

**OPEN NINTH:
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM
LOVE BEAMER STYLE
EPISODE 119
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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 a very special Valentine’s Edition of Open Ninth. I’m here today with Ninth Circuit husband and wife judicial duo Judges Denise and John Beamer.

Judge Denise Beamer, who currently serves in Circuit Civil Division, was appointed to the Circuit bench in 2019 by then-Governor Rick Scott. I’ve had the pleasure of hosting her on the podcast before. We had a lot of fun. And I’m thrilled to have her again with me today.

And Judge John Beamer, who joined our Circuit bench in 2020 by appointment of Governor Ron DeSantis and currently serves in the Domestic Division, we’re especially pleased to be able to welcome him here today. He joined us during the midst of the pandemic, and it has been one heck of a year.

So John, Denise, thanks both for joining me. It’s great to have you here.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Thanks for having us, Judge Myers. We really appreciate it and we’re looking forward to it.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Thank you.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: All right. Well, if you say you’re looking forward to it, let’s see how you feel when we’re done.

I really just want to kind of catch up a little bit for our listeners with some background on you, John, to start. We had the chance to host Denise in a fun conversation about Millennials

and Gen-Xers and those of us in the Boomer age brackets, but we don't know a lot about you. So tell us a little bit about yourself. How did you get here to the Ninth?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Well, I grew up in East Tennessee, lived there my entire life and had the opportunity to come to Florida to go to law school, and kind of jumped at that because I'd never lived outside of Tennessee. And in law school I met my better half and, as they say, it's history from there. You know, fell in love, got married, had a couple kids, found a good job. And then that's how we found ourselves working together, although I didn't think we'd see each other in this capacity when we initially started out.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So what drove you to the law?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: I've always wanted to be a lawyer. And I don't know exactly what sparked it initially. I had a family friend that was a lawyer, and I got to see some of things that he did. He did mostly civil rights cases, and that was really all I knew of it. And then I got to college and took a lot of legal-based classes, business law, things like that, and actually just really enjoyed the, I guess, intellectual exercise of reading the law. I know that sounds kind of strange, but that's what kind of sparked my interest.

And then it was either the Navy or law school after I got out, because I had a Political Science Degree, so that's kind of how I ended up in law school.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Why not the Navy? We have to ask that.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: I didn't want to spend my time out at sea on a boat for months at a time.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Fair enough. Fair enough. And tell us a little bit about your practice before you came to the bench.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: So initially I started out at a small firm doing mostly workers' compensation and general liability defense. I was there for -- as a law clerk, and then for a number of years my -- when I first started practicing. And then I went to another firm and did a lot of Federal court work in products liability before becoming in-house counsel -- trial counsel with Farmers Insurance where I got to try cases across the State of Florida. And that was where I ended up before I joined this -- joined everyone on the bench.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, that trial experience, I know, is so valuable when you come here to the courthouse.

Denise, you heard John give us just a little thumbnail sketch of how you-all met. A little more detail; how did that go?

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: So we went to Barry law school together. John was in the class before me. And we both did Trial Team, and that's -- I remember seeing John going into his audition for Trial Team, and he was wearing a bow tie. And I remember thinking, oh, that bow tie is different, that's cute. And it made a mental impression. He didn't see me; I was down the hall. But I remember seeing him.

And then we ended up both on Trial Team, and our first year we had competitions against each other. So he was paired up with somebody else, I was paired up with somebody else, but we ended up in the final round together. But we had met through that process and then we started dating.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So tell me about the first date, John.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Um, the first date -- when was the first date?

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: We went to Daytona.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: No, it wasn't Daytona. It was Sarasota.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Yes.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: We went -- so we had a friend who lived in Sarasota that invited us down to the boat races. They have -- I guess you call them cigarette boats, the big, long boats with the large engine in the back. And we went down there for the weekend, and that was actually our first date.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: She matched us up, yeah.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Yeah, Ashley.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Yes, that's right. Thank you, Ashley.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Ashley, the matchmaker.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: All right. Has Ashley matched other folks, do you know, or --

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Not that I know of.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: We'll have to get Ashley on and follow up to the podcast and find out if that's the case.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Yeah, definitely.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So first date goes well. How long did you-all end up dating?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Well, that was in 2007. And then we continued dating until we got engaged in 2013. But in between there, Denise took a job with the Miami-Dade County State Attorney's Office in fall of 2009, and so she moved down there and then we rotated weekends. One day she -- one weekend she would drive up here, the other weekend I would drive down there, and did that until, I believe, the summer of 2011.

And then Judge Starr, who at the time was at the Attorney General's Office and with whom Denise had interned with previously, said that there was an opening up here and so it was an opportunity for Denise to move back up here for us to be closer to save a little bit of money on the gas and the travel expenses. And so I guess Judge Starr would be our second matchmaker that helped get us back in the same city. But, yeah, we were -- I think it was 2011. And 2013 is when we got married.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Okay. So 2007 to 2013 is six years. I want you to think back to that time. And Denise, just off the top of your head, your favorite date during that time.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Gosh, you know, we have three kids now that are all under the age of five, so those days seem so far away but I also remember them so clearly. I think my favorite date would be we would go to this restaurant, Colorado Fondue Company, and they -- it's like a fondue restaurant, and they have little stones that they heat up to 700 degrees and you cook your meat on there. And I remember going there, and that was some of my favorite times because it was just the two of us and we could talk to each other and have a good time. And so that is probably one of my favorite dates.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: How about for you, John?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Well, you have to understand, I came from a small town in Tennessee, so if you had told me that I would have been driving on the streets of Miami, I would have -- I probably would have laughed at you. I never thought I would have gone to Miami. But there was a small Cuban restaurant called -- I think it was Enriqueta's, and when I would go down there -- drive down on Friday night, and either Saturday or Sunday mornings, we would get up -- and it was just the two of us -- we would go and sit down and have what I understood was a Cuban breakfast with Cuban bread, bacon, eggs, orange juice, and it was like 10 dollars

apiece. And we would just sit there and read the paper, have café con leche and just sit and talk. And those are some of my favorite times. Not the getting up and getting dressed, but just the simple times of being able to sit there and talk to each other instead of wondering, where's the baby.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Tell me about your conversations for both of you to be on the bench. I mean that's -- doesn't happen all that frequently. We've had a couple of married couples here in the Ninth Circuit. But what is it that -- how did that come about for each of you?

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: So I was appointed first. I went through the process and got appointed. But candidly, I knew that John had wanted -- had aspirations for the bench, you know, long before I even thought about it. Because for me, I never thought it would be possible for me. I just never thought it was something that I could attain, so I didn't seriously entertain it until I had the confidence to actually go through the process.

But I just love having John on the bench. He's in Family. I'm now in Civil. I practiced civil, but not general civil. A lot of the things that we see -- lot of the things I see now -- so he's good to have someone just to bounce questions off of, ideas off of, just like I would with other judges in the Circuit regarding other questions. But it's also nice talking about how we deal with maybe a difficult attorney or a difficult litigant. We can share advice and things and experiences that we've learned, you know, while being on the bench.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Is it hard to draw lines, John, you know, at work and home when you guys are doing the same stuff in the same place?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Well, I remember a lot of my friends would ask, isn't it difficult being married to a lawyer. And I was like, well, no, because she understands kind of the same pressures that I understood, when we were in practice. And they were like, well, what

about being married to a judge. And as a lawyer being married to a judge, it was sometimes difficult to draw those lines. But, I mean, now it's -- I don't want to say symbiotic, but it's nice to be able to draw from her experiences on the bench and how she's handled things, because this environment is so -- it's such -- so very different from coming in a practitioner's background to the bench. And having someone that's kind of already plowed that ground and knows some of the pitfalls and some of the benefits and how to handle things, it's been really beneficial for me.

But we come home, we're like, you won't believe what happened today; how would you deal with this.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Yeah. And COVID has really changed so much of our experience.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Oh, yeah.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: You know, when I was appointed, I was on the bench for a good year, so I saw when it was "normal" what it was like. And then COVID hit, so he -- John got to hear some of the things that we were going through. And then he became a judge right in the middle of the pandemic, so his experience starting has been completely different. I mean, now it's like witness control or attorney control or just having to deal with Zoom or, you know, virtual hearings and virtual witnesses and the procedures that go along with that. So it's nice to talk to somebody that is going through it for the first time now.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: John, and so for -- yeah, for you, John, this is all you know about how it is to be a judge. That's got to be such a different experience than Denise has had.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Yeah. I think I was on the bench for about a month before we had the total shutdown. So I got to see the initial -- you know, how things were handled with pro se litigants in domestic relations cases, you know, attorneys and -- when they would come in.

And it's so much easier to, you know, have a hearing and a proposed order and you can sign it there and then you make copies and everybody gets them and you don't have to worry about sending them out.

And now it's a lot of the more preparation on the front end for hearings in terms of just the logistics of getting those orders and getting the materials where you need them, where they're readily accessible, making sure that the litigants and the attorneys have access to the, you know, electronic formats that we're using, being able to pivot and move when you have difficulties logging into Zoom and things like that.

I mean, it's been a challenge, but I think everyone in the Circuit has really adapted well. I've had a little bit less of an adaptation to it since it started at the very beginning, but we -- I think we've been successful with it.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah. Denise, you've been on the bench now for close to two years?

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Is it what you expected?

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Gosh, it -- first of all, it's the best job in the world, and I'm so glad I did it. I wish that I had known things from the bench's perspective when I was an attorney. I wish I -- I think I would have been a much better lawyer, to be honest, if I went back to practicing. But I just love the job, and I love the service aspect of it.

And I run into people that can't believe I'm a judge and they comment, gosh, you look so young to be a judge and, you know, is -- wow, that's so impressive. And I think that people just have a different picture in mind when they think of judge; it's not a young, Asian female.

I remember I was covering another division and they expected, I think, Judge Weiss, and I popped up and they were like, whoa, we did not expect to see you. And I'm like, good morning, you know, let's begin.

But it really is the most amazing job. And every day I learn something new. And being in a new division, Civil, is just exciting. It's -- each case is like a puzzle and I can't wait to dig in and figure out what the issues are and figure out what the law is and get going. And it's been a lot more work, a lot more reading, but I think that it's a wonderful challenge and I'm so happy in this division.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: How about for you, John; is it what you expected? Recognizing that it's not what we all considered normal, but is the work, I guess, what you expected?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: The work is much more fulfilling than I think I initially expected. Denise mentioned the service aspect of it, and being in Family -- and I think you and I have talked about this before -- the impact that we have on individuals -- not just in Family, but any litigant that comes in front of us -- because we are really the frontline contact for their interaction with the third branch of government that they don't necessarily see on the news all the time. And so we are, for most instances, the face of the Judicial Branch. And so the things that we do, the things that we say, how we behave, have an impact on the community's confidence in the judiciary and how they view the Judicial Branch as the third branch of government.

And so I think that that's one of the things that I didn't anticipate or fully appreciate before taking the bench that I've realized has much more of an impact than anything else I did in private practice.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, it -- I can just tell you from the Circuit's perspective, from the lawyers that I speak to, that they're just thrilled with both of you on the bench. I mean, what an incredibly positive experience for us to be able to visit and see the two of you working in the ways that you have together and separately on the bench.

Ten years from now, do you still see your family as a two-judge family at home?

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: I think so. You know, I really do. It's -- we have three kids under five, so sometimes I'll joke to my clerk, I've got to go to my second job now. And, you know, it's going home and getting the kids down, and that exercises a different part of my brain. And then I -- at night, once the kids go to sleep, I start to prepare and -- starting to read over everything. And even though the hours get late, I still enjoy it.

So ten years from now, yeah, I think I'll still be here. Maybe we'll still be doing virtual hearings, which I think some of it I'll incorporate. Obviously there's nothing that replaces, you know, face-to-face contact, picking up on the nonverbal aspects of, you know, human interaction. I think some of the virtual stuff I'll keep, because I think it's just a great convenience.

But ten years from now, I think personally, for me, I think I'll still be here. I think I'll be enjoying it. But I mean, will you check back in with me in ten years and find out?

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: If I'm still around, you got it.

How about you, John, ten years from now?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: No, I absolutely see us -- this job, to us, is not just a job, but I think this is where we were meant to be, where we want to be. And it's where we intend to continue being as long as the community will have us on the bench.

You know, Denise mentioned coming home, going to her second job. I joke with my JA sometimes, I'm like, Mondays are like a vacation. But, you know, as the children get older, obviously, it frees up time. But I think that us being able to set this example for our children -- them saying their parents -- you know, hopefully continuing to succeed is something that we would want to continue doing. And honestly, after having done this job, I can't see myself -- I have a hard time seeing myself doing something else.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: In most relationships -- not all of them, but most of them -- one of the parties is a romantic. Either of you the romantic in this relationship?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: I'll let you take this one, Dear.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: I think you are. I think -- like, you know, John always buys the cards and writes the really sweet -- the sweet --

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Well, that's not entirely true. You do it too.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: I try. But I think it was because you started doing that. And like when we first started dating, I would get these birthday cards, and they were really, really sweet. And I'm like, gosh, I wish I could write like this, in terms of being so romantic. So I try. I do the best that I can.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: And now she says, where are those cards. No, we -- I think that's one of the things that we try and do, is make time for us and our relationship in the midst of the pandemic and being on the bench and the children. We try and not forget that at the end of the day we're -- I mean, she's my best friend, is the bottom line. This is who I love spending my time with.

When we got married -- the reason why I asked her to marry me is because when I see myself being 70, 80 years old, I can see myself sitting there and just being able to talk with her. And that's the thing that stands out in my mind the most.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: The only issue, though, is college football. That's when it really gets contentious because John is a Tennessee Vols fan, I'm a Florida Gator. And, you know, every fall when they play it's a big thing at the house. In fact, our daughter, the oldest, she was actually born during the Florida/Tennessee game during halftime, so she's literally half of me and half of John. I mean, I was in the hospital and we were watching the football game. So -- and now she says she's half Korean and half Tennessee. So it's really, really sweet.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's awesome. I -- what an enjoyable time today. I have to ask the question because this is our special Valentine's Day Edition; I know you've got kids, I know dates look different these days, but do you have a Valentine's Day plan yet?

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: To be continued.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Okay. You had to be in the room to see them look at -- pause, look at each other, and recognize we've got to fill this dead air.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: We'll do something special. Valentine's Day is a fun day for us.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: To be honest, we don't celebrate it as much as other people because -- and it may just be a cop-out, but sometimes I say, I don't need a special day on the calendar to tell you how much I love you or to do something nice. But, I don't know, we try to make all the time special, but I'm sure we'll do probably something special for Valentine's, even if it's just a little bit extra fun at dinner.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's great. Well, with young kids growing up, I know you'll find chances to celebrate with them too. What a special relationship you guys have.

Thanks so much for joining me today.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Oh, thank you.

JUDGE JOHN BEAMER: Thank you, Judge Myers.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: Yeah, thank you for having us.

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