. My father was into cars and doing maintenance on cars and taught me how to do that. And so when I was – and I'm shocked that he did it but he bought me a small motorcycle and I don't know how my mom agreed to it but I had that and I had saved up a couple bucks and I sold the motorcycle and took the cash and I bought, I'm trying to think which one first. I think it was a 1955 Chevy.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh.

JUDGE CRANER: And I had that in the garage and then I sold it –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How old were you then?

JUDGE CRANER: Fifteen.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you couldn't drive it by yourself.

JUDGE CRANER: Not legally.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Not legally anyway.

JUDGE CRANER: No, and then I sold that –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It was a different era then.

JUDGE CRANER: Well, yeah. They weren't drivable either. They were in pretty bad shape because everything up there has you know rust in it. So I sold that one and I bought a '66 Volkswagen Beetle and I was still 15. And that one was rusty and I redid that one to the extent that I could without having any money or any skill level. So – but I sold it and I made some money on it and I bought a third car, another '55 Chevy, two-door sport coupe that a friend of ours had and he had it for sale so I went ahead and bought that, and I think at that point I was probably 18, getting ready to graduate high school.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And was that one drivable? Is that what you drove when you went to college?

JUDGE CRANER: I took it one year, the transmission blew up. I had to have it rebuilt. They did it wrong. It blew up a second time and I was in school at Kent State University and I advertised it and sold it and I bought my mom's car which was a 1979 Datsun B210, called the Honeybee. It was yellow. So that was my fourth car. So that one got me through law school.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what did you love about cars?

JUDGE CRANER: Just being able to do something with them to make them look better, to make them run better, to make them sound better, you know, get me from point A to point B. I still do it today with the cars I have.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It wasn't the muscle car, the sound, the speed?

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah, yeah, not so much the speed because they weren't very speedy cars. Just the sound, the fact that I could do something with my hands and maybe make it look better, maybe redo the interior. I tried to paint it. I didn't do a very good job. I got the door jams painted and under the hood, and the trunk lid painted but it was the wrong color so instead of going to my senior prom, I actually took the money that I had and went and had the car painted, much to somebody's disappointment. But I never got to the prom so I had the car painted. It wasn't the exact match of everything else but the car looked really, really good and I doubled my money. So I parlayed that into the third car which was a turquoise and white '55 Belair sport coupe so they were fun, great little cars. I enjoyed them. I wish I still had them.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, my first car, when I was 16 was a 1973, I think it was Pontiac Gran Prix, had the big V8 in it and dual exhaust.

JUDGE CRANER: We had a '74.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It was a lot of fun.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah. Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Probably far too much car for a 16-year-old.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah, no, that's fun though. It's good.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: But it is fun. Absolutely. So you made a little money, bought more cars, went to college. What did you study in college?

JUDGE CRANER: At Kent State I had a major in criminal justice with a minor in police studies. I started out in architecture. I thought that was the right thing to do. That sounded really good when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. By the time I got to Kent State and I realized how hard they

worked, and they're up at two or three o'clock in the morning drafting and that sort of thing, I switched quickly and went to the criminal justice program and spent three and-a-half to four years in it and graduated with that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Did you anticipate going to law school with that degree or did you anticipate work as a law enforcement officer?

JUDGE CRANER: I wasn't sure. I didn't have a lot of direction. My father passed away when I was in high school at the age of 15.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE CRANER: So I was relying upon my mom and family members and friends to give me direction. They really didn't know. My mom was in the throes of raising of us as teenagers so she had her hands full keeping us in line. So I listened to other people. I thought well, maybe I could become a law enforcement officer. The funny part was I applied for a job as a law enforcement officer in Delaware, Ohio which is a small college town 15 miles north of Columbus. I traveled down there in the middle of winter, Saturday morning, four feet of snow on the ground, dressed up. Put a tie on, everything. Went into the interview and I was very disappointed with the interview process. It involved professors, civilians and law enforcement officers in the community and it took all of two minutes, and I was very disappointed. I expected it to last a lot longer, but I think they were doing what they had to do to comply with the law at the time and just interviewing people. I walked away. Got back in my car and went back to Kent State and got a ding letter a couple weeks later. So it was a little frustrating, a little disappointing, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me because I was a junior in college at the time and I went to an associate professor of mine by the name of Charlie Epstein and I said, I'm

thinking about going to law school and he said, you should. And I said, well, I'm not sure I can do it. He said, I've got a host of friends who didn't think they should go to law school. They did it and they're doing really well so you can do it too, let me help you. And I talked to an uncle. I talked to my mom and I talked to a few others and they all encouraged me to go, whether I use the degree or not, just go. And so Charlie got out this vintage typewriter and carbon paper and we filled out the applications and he told me, he said, we're going to do six applications. Two you absolutely will get into, two you might get into and two you have no chance of getting into, we'll see which ones hit. And so out of the six I probably got accepted to four which was you know wonderful. And I had some obligations at Kent State University so I chose to go to Akron which was about 15 miles down the road so that's why I ended up going to the University of Akron, plus I got to stay you know not too far from Columbus, Ohio where my mom lived.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: All right, so that's what led you to Akron.

JUDGE CRANER: That's it. That's how I got to Akron and that's how I got to law school, not knowing where I was headed once I got there and what to expect but it actually worked out pretty well.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you graduated from law school, your first job was here in Florida?

JUDGE CRANER: It was.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What brought you to Florida?

JUDGE CRANER: Funny, funny story. I had a friend in college, Clayton Robinson, Alan's younger brother, by 16 years and we had no plans for spring break and he said, let's go to Florida. And he said my brother lives down there in Seminole County, Orlando, Orange County

and we were both thinking about graduating and moving down here and so we brought resumes and left them with Alan on the hope that he would distribute them and he said he'd give them to various firms throughout the Central Florida area. And so we came down and spent a week here, left and went back and Clayton changed his mind. He decided to stay in Northeast Ohio. So I had no job prospects and I got a call one night from Alan saying I'd like you come down to work for me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, wow.

JUDGE CRANER: So he – I said, when would you like me there and he said noon on Saturday. Well, I called up my mom and I said what do you think you know because –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's a long way from Ohio.

JUDGE CRANER: It's a long haul, yeah so, I had a small sports car at the time and I threw out everything I had and got in the car and drove down and worked for him for five years. So he kind of taught me the ropes, getting started in trial work.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Did you learn a lot from him?

JUDGE CRANER: A lot. Brilliant lawyer.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes, I remember.

JUDGE CRANER: Very effective lawyer in court.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, got beat by him a couple of times.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah, he had a lot of good skills that he learned and he was willing to share it with me, a lot of good skills. I can't say enough about the opportunity that he offered me so I was with him for five years and I ended up coming to work with you.



CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So did you ever regret leaving Ohio and coming down to warmer climate in Florida?

JUDGE CRANER: Not a bit. Not a bit. I've been back of course several times to visit family, but if I was asked if I wanted to move back there the answer would be absolutely not. I'm very happy where I am so –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what led you to leave Alan's office and go to the State Attorney's Office?

JUDGE CRANER: He was having some difficulty in his practice and I think he was interested in me moving up and out and getting some experience with someone else. And so I took that as a sign to leave. So I went to the State Attorney's Office and I said I need a job. And I spoke to the bureau chief in traffic court at the time and he said, well, go see Bill Vose. So I sat down with Bill Vose and he offered me a job because I needed a job. And it was probably 1994 or 95, '93 it should have been and I was engaged at the time and so I needed a job. And so I accepted the job. I was working in the courtroom of Alan Todd, a county court judge on Friday, finishing up a trial and on Monday morning I rolled in with the usual four or five boxes of files that the state attorney drags around and he said, what are you doing? And I said I work for the state today so he was a little surprised.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I bet you didn't stay in county court for very long with the experience that you had.

JUDGE CRANER: No, I had five years of trial experience before that. I think I was in county court between two or three judges for maybe six months, then I went to juvenile to work with Judge Clark as a supervisor. And I was there for two months or three months and then I got

pulled back downtown to the felony division. I think you were my supervisor in the felony division when I was there for the remaining probably two years before I went back on my own.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What led you to go back into private practice?

JUDGE CRANER: Money.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, that's always the story.

JUDGE CRANER: That's a big pull.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, it's fun working at the State Attorney's Office but you don't make a lot. You don't make what you make in private practice.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah. And I didn't want to focus on one area for the balance of my career and I had many friends who were criminal defense attorneys, including Alan and Don Lykkebak, Cheney Mason, Russ Crawford, some of these other individuals I had become fans of and friends with, so I decided to go back into private practice. We were asked to serve three years and I agreed to three years and so at the end of three years I gave my notice and I got a thank you note from the staff at the State Attorney's Office, Bill Vose and the State Attorney and went about my business. So it worked out fine. That was 1995, '96.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, that's about when I left.

JUDGE CRANER: You left about six or 12 months before me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Did I? Okay. Yeah, I left at the end of '95.

JUDGE CRANER: Yep.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I think.

JUDGE CRANER: Or maybe earlier.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Maybe earlier. I'd have to back and really think about that. That was a long time ago.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah, it was. It really was.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you got back into private practice, did you still concentrate on criminal defense?

JUDGE CRANER: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Or did you branch out into other things?

JUDGE CRANER: I did a smattering of other things but primarily it was criminal defense because I was familiar with it. I had all of the original pleadings that I had before from '88 to '93 when I was with Alan that I had drafted. I was familiar with it. I had to some degree contact with former clients who knew that I was then back in private practice. So it really, it was easy for me. Had I had an opportunity to do it differently, I might do it differently now but it was easy for me then to jump into something that I was familiar with. It was '96 or so and I had been married for a couple of years and I think I had a daughter at that point so I needed a guarantee something which wasn't much but it was something. And it turned out to work out really, really well.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And if I recall correctly when you were in private practice, you represented bail bondsmen?

JUDGE CRANER: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How did you get into that work?

JUDGE CRANER: With Alan.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay.

JUDGE CRANER: Alan was friends with bail bondsmen and bail bond agencies and taught the class. When I came to Florida in 1988, and he looked at me and he said now you're going to teach it. So I had to learn Chapter 903 and study the subsections within it and learn it, understand it, research the case law. He did a lot of forfeiture work, setting aside estreatures, things of that nature under Chapter 903. And so he got out of that and let me do it so I was the one showing up in court litigating these motions to set aside and get the money remitted to the bail bondsman which is you know a big deal if you're in a business like that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE CRANER: So that's what I did and eventually I started teaching a class for a couple local bail bond agencies and met a lot of the new students that were in the program and graduating and befriended them. And stayed in touch with them when I went back into private practice too.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And if I recall correctly, you represented a group of bail bondsmen or agencies up until the time you were appointed to the bench.

JUDGE CRANER: I did. I continued to – you learn over time the ones that you want to represent and the ones you really don't want to represent so I had a very small core group of people, and there weren't at the time, and I don't think there are truly many lawyers here in Central Florida that are representing bail bondsmen. There might be two to three to four that I know of. We had a, while I was on the bench in Osceola County in criminal court a significant case come up that involved a lot of money. It was a drug trafficking case and probably a quarter

to a half a million-dollar bond. They hired a lawyer from South Florida. And which I thought was interesting that we didn't have you know a lawyer here in Central Florida that somebody felt comfortable with that they could retain to assist them with regard to getting the whole thing set aside, getting their money back but there aren't too many lawyers that do it. I'm not sure why, but I continued to do it, yes, and I maintained a good friendship with them. And I'm still friends with them to this day.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What made you, after being in private practice for so long, want to go to the Orange County bench?

JUDGE CRANER: I saw things changing in '09, 2010, 2011. We had two law schools here that were putting out hundreds of students per year that were taking the bar exam and passing it and remaining in Central Florida.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And we had the recession.

JUDGE CRANER: We had a recession. It was diluting you know the practice here. I had been doing it then for 20 or 21 years, felt very confident in what I could do, what I couldn't do, but it was a challenge because you know if I want to charge 2,500 bucks for an F3, you know a student right out of school who just passed the bar exam, might do the same case for 500 with \$100 down and payments. Well, that's hard to compete with.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE CRANER: And –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Even if they don't know what they're doing.

JUDGE CRANER: Right. When I hit the bench, we would see you know well, okay, it's a \$2,500 case but they quote \$7,500 with \$2,500 down and payments on the rest. When the second payment wasn't forthcoming, as a judge I'd get a motion to withdraw on my desk. Okay, I don't – I'm not a fan of that. So I didn't do it when I was in private practice and it's just hard to compete with that when you have that quality of representation out there for people charged with misdemeanors and felonies. And a friend of mine who's currently on the bench in Seminole County said he was thinking about doing it himself. He was not then a judge at the time and I thought well, I could do it too so I filled out the application and reached out to some people and kind of learned how to do it. There's of course two ways to do it, appointment and election. I preferred to go the appointment route initially and it's a whole different ball game than an election.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yep.

JUDGE CRANER: I fortunately not had to go through an election but the appointment is also a full-time gig to try to work your way through it because there's a lot do at the local level and the state level.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And when you were appoint – you were appointed to the county bench in 2011.

JUDGE CRANER: Correct.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: By Rick Scott.

JUDGE CRANER: I think it was his first trial judge appointed when he got to Tallahassee after he was elected. It was a February appointment.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow, that was really quick.

JUDGE CRANER: Now, he might have appointed an appellate judge before that but I don't know that he had appointed a trial judge before that. So I think I was the first one and it was, candidly a pleasant surprise, a shock because I did criminal defense work and I'm not sure how far that was going to fly up in Tallahassee that a criminal defense attorney might get appointed as opposed to somebody who was a career state attorney or somebody from the AG's office.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right.

JUDGE CRANER: But I did have the background having worked under Lawson Lamar and Bill Vose from '93 to '96 so I think that's probably the thing that put me over the top. So yeah, I think it was his first appointment. And I think I was his first appointment in 2014 after he was re-elected. What I mean to say is he was elected we'll say in November of '14 and my seat was open. I filled the seat occupied prior to that by Belvin Perry and he announced his retirement. I put my name in for it and the Governor I believe let the election go through and then appointed me a couple of days afterwards so I think I was his first one after he got re-elected also. I could be wrong but I think that that's how it worked.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE CRANER: From what I could tell.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So when you were in county court you sat on both the criminal and the civil benches.

JUDGE CRANER: I did.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Did you like them both?

JUDGE CRANER: Loved it. Yeah, I started out on the criminal bench. That was comfortable for me because I had done it before. And then they needed someone to volunteer for – well, actually I was headed to the county jail to sit down there for IAs. And former county judge Jerry Brewer called me one day and said I'd like to go there instead. Do you mind switching with me? I was on my way to civil and I said I'll take civil so that's how I ended up in civil which worked out great. There were four of us at the time and we – very pleasant assignment for the issues that you address.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, and when you got to the circuit bench, what was your first assignment?

JUDGE CRANER: Well, I'd like to say I volunteered for Osceola County but I don't know that I did. I might have been sent to Osceola County because nobody else was throwing their hand up to go, but I ended up in Osceola County doing criminal. So I followed –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Again very familiar.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah, very, and I was happy to do it because I knew it was going to be an easier transition.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And Osceola is a wonderful place to work.

JUDGE CRANER: Absolutely. Loved it. Loved it. I was down there for two years and then I came back here and moved into another criminal division and spent two or three years in Division 16 here. So yeah, Osceola County was a wonderful assignment. Glad to have done it quite frankly. As soon as I got there I reached out to some of the notables in Osceola County and



set up a lunch date with all of them so I could meet them and introduce myself to them. I thought that was a good thing to do and get a chance to meet them all since we serve both counties.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes. And you have been in a lot of different divisions in your almost ten years at this point on the bench. You did Osceola criminal, Orange criminal; I think you were at the juvenile courthouse for dependency and delinquency.

JUDGE CRANER: We did – I was assigned to delinquency for three years prior to my current assignment and we also took crossover cases for individuals who were both delinquent and dependent so yeah, I spent three years out there. That’s probably the longest stint I’ve had.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And then you came back to civil.

JUDGE CRANER: Civil.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How do you like civil?

JUDGE CRANER: Love it, without hesitation.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It’s a lot of work.

JUDGE CRANER: It’s a lot of work but they all are.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE CRANER: Very pleasant assignment. I like the lawyers very much. I like the subject matter. I like the fact that there are 150 different things to do on any given day or week or month as opposed to you know the same thing day in and day out. You know it would be frustrating you know to try to do that all the time. You told me that as a matter of fact when I talked to you about applying for a job as a county judge or a circuit judge and you said I think you will like circuit because of the shear volume and the number of things that you can do and

the different divisions you can go to including civil. And there's a lot to do but it's fabulous, really, it's different every day.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. I know that when I took the bench I had been a trial lawyer like you for my career. I thought I knew what judges did. And I was surprised.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I'm sure at times you've thought being a judge is different than what you thought it would be before you became a judge.

JUDGE CRANER: Very.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What have you found to be different?

JUDGE CRANER: The day-to-day duties. Time management. Docket management. Attorney management. I mean, so much of the responsibility that we have in each individual division, including civil is learning how to run a docket so that it doesn't fall apart, so that people get into court on a timely basis and have their issues addressed by the court on a timely basis. And get orders out on a timely basis. That's hard to do sometimes. I had the good fortune when I worked for Alan, he had a high volume and he taught me high volume. And you know you lay your hands on a file when you have to and you make the right decisions all the time, really good decisions. When you go to the state attorney's office, it's the same practice. You don't have one or two files, you have 250 active cases and you take four boxes of files, well, they probably don't now, but back in the day, four or five boxes of files to court. You have to manage them on a regular basis, figure out what the issues are, identify the issues, address the issues and move on. And the same thing applies in – on the bench. You really have to manage the lawyers, you have to move them along. You have to make tough decisions. Somebody is going to be happy, and

somebody may not be happy but we're going to move it along and get to a conclusion so that you know we have just that, a conclusion. So that's hard to do sometimes. I've always tried to manage my numbers and keep them down. I don't get too cranked up over it but whatever I'm doing seems to work. When I was in criminal, I moved into a division that was well-managed and I ended up, you know, I try to manage, instead of 250 cases per pre-trial, I tried to get it down to 125 and there's ways to do it. Same thing applies in civil, you know we try to manage the cases so that we can get these things resolved and if they go to trial, they go to trial. I tend to try a bunch of cases.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you like trying cases.

JUDGE CRANER: I enjoy it. I really do, I really enjoy it. But it's a lot, I never expected that as a judge. I never knew that. There's a lot of camaraderie amongst the judges. If you have a question, you don't have to re-invent the wheel. You can reach out to somebody and say, what do I do here, what do I do there, why do I do it? Why would you do it? What are my options? You know, as a young judge, Jerry Brewer was the best at it, as far as I'm concerned. He came to me to assist me one day probably the first week I was on the bench and he didn't tell me how to do it, he gave me my options. You can turn left. You can turn right or go straight ahead. You make the choice. Which one do you think is the best and why? And I thought that was a good way to do it. So you know the judges here are all willing to help out.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I know that when I took – before I took the bench I assumed that if a judge wasn't in court they didn't have anything to do. And shortly after you become a judge you learn that that is not true.

JUDGE CRANER: No.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That a lot of work goes on when you're not in court. Have you found that to be the case too?

JUDGE CRANER: Very much so in civil, yes. Well, it's been that way in all divisions, but very much so in civil. We have ex parte in the morning from 8:30 to 9:30. On a slow day I'll have zero to two. On a busy day, two weeks ago I had 18 in 60 minutes. Well, that's a lot of hustle. That means I'm going to get 18 orders within – I make them do within 48 hours so in 48 hours I'm going to get 18 orders. And I take detailed notes so that I can you know review the order and sign it quickly, but I sometimes have questions. So I need to go back online and look up in the court file exactly what I said, how I said it and that sort of thing. So that takes a lot of time, a lot of time. So you walk in on any given day and I'll have 15 to 20 orders on my desk that I need to go through and compare to my notes and then get an order signed. It's just constant and if I don't agree with the order, I've got to write it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And you know that's not even preparing, you know, hearing your cases that day and then preparing for your cases that are coming down the pike because we can't walk into court cold. It's just too hard to do that.

JUDGE CRANER: I get my docket Wednesday before Monday morning and I've already got my docket for next week and sometime during the week, it's never been an issue for me. But sometime during the week I will go through that docket and I do it the old-fashioned way. I look the case up one at a time, look up the motion that's the subject of the hearing and hit the print button. And have that ready to go. So I print up all the motions ahead of time, then I read them all ahead of time and then I do research on the issues that I need to do research on. I don't know what other judges do because I'm not in chambers when they do it or am I in the courtroom. But

that's how I do it. I try to review them all ahead of time so I'm not blindsided when I walk it and it works for me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, that's what I did too because I don't want to be unprepared.

JUDGE CRANER: And trials are the same way. I've got trials coming up and I think I have at this point 7 set for the following Monday, ten days from now and I'll have a trial folder with one and I go through and I print up the complaint, the answer, the amended complaint, you know all of the answers, all of the orders on the motions in limine, my jury instructions, I'll put it all together in a file and have it ready to go so I know what the case is about.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow.

JUDGE CRANER: It takes a little more time but it's not that hard. You've got me right next to my chambers. My hearing room is right next to my chambers so when I'm done with the hearing, I don't sit and talk. I'll typically get up and go straight back to chambers and work on next week's docket. So that's how I squeeze all those things in and try to get them done. It works for me, I hope.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, it does. And you know being a judge is high pressure and really busy, so we all have to have outlets for you know to keep grounded. So what do you enjoy doing that's not law related? I know you paint because I've seen your paintings.

JUDGE CRANER: A lot, yeah, yeah, I'm working on one now for my daughter. I paint signs or trays which sounds stupid but I make a tray out of scrap wood.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you do the woodworking yourself too.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah. Yeah, a pallet. I'll find a pallet on the side of the road and I'll take it home, take it apart, take the nails out, sand it down, cut the wood up, make it nice and then I you know, if it's a nautical theme, we'll get you know something from a boat dock or something and screw those on for handles and then paint them. Like if it's a nautical theme, I just got done with one that was a sea turtle.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh.

JUDGE CRANER: And I gave it to a friend of a friend. So I do paint. I like cars. I have several –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You still like cars.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah. It's a bad habit.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's a life-long passion, huh?

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah, it's bad. My kids are like that now. I have two daughters. And they wanted cars for themselves and so my wife said, we're going to get them a car and she said the good news is, you get to pick it which was good because I wanted to pick it. So one got an old Bronco. One of them got an old Blazer.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Oh, I love those – I loved those cars when they were out.

JUDGE CRANER: And they still have them. And my oldest daughter with the Bronco, it's a '96, it was white, she said dad, I want to restore it, I want to redo it. So we just got it done so now it's red and white and it's all new inside and out. But you know she's got the bug too. They don't get rid of them. They each have two cars, my kids and they're in their twenties.

Nobody does that, right but they call it back-up. I said, well, you got to have a back-up, right in case something doesn't work. So now they have a back-up.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: When you're driving old cars, there are times when things don't work.

JUDGE CRANER: Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: But the nice thing about it is you know they've got the cars, they've got them paid off so they can afford the insurance on two cars.

JUDGE CRANER: It's not my problem at this point.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah.

JUDGE CRANER: I just started the bad habit. Yeah, cars, woodworking, I like to paint. You know we take some time off every year and go lobstering in the keys. We kind of enjoy that. That's kind of the big family vacation. Just a lot. We do very different things, you know, we try to get away and relax at the beach also.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, you need that. You need the down time from the high stress – high stress job.

JUDGE CRANER: It's perfect. All those things to me are very relaxing so I just look forward to each and every one of them.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, it's been great learning about your career which I already knew a lot about anyway because we – our careers sort of mirrored each other and your hobbies. So thank you for joining me here today.

JUDGE CRANER: Thank you for having me. Loved it.

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.

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