

OPEN NINTH:
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM
DRAWING FROM EXPERIENCE
EPISODE 125
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HOSTED BY: DONALD A. MYERS, JR.

(Music)

NARRATOR: Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida.

And now here’s your host, Chief Judge Don Myers.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Hello, and welcome to Open Ninth. I’m here today with court sketch artist Jane Rosenberg. Jane has had a front row seat at some of the most high-profile trials in the country sketching the likes of Harvey Weinstein, El Chapo, Bill Cosby and John Gotti over her 40-year career.

It is such a pleasure to have you with us today, Jane. Thanks for joining me.

JANE ROSENBERG: Thank you.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So I’m really excited about this conversation because I’ve had the privilege of just doing some background research and reading about the work that you do. You are an artist. I mean, that is your profession, right?

JANE ROSENBERG: I’m an artist. I always was. Drawing pictures when I was a little kid. My mother saved my first portrait when I was three. And I’ve been drawing ever since.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Tell us, just for a little bit of background, where did you receive your art training?

JANE ROSENBERG: I majored in art in college. I did take electives in high school, then I majored in art in college. And then I was a struggling artist for many years in the city. And I did some illustration jobs. I started to go to The Art Students League. And then I started doing portraits on the sidewalks of tourists in -- it was in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and in a shopping mall, wherever I can make a dollar, I would be there trying to do that.

So I had a lot of background drawing people before I became a courtroom artist. And then -- I was struggling, and then I saw a lecture by another courtroom artist, her name is Marilyn Church, and -- at the Society of Illustrators, and I felt like I really want to do that, I just don't know if I'm good enough. But I became driven. I looked in the mirror, I said, I'm going to do this, and I went after it. And I went to court, I practiced. I had friends who were lawyers, they took me to night court at 100 Centre Street, where I sketched -- in those days it was prostitutes in night court. And that's what I did in the early years.

And I put together a portfolio. I made a couple calls. And then what -- that didn't --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, hang on.

JANE ROSENBERG: Okay.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: We're getting ahead of ourselves here. Know -- because I think I know what's coming, and I want to build up to that because I think it's so significant.

You are -- what you've described to me is a background and growth and experience and training in portrait artistry.

JANE ROSENBERG: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: But there's lots of different kinds of artists. I mean, there are landscape artists --

JANE ROSENBERG: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: -- there are photographers, there -- what separates portrait artists, I guess, from other types of artists?

JANE ROSENBERG: I love human nature. I love studying faces and gestures and body language. I always have. Psychology a little bit. I just -- I've always been more interested in people than landscapes. Although I still struggle painting trees, and a lot of people are the

opposite. They'd rather draw a tree than a human being. But I just find this -- it easier. I don't know. It came naturally to me.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: And you -- in your career, you describe working on the streets of the city. I assume you mean New York.

JANE ROSENBERG: New York City.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah.

JANE ROSENBERG: I actually did draw right on the streets, right on the sidewalk with chalk. I had copies of Vermeer's and Rembrandt I did on the sidewalk. I had a hat out, people dropped dollars in and made a little bit of money then. I was surprised how much I could get at the end of the day doing that.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So as a portrait artist, if you were painting and you painted something like a Monet -- or not a Monet. Let's take a -- the Mona Lisa. There's a portrait piece in paint. How long would it take you as an artist to complete a piece like that?

JANE ROSENBERG: I guess thousands of years to get a Mona Lisa right. I mean, I don't know -- what year was that -- hundreds of years. The Mona Lisa -- I mean, to paint an oil portrait of somebody and they were -- I was working from life, that's different from doing a pastel courtroom sketch.

So an oil portrait would take me several sittings of like a couple hours each time. And I'd probably be working and working in and out of it. It takes a -- much longer than a quick pastel sketch, which is looser and isn't always perfect. A portrait you're expected to get a flattering portrait of a person. Nobody wants my quick sketches where I might exaggerate something. They don't like their nose too big, or their hair, or the -- something's wrong with the mouth. Whatever.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, if you do a sketch of me, I'd like a little more hair.

JANE ROSENBERG: Exact -- I -- you know, that's the main one. I always have to give people more hair.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Okay.

JANE ROSENBERG: That's the main request I get, please give me more hair. I've got special hair chalk in my --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's fabulous.

JANE ROSENBERG: I know how to do that best.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So as a high-speed portrait artist, what are the things that you focus on that may be different than the things that are captured in that -- the oil portrait of, you know, a president that we see pretty commonly?

JANE ROSENBERG: What do I focus on?

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah. I mean, you don't have the luxury of time to capture a lot of that detail. So what are the types of things that you're looking to capture when you do a high-speed portrait?

JANE ROSENBERG: Well, I have to plan it out and think how much time am I going to have, and I have to have a composition in mind, I have to know what the proceeding is going to be. If it's an arraignment, it could be five minutes that I look at a person. Whereas if I have all day for a trial, several witnesses, I think -- I know I could do more people on a page, a wider shot. So I have to judge how much time I'm going to have.

Then if it's just a quickie person, a head, what do I look for? The shape of the head, generally. There's a generic shape. Then you vary it from that. The -- where the eyes are located on the head. There's all kinds of things. Then you have to look -- capture what that

person's things are specific to that person. What's the difference between that head and the generic head.

And then I have to go for the expression that they're showing at that moment. Maybe capture the emotion of the wrinkles in their forehead, whatever it is that shows -- that's going on with that face at that moment that's going to get who they are.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: In this digital age, and really even before that in the photographic age, we could capture all of that in an instant.

JANE ROSENBERG: Um-hum.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Why sketch artists?

JANE ROSENBERG: Because -- well, because cameras are not permitted in the courtrooms. And I often thought, well, if they got the cameras in they won't want a courtroom artist. But I'm finding nowadays -- as a matter of fact, starting Monday, there is a trial, Derek Chauvin trial -- he's the police officer accused of the knee on the head [sic] of George Floyd -- they're having a trial in Minnesota where they're not permitting courtroom artists but they will have Court TV -- a camera in the courtroom.

But I was asked to cover that trial. I was not permitted to go inside the courtroom, but they're going to have me sketch off of a computer monitor. So it's going to be very unusual. And I forgot what the -- how I got onto this about why -- so I guess I'm offering something a little different than what a camera can offer. There must be something about -- people like to look at art. There's just something about it. Hand created. People like to buy handcrafted goods. There must be something that I get in art than -- it's different than what a photo can capture.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, do you feel like when you have that opportunity to sit for a full day in a trial and to do a sketch that perhaps your sketch captures more than might happen in the split second of a photograph in terms of mood and tension in the courtroom, or how that's displayed, perhaps, on a defendant's face?

JANE ROSENBERG: That's what I go for. I hope I capture more than what a photographer can capture in a split second because I'm looking at moments happening. I can't draw it all at once. I'm looking at the lawyer pointing. I'm looking at the defendant reacting. And the camera -- the point may happen and then the reaction, or somebody may jump up and a hand could -- the judge could be like, stop all this nonsense, and the hand raise; anything could happen.

Yeah, I'm trying to get it all so that it conveys in the -- what's going on in one -- in more -- like I'm combining -- I'm trying to illustrate the story of the moment; what is happening in the courtroom at that time.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah. That's a great image. So you made a decision to pursue courtroom sketch work. And what prompted that?

JANE ROSENBERG: I went to -- well, I was a starving artist and I wanted to make some money. That was what prompted it. But that was a direction that I was inspired to do because I saw that lecture at the Society of Illustrators and I thought, how wonderful to be able to sketch people and make money doing that. And I was very excited to do that. I went after it.

I asked how -- okay I'll wait for you to ask the next question, how I --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah. So how did you decide where to go, what images to capture? What is it that said, I'll try night court and see what images I can get there?

JANE ROSENBERG: I tried night court because I had a friend who was a lawyer who was going to night court arraignments, so he invited me to come. I didn't even know where the courthouse was at that point. And not -- I didn't even know what an arraignment was. I learned a lot.

So I asked a lot of the court officers questions. I started going in the days as well, practicing in trials. And I would ask the court officers, where do the artists sit when they come, what do they bring. And they said, come next week, we'll let you sit in the jury box with the other artists, we're having a big arraignment.

So I did go to court that day, and there were only two other artists in the jury box with me. And one had FOX on their portfolio, so I knew not to call them. And then I started with a startup company. This is 1980, so I called CNN. I thought, well, you know, they're just the little guy. And they said, oh, we had an artist.

So now I had to go to the three big stations. In those days it was CBS, ABC and NBC. And I called, NBC said, come in, show us what you've got. And I went to the newsroom. It was a big deal. A producer led me around the newsroom and showed me all the booths where all the writers are. And it was pretty exciting. And they shot my work and it went on TV. And I watched on my little black-and-white television. I called my -- Ma, I'm on TV. It was pretty exciting. I got paid, and it just went from there. I don't know how, it just kept -- my name went out there and it kept going.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: And when you do a sketch like that and you're able to sell it basically to a network or to -- I guess print media would be interested as well, right?

JANE ROSENBERG: Back then, no. But now, yeah.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah. Who takes your original? Is that yours? Does it now belong to the --

JANE ROSENBERG: I own the -- I do own the original artwork. And they are buying licensing rights for their news -- either television or print media.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So you must have a fabulous collection of originals.

JANE ROSENBERG: I have thousands of originals. They go up to the ceiling; floor to ceiling in my little storage area. And it's overflowing to every space in my apartment.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's fantastic.

JANE ROSENBERG: I have folders of everything.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So you broke into the industry by your work with C -- or NBC, I guess?

JANE ROSENBERG: Well, that was my first. And then I started with CBS as their first-call artist after that. Within a few months I was -- I don't know what happened. Maybe their other artist -- I don't know what happened to that person, but I was now -- for almost the 40 years I was the CBS News for first-call artist. And that's sort of the way it is. Go ahead.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Did you travel?

JANE ROSENBERG: I -- in the early years, a lot. I did travel. They had a lot more money in those days so they sent me in helicopters to Philadelphia. In those days it was different. And then the budgets kind of got cut as the TV stations -- there were more and more stations. It was not just the three big guns. It was -- now there's a million small stations. And -- I'm blanking out on the word I'm looking for.

But they still send me places. I did cover the Boston Marathon Bombing trial. I spent three months in Boston. And I did cover the Cosby trial in Pennsylvania. So sometimes when

they're desperate, yes, they do send an artist. But they try to not spend the money to put me up. If they could find a local artist, they usually will do that.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So 40 years ago we didn't have TV cameras in courtrooms at all, right?

JANE ROSENBERG: No, none. None. 1988, there was an experiment in state court to let some cameras in, and then that didn't last that long. And then there were no cameras. And then I don't remember what year they changed it to be sometimes cameras in state court and sometimes not. It seems to be that if it's a huge story they're going to have to send me, because the photographers have to submit paperwork to see if they're going to be allowed in and it depends if it's a camera-friendly judge or not in New York State. Every state's different.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Um-hum.

JANE ROSENBERG: Pennsylvania doesn't let cameras in.

Now, everything I'm talking about is different now that it's pandemic, so we're just talking about pre-pandemic. Okay?

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Sure. Sure.

JANE ROSENBERG: That's a whole --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: No -- yeah, I know -- I think we all accept that life has changed during this time. We hope much of it on a temporary basis and that we'll get back to some of this normal for us.

JANE ROSENBERG: Wouldn't that be nice.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Wouldn't it be.

So we started to talk a little bit about the things that you're looking for as you're doing one of the sketches inside the courtroom. How do you start? What's your inspiration for the moment that you want to capture?

JANE ROSENBERG: I have to capture the defendant. I know that's the most important thing, probably why I was sent to this courtroom in the first place. There's a defendant who is of interest to the news media. And I know I have to focus on that person more than anybody. Especially if it's an arraignment, they may not have any photos of this person. They need to see what that person looks like. So that would be my initial focus.

I try to get a good seat. My angle is really important, especially if I only have minutes to capture that person. If I'm in the front row, I try to get to a side where I think the defendant will turn towards his lawyer. I have it all figured out after all these years, that they're usually going to turn towards the lawyer to have a little chat with them for a moment. And I try to capture that profile for a minute, if I get a minute, or whatever.

I have to remember a lot too. I jot down what I can, and I have to remember. They don't hold still for me.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Right. An arraignment may take less than two minutes.

JANE ROSENBERG: That's right.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: In one of our --

JANE ROSENBERG: That's correct. You know that as a judge. You know how quick they can be. (Indiscernible words) for me, I hate it.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: But you must have a fabulous memory for those details.

JANE ROSENBERG: I only have that memory when I'm concentrating really hard on doing that. Because when I'm on the sidewalk and somebody walks by, I don't remember

anything about them. But if I'm making a really -- a mental note of really concentrating on what I have to do, that's my job. It's very stressful. I can do it, but it's not a natural every moment of my life I have photogenic memory. It's not. I don't have that.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: When you're doing a sketch like that based on such a short appearance, how long does it take you to complete that sketch?

JANE ROSENBERG: It depends how many people I can fit in -- I'd probably be out there with it shot and in the newsroom in -- within 45 minutes. I have to finish it right there. There's no taking things home and touching up and thinking about it. Sometimes I'm kicked out of the courtroom and I have to finish in a hallway. So I have to pack up my art supplies and then go into a hallway and unpack everything and finish it up.

But I'm saying 45 is -- you know, I have to go wash my hands, they're full of pastel, and take a photo of -- nowadays I have to shoot my own artwork. In the early years there was always a cameraman waiting -- or woman waiting for me outside the court building to take a -- their camera and shoot my work and then send it back by -- in the earliest years it was film and they had a courier go on a motorcycle back to the newsroom, and then it became videotape, and then it became satellite trucks feeding it in. And now it's up to the artist to use their cellphone, shoot it myself, and email it in.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Off it goes. Off it goes. So that's -- it sounds fast-paced work as well.

JANE ROSENBERG: Yes. Very stressful, very fast paced.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah. So is it -- you know, we talk about some artists whose role is to be objective, to just simply capture the bowl of fruit that sits in front of them; the banana as it looked, the orange as it looked, the apple as it looked.

Do you think that a sketch artist -- that they should be objective -- can they be objective?

JANE ROSENBERG: My job as a courtroom artist is to sketch it as I see it in the courtroom at that time. Some people wonder, am I -- if I think somebody's guilty, am I going to sketch them looking guilty. Some people -- like, I think somebody just asked me about Bernie Madoff, for instance. I had an interview yesterday about -- and they were asking me, well, what about sketching Bernie Madoff. He's a master of hiding -- he duped all these people. People don't always look guilty if they are guilty. They hide -- there are con artists out there, there are many people who just don't express any emotion, and you just -- you're shocked that they were guilty of anything.

And then -- and that's what I have to draw. I have to draw what they look like really, what I see at the moment in the courtroom. The facial expression that they are exhibiting is what I have to go after. I can't just make them look guilty if they don't have an expression of whatever. And that's what I have to draw. So my goal is to be objective and not put my feelings -- if they come out, I can't help it. Sorry.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: No, no. So you have been at the epicenter, though, of really some of the most high-profile cases with some of the very most notorious defendants across the country. What's that like?

JANE ROSENBERG: Nobody's going to pay me if it's not a big case. Nobody wants to bother sending me to court to the Court of Appeals in Florida there, say, if it's just more technical -- they want splashy. It's the news media I'm working for. I'm not working for the courts. I'm working for the news media. People don't realize that. They hire me. It's either a wire service or a newspaper or a television station that's going to call me and say, we need a sketch of this; go ahead.

So that's what I'm doing. And it's usually a big story. They love -- it's themes. They love it when somebody big falls from grace, or a business con, or -- there are -- seems to be themes. Terrorism was big for a long time. It seems like nobody cares about the ISIS people anymore being arraigned. It seems like now it's all Me Too. It's the Me Too stuff. That's big now. Okay. So that's sort of the way it is.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Do you walk away from those experiences impacted by the cases themselves, do you think?

JANE ROSENBERG: Sometimes I do have emotions. I've cried a few times. I try not to, but some of them affect me and I really get very emotional. Some are horrific. Horrific. I see crime photos. I've seen mothers whose children -- the nanny stabbed their kids to death in the bathtub. And it's just brutal sometimes. And, yes, it does affect me. But I try to not -- because the next day there will be a new sketch in a new case maybe, and I could think of something else, get past --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah. Do you have a story that sticks out in your mind of a 40-year career as, wow, I can't believe I found myself here, or I couldn't believe this happened and I got to capture it?

JANE ROSENBERG: Recently, I told the story about the Boston Marathon Bombing trial, which was really exciting because I got called by the government on -- I was on the train, early in the morning, heading back to Boston and -- from New York, and I got a call by someone in the government. It was a very secret call, and they told me I can't tell anybody, but we're going to send you on a secret mission tomorrow and this is very secret. You're going to sketch the jury -- the boat -- the jury is going to be taken to where the boat was being stored. The boat

was where Tsarnaev, of the Boston Marathon Bomber, was hiding. And it was bullet-ridden, and he had hid there for days, and the boat was in somebody's backyard.

So I was going to be picked up at a secret location. All the reporters didn't know where -- where are all the artists. There were three artists, and we were all taken to this giant warehouse to sketch this boat, and all the juries -- the jurors were there, and Tsarnaev was in a secret little tent with handcuffs just watching it. They moved the courtroom with just the artists and two pool reporters to this secret -- it was pretty exciting to be a chosen one. Special.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's -- wow, that's amazing. Fascinating. And, yeah, got to be adrenalin pumping, I would imagine.

JANE ROSENBERG: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Even in that context, right?

JANE ROSENBERG: Yes, it was. It was pretty exciting.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Yeah.

JANE ROSENBERG: And it was fun to draw too. The light coming in this giant warehouse -- I mean, it was a break from just the dingy courtroom with no windows and the same old seal, like, behind your head, the two flags.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Do you have favorite sketches that you've done?

JANE ROSENBERG: Sometimes -- I have hits and misses. And some of them I happen to capture it, I think. I get -- nowadays there's social media, which I don't really go on, but sometimes my work goes viral and -- for good and bad. It -- the -- people love to criticize artwork. They love to say, that's not that -- that doesn't look like so-and-so, or that's so great, you really nailed it. Everybody loves to make some kind of comment about art in this world. I

didn't -- I don't do Instagram or -- I barely -- or any Twitter. I sometimes have Facebook. But it's a different world now.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, what do you think the future holds for court sketch artists? Will there always be a place?

JANE ROSENBERG: I hope so, but I've always thought, since I began, that my career's going to disappear any minute. I can't believe I'm still doing this, especially when places like Florida put cameras in all the time. You know, I think, that is going to be the end of me, but apparently it hasn't ended me yet.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So what's next for you? What's -- do you have your next sketch booked?

JANE ROSENBERG: Tomorrow. Tomorrow is the Colorado shooter of the -- who shot up ten people yesterday in the -- and it was a big story in the news. He's going to be arraigned. And now, during pandemic, I have to sketch off of video, so --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Does that raise different challenges for you?

JANE ROSENBERG: Yes, it certainly does. I don't really like it, but I have to do what I have to do now. I like that I don't have to schlep my art supplies to a courthouse and stand in a line like with the El Chapo trial at 4:00 in the morning, trying to get that good seat. I like that I'm -- I just -- I'm right here in my apartment, I have my pastel box open, I just sit down and get my pad out and start working. It's a lot easier in certain ways. But drawing from a photo, it's different than working from life. It's very different. You can't see as well. Blurry. It's very different.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: You mentioned El Chapo and having to get in line very early. I guess I just kind of had this picture that seats were reserved for Jane Rosenberg.

JANE ROSENBERG: Well, wouldn't you think. Some courts they are, actually. They -- some courts they -- I do have a seat. But that particular trial, that particular courthouse was very unorganized for the media. They just had two sketch artist seats reserved in the front row, and the rest of the sketch artists -- whoever showed up, that was for first-come first-served, first two seats. The rest of them go into the back of the courtroom. And I wanted those front-row seats, that's why I got there so early. I wasn't going to risk being in a bad seat.

As I said, my angle means a lot to me. And what I see is what I -- I can do better work if I could see better. So they just did not have a seat for me. And there were plenty of reporters camping out literally with sleeping bags on the sidewalk making sure they got in in time to see the verdict. There are, you know, important moments where -- it was such a big case and they just didn't have it organized.

I think that El Chapo was -- they had such extra tight security for him. They took him in over the bridge. They closed down the Brooklyn Bridge. I once got stuck in a taxi behind El Chapo's -- the group of cars coming -- motorcade, and the helicopter flying over me as I'm in the -- paying my meter. It was running up. I had to wait for the bridge to open back up so I can go. And that's how that trial was. Extra tight security and extra crazy.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, Jane, I am so grateful for this opportunity to talk to you. And I hope if I ever make it up to the city, I might be able to buy you a cup of coffee. Just fascinating conversation. I know I've got a lot more we could chat about. Maybe we'll do a part two of this podcast.

JANE ROSENBERG: Okay.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: But I will promise you this. I -- my sense is -- I say promise -- my sense is there is always room for art.

JANE ROSENBERG: Oh, thank you.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: And I have a belief that there will be a place for sketch artists among other types of artists in our future; that video and cellphones and photography capture their unique piece of the art world, I think you capture another.

Thanks for joining us.

JANE ROSENBERG: Captured my heart in saying that. Thank you very much.

NARRATOR: You've been listening to "Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom" brought to you by Chief Judge Donald A. Myers, Jr., and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. For more information about the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, follow us on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

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