

9TH UNPLUGGED

HONORABLE MARK BLECHMAN

CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE

OCTOBER 13, 2021

HOSTED BY: HONORABLE ALICIA L. LATIMORE

JUDGE LATIMORE: Hi, I'm Judge Alicia Latimore.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: And I'm Judge Mark Blechman.

JUDGE LATIMORE: And you are listening to 9th Unplugged.

(Music)

JUDGE LATIMORE: So before we become unplugged, tell us something about your job assignment, where you are assigned and a little bit about your career as a judge.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I'm currently assigned to the criminal division. And in the criminal division, in felonies, we hear cases from grand theft all the way up to death penalty cases. And I've been a judge now for about eight years and I've been assigned to criminal for five of the eight years. The other three I was in family court.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay, so only family and criminal.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: That's it so far.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Is there a division you'd like to go to that you haven't had a chance to visit yet?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Criminal. Oh, wait, I'm there.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right, I think you're going stick with that. So before we get unplugged, again, tell us a little bit about what you did before you got to the bench?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Before I got to the bench, I graduated law school in 1981 and started at the State Attorney's Office here as a 23 year old kid. And I did that for five years, then

I went out and joined the firm of Lubet and Woodard who later on, much later on, both became judges. And I was with that firm for a year. The firm broke up and then Marc Lubet and I became partners for 12 years. And then I divorced him and went out on my own and I was in private practice with my own firm for the remainder of the 25 years as a criminal defense attorney.

JUDGE LATIMORE: And criminal law is kind of your –

JUDGE BLECHMAN: That's what I've been doing for almost 40 years now.

JUDGE LATIMORE: That's what you do.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Yeah.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right. Wonderful. Let's get unplugged. All right, so what are your favorite hobbies?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I like to read. I love to travel. And I exercise probably seven, eight days a week.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Seven, eight days a week. And so what type of exercise do you do?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I do half ironman type races and so I ride my bike four days a week. I swim three days a week and I walk with my wife every Monday morning.

JUDGE LATIMORE: And so your body fat thing percentage is really, really low, isn't it?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I'm in okay shape for an old guy.

JUDGE LATIMORE: And what is the most exciting type of sport that you've done?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Well, every sport is exciting. I've done a couple, like I said, half ironman races. I've climbed mountains on different continents. And all that is just a lot of fun for me, plus the traveling to get there.

JUDGE LATIMORE: So tell us about climbing mountains. I've never – well, no, I've never climbed a mountain. And so tell us about that. What's your most memorable experience and which mountain?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: That would be my 50th birthday, Kilimanjaro and I trained to do Kilimanjaro. I read a book called Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer. And it spoke about the seven continents and the seven highest peaks on each continent. And it said Kilimanjaro was the easiest of the seven peaks. And I said, I'll do that. So I over train for everything. That's how I get through life and I over trained for that. I climbed Rainier twice, Hood a couple of times, Whitney once. I went to Hawaii and climbed Mauna Kea, which is technically the tallest mountain on the planet. And so I did that. And then Carlos Payas and I flew to Africa and we did Kilimanjaro.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Oh, wow, that is really exciting.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Yeah. And we were with five other people and we're friends to this day.

JUDGE LATIMORE: So how long does it take to get to the top of that mountain and back?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: There's different routes. We took the seven-day route.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: But there are some routes that are one and two days where you're just hiking right up there and hiking back down. But we enjoyed it. We camped out along the way. We had forty porters, seven cooks and three guides so it was a very nice trip.

JUDGE LATIMORE: And when you say seven cooks, and when I think of cooking, you know, I'm thinking of like a little bit of filet and some mixed vegetables, and all that kind of stuff. What do you cook on a mountain trip?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Well, they cooked for us. Meals like Judge Marques would cook. I mean, they were spectacular meals.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Oh, nice.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Right.

JUDGE LATIMORE: That is exciting. All right, do you speak different languages?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I can teach a martial arts class fully in Japanese. And like most Jewish children, I can read Hebrew. I don't know what I'm reading because they didn't teach us to understand. They just taught us to read, so I can read anything in Hebrew.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay. Where were you born and raised?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I was born in Miami Beach and I was raised in North Miami Beach.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Hey. All right. And where did you go to school?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I went to North Miami Beach High School, and then I went to the University of Florida both for undergraduate and law school.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Go Gators and fellow Miami neighborhood guy.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Yes.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Thank you. All right, and what is something that you'd like to do? It seems like you've done some amazing things. Tell me what's on your bucket list.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Well, I'm going to visit all seven continents. I'm going to do number six in February, and then I'll take my wife, and we'll go to number seven sometime after the pandemic.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right, and I hope that happens soon. I really do. How would you like to be remembered, Judge?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I'd like to be remembered as a thoughtful person who was prepared and worked hard at everything he did.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Tell me this, if you had to pick, are you an extravert or introvert?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Everyone says I'm an extravert, but I'm exhausted at the end of the day, which is a sign of being really an introvert.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Yep.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: So I don't know what I am. If you ask anybody else, they'll say extravert.

JUDGE LATIMORE: I call it the forced extravert because I'm an introvert, but we have to be a little bit extravert.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Maybe you and I share that.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Yep and we just close ourselves off at the end of the night, right.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: And here we are speaking to how many thousands of people.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Yes. If you had to pick, zoo or aquarium?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I love fish. I'm a Pisces and I love animals, going to Africa and seeing all those animals was stunning. So I'm not going to pick. I love them both.

JUDGE LATIMORE: You love them both.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Yes.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Early morning or late night?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Early morning.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Early morning.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Yes.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Oh, what is the best gift you've ever received?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: My children and grandchildren.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay. I'm sure that that would be at the top of the list and after that?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: After –

JUDGE LATIMORE: Any particular material gift that you received?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: A material gift? No, I'm not – I'm not in need or want of material gifts. I've been blessed to have a loving family and the extended family as well, and that's really – that's what makes me happy.

JUDGE LATIMORE: That's wonderful. What did you find yourself doing the most when you were in the lockdown phase of the pandemic?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I was in the family division then and so I worked harder than I worked when we were out of the lockdown phase. Everything was remote and I've got one dog that I cannot travel with because she doesn't like to be in a car for a long period of time. If I could do it again, I would have gone somewhere like North Carolina and just set up camp there and done all my remote work there. But I really did the same thing I'm doing now. I didn't go to restaurants anymore and I still don't which is sad because we loved going to restaurants. Cindy and I loved going to movies and I don't know that we'll ever go to a movie again outside of the house so I miss those aspects of our life.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Yeah, our life did change with that pandemic.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Yeah.

JUDGE LATIMORE: But we do make the best of it.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Right.

JUDGE LATIMORE: All right. I do want to know if you were able to have an exotic pet. You mentioned a dog. If you could have an exotic pet, what would that be?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: A Kangaroo.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Oh, okay, and why is that?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: As a child my goal was to go to Dartmouth and have a Kangaroo as a pet. And none of those things happened. And so if I could have a pet it would be a Kangaroo.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Now, have you ever been in the presence of a Kangaroo close up, and able to pet a Kangaroo?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I've in the presence of Kangaroos at zoos and when I go to the seventh continent, I will pet them and play with them.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Okay. All right, and you let me know how that goes.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: I'll send you a video.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Send me a video. And what was the name of your Kangaroo?

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Roo.

JUDGE LATIMORE: Roo. Absolutely.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Is there a better name?

JUDGE LATIMORE: I know. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate you being unplugged with me today.

JUDGE BLECHMAN: Thank you for the time.

(Music)