

THE JUDICIARY WEEKLY PROFILE by CARLOS HARRISON

Cynamon's ascent to judge a Cinderella story

Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Abby Cynamon went from Cinderella to circuit judge thanks to a jurist she met when she was 9 who treated her "as if I mattered."

The judge was deciding which of Cynamon's parents would get custody.

"She actually got off the bench and took me into her chambers and asked me, 'How do you feel about being with your mom? How do you feel about being with your dad?'" Cynamon said. "She sat me next to her as if I mattered. And I just thought that was such a cool thing."

The experience sparked an interest in law and a determination to get an education that led to a scholarship at Barnard College, another to the University of Miami School of Law and ultimately the bench.

In between, she was abducted, recovered, orphaned and sent into foster care with a family that treated her like a live-in housekeeper that they didn't have to pay.

"They would go away for weekends when I was 12½ and just leave me with three kids," she said.

Cynamon's parents both came from Poland, fleeing the Holocaust with their parents. They met in Palestine and moved to New York, where Cynamon was born in 1960.

When they divorced, her mother got custody. Her father snatched her and took her to Illinois. Two years later, her mother found her and brought her back to New York. It was a short-lived reunion. Her mother died of breast cancer when Cynamon was 12.

Her father "just wasn't a nice person," she said. He drank and had an explosive violent temper. Rather than give her to him, one of her brothers took her to a rabbi, who connected her with the foster family. That's where Cynamon became Cinderella. She cleaned house and cared for their kids.

STRENGTH AND DISCIPLINE

She buried herself in her studies and earned the college scholarship. After graduation, she worked as a paralegal on Wall Street. Three years later, she decided to go to law school. She finished in 1989 and passed the Bar in 1990.

She was about to move to Seattle to

take a job, "but I had just started dating a really nice man, and growing up with a dad like I had I didn't have very many

examples of very nice men around. So I figured if I found a nice guy I should hang onto him. This is the man I married, and we have two kids," she said.

In 1993, she took a job as a Miami-Dade Circuit

Court staff attorney and stayed there until she became a judge in 2008.

"When I was in the juvenile court, I saw so many young boys and girls who came from really distressing, dark, negative circumstances," Cynamon said. "I think that one of the things that made me effective there was the ability to see these young men and women and understand that they were in a predicament where they would have to have their own strength and strength of will and discipline to extricate themselves."

Every once in a while, she would share her story with the kids before her and tell them: "Look around the room. You can have any job you want. You can be a defense attorney. You could be a clerk. You could be a probation officer. You could be a prosecutor. You could be a judge. The only thing that I have that you don't is a degree."

"It was a very powerful message, I think, and hopefully it did reach them."

PREPARATION TIME

Currently, Cynamon is in the civil division, but her childhood experienc-

es still affect her courtroom style.

"When my mom was dying and couldn't work, we were on welfare. We were on food stamps. I don't take anything for granted," she said. "You go into that courtroom, and I may be sitting higher than everybody else, but I'm not better than anybody else."

The judge arrives at 7:30 or 8 a.m. every day and makes herself available to any lawyer who wants to come in. She usually puts in at least a half day of work on weekends.

"Here in civil we have a lot of issues that are heavily briefed by the lawyers before they come to hearings," she added. "If they send me something, I read it before the hearing because they spent time preparing it. They're billing a client for preparing it. If they have to come in for their

hour and spend half of their hour telling me what it's about, I've wasted their time. And that's not how I think the public should be served."

This month, Cynamon took on a new responsibility as administrative judge of the circuit appellate division, hearing appeals of county court rulings.

"At the end of the day, I just want to make sure that the proceedings are fair, that I've heard the people," she said. "I may not rule in their favor, but I've given them a fair hearing."

COURT NOTES

■ The Florida Supreme Court has named 14 South Florida attorneys and two judges to the court's Committee on Standard Jury Instructions—Contract and Business Cases.

Steven R. Reiningger, a partner with Rasco Reiningger Perez Esquenazi & Vigil in Coral Gables; Gary C. Rosen, managing shareholder of Becker & Polakoff in Fort Lauderdale; and Paul K. Silverberg, founder of Silverberg & Weiss in Miami, will serve two-year terms ending June 30, 2014.

Fourth District Court of Appeal Judge Jonathan D. Gerber; Roy Edmund Fitzgerald III, founding partner of Page Mrachek Fitzgerald Rose Konopka & Dow in West Palm Beach; Jane Kreuzler-Walsh, founding partner of Kreuzler-Walsh Compliant & Vargas in Palm Beach; Palm Beach Circuit Judge Meenu Sasser; Ron M. Gaché, a partner with Shapiro Fishman & Gaché in West Palm Beach; James M. Kaplan, managing partner of Kaplan Zeena in Miami; and Eric Lee, managing partner of Lee & Amtz in Boca Raton, will serve three-year terms ending June 30, 2015.

Manuel Farach, of counsel with Richman Greer in West Palm Beach; Maxine M. Long, a partner of Shutts & Bowen in Miami; Michael S. Olin, a Miami solo practitioner; T. Tucker Ronzetti, a shareholder of Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton in Coral Gables; Brian F. Spector, a Miami solo practitioner; and Joshua Spector, a partner of Perlman Bajandas Yevoli & Albright will serve four-year terms ending June 30, 2016.

■ Chief Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Joel H. Brown has selected Miami-Dade County Court Judge Robin Faber to serve as a member of the Canvassing Board for the Doral runoff election scheduled for Tuesday.



J. ALBERT DIAZ

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