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Transcript of Interview with Laishka Bruno

Interviewer: Aaron J. Stewart

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Transcript

Laishka Bruno: Hello, Aaron.

Aaron Stewart: Hello. You alright?

Bruno: I'm good, how are you?

Stewart: Um, pretty good. Just one second please.

Bruno: Okay, you're good.

Stewart: Alright, ready to begin?

Bruno: I'm ready when you are.

Stewart: Okay, so this is Aaron Stewart. I'm conducting an oral history, hit—oral history project interview of Ms. Laisha Bruno--did I say that correctly?

Bruno: Laishka Bruno.

Stewart: Laishka, that's my--

Bruno: Laishka, yeah.

Stewart: --my bad. Of Ms. Laishka Bruno for the Tennessee Tech University Black Cultural Center Oral History Project. Today's date is January the 8th, 2021. We are doing this interview remotely and we are going to start with questions on your background and then talk about your experience at Tennessee Tech. So, the, for starters, what is your full name?

Bruno: Laishka Bruno.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. And, and if you don't mind when, when and where were you born?

Bruno: I was actually born in Fort Hood Texas, 1990.

Stewart: Oh, Texas, okay. It's very nice place. And did you live there throughout your childhood or and what was it like when you were growing up there?

Bruno: I did not. So, I'm a military brat. So, I moved from there to Germany and then from Germany to Tennessee. I actually grew up—I was there about 24 years.

Stewart: 24 years. So, just going off that question, how was Germany for you?

Bruno: It was great. I was in the toddler range so I got to enjoy being a kid in Germany. And then enjoying the culture enjoying the cold. And then moving down to Tennessee completely different mentality, so.

Stewart: That's good, yes ma'am. And what was school like for you as a child?

Bruno: It was interesting. So, I learned Spanish before I learned English, so I did a lot of ESL classes. I was always not the talkative kid, but I was definitely like more of the friend to everyone. And then when sports started hitting I was the athlete, but I was the also the smart kid, so kind of had a balance of both.

Stewart: This is, this is really good actually. Going off of that did Spanish have any kind of impact on how you made friends, how you kind of kept them or just how you related to people when you came back?

Bruno: Uh, no. So, it's I'm Puerto Rican so that's part of the culture. It was definitely a lot easier when with I grew up in a military town, so there was always people coming in of different ethnicities and backgrounds, so I'm getting a chance to meet new friends. And then if they spoke Spanish we spoke Spanish, if not spoke English. So, I think it better, I mean further on it, it better, bettered my career chances and everything being able to speak you know two languages.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. It's very nice and so unless you have anything else you want to talk about your early life or?

Bruno: No, that's fine.

Stewart: Okay, so we'll move on to your experience at Tech. So, when did you attend Tennessee Tech?

Bruno: 2008 to 2014 is when I graduated. So, I actually did a summer scholars program. So, I graduated high school in 2008 of, May 2008 and the scholars program was June through August. So I kind of started a little bit earlier. It was with—we call it the BCC, but Black Cultural Center. So, I got a chance to start school before everybody did, right, so it was a group of I think like 10 of us. It's been a while. And I actually have still really good—one of my best friends is

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actually from someone that I met at that program. And I was able to do that and that was just kind of like a, a precursor of what college was going to be. You know, we we took college exams. We took--there was an intro to engineering. There was a like a pre-calculus class or something like that. So, we got, we were taking real college courses and pulled our first all-nighters and everything there. And then started the, the college career. And honestly, the BCC is why I stayed at Tech you know for, for, for the years I was there. It created a family. You go to Tech, so you see what, what the background is there. The BCC creates a diversity that we want to see, right. You know, it, it allows us to expand and still have a comfort zone. Have somewhere to come in and take a nap on the couch if we need to if we're having too many long days. But, I enjoyed my, my time at Tech greatly due to the BCC and the things I was able to be involved with. The minority group that I was involved with, a mentoring group, you know, and it, it definitely built a lot of character in me and allowed me to be confident in what I did.

Stewart: That's a lot. So, just going off of your RACE PLUS--the RACE, RACE PLUS program is actually going really well still to this day. I was actually a member of that my freshman year.

Bruno: Oh, awesome.

Stewart: And yeah I do agree with you that it's really, a really good introduction for people like us. So it's more of a gentle dip down into the water instead of just throwing you full on and telling you to swim.

Bruno: Mm-hmm, definitely.

Stewart: And so why did you choose to go to Tech because there aren't a lot of options, so what made you, was a deciding factor for Tennessee Tech?

Bruno: So, I was actually between Tennessee Tech and UT-Knox, right. So, I pretty much grew up in Tennessee. So, for basketball purposes I was like "uh." Once I decided I wasn't going to college for basketball and I was doing engineering, I started doing a little more research and my AU basketball coach actually graduated from Tennessee Tech and he said check it out. Go visit the campus. Go, go check it out. I'm not a big, like big school person so a lot of a lot of people in one place it just doesn't do, fit, fit well with me. So, I actually decided to go visit Tech before I visited UT-Knox and I fell in love with it. I mean it was small enough but still far enough away from home. Meeting Dr. Owens at the time and, and getting that comfort level of okay I can see, I can see myself here, make an impact at Tech versus just being another number. So, that was the deciding factor, is the size, the community it created. Specifically, the BCC created and the vision of what it could do. And at the time, it was one of the top engineering schools in, in the country. So, that also helped out.

Stewart: A very good, very good decision. What was the transition to college like for you?

Bruno: So, it was a little bit harder. So, in high school I was an athlete. I was involved in multiple different organizations, scholarship organizations, right, so Beta club, National Honor Society, all those. School came easy. Science and math were like my “okay, I gotta apply myself to these.” Just the way my brain works, so I decided engineering. But, but transitioning to college, the fact that, like, you can choose your times of classes and like you don't have a professor telling you, you better turn this in. You know, you get a syllabus and you follow that. There was also the transition of the culture shock. Right, so I came from military town where my high school had all, all races, diverse, diverse to the t. And then moving to Tech was very much of a okay I'm in a new place. So there was adjustments to that. And then being getting used to being the only, so the only female, only Hispanic in an engineering course. You know, or if it was, it was only like two or three of us, you know, minorities in general in the, in the course. And learning that, that's not a, a crutch but a--it's, it's something that should push you, right. We always walk with a little bit of a chip on our shoulder because we're used to being the onlies. But, it's the same as corporate America. We, we are the onlies, right. You, you get used to walking in a room and you, especially, in engineering fields, and you're like okay. But, that's it. You think of it once and you keep going, right. And you make the strides and, and Tech provides that for you. And it allows you to, to feel that confidence level. And whether you're doing NSBE or ASME or whatever organization you're in, you get an opportunity to learn what that is and then you just apply it to corporate America.

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Stewart: Yes, ma'am. And spurring off that question, did any of the kind of factors where you were one if not the only person like you in your field, did that ever kind of discourage you, hurt you, or kind of set you back in terms of how you felt belong, belonging in the program?

Bruno: Yeah, so I surrounded myself with some very strong people within the BCC or within, you know, the, the curriculum itself, that kind of, you know, old, older mentors that have been through that, you know. And I was learning, I learned quick that being the only is, is a good thing. You know, it's one of those, like, I revert back to you, you take notice of it. But if you let it get in the way of you succeeding, then you weren't meant to succeed in the first place. So, it, there was some times where I would, I would laugh and be like “oh,” new semester, new classes, right, you walk in you're like “okaaaay. Let me adjust my sails and keep it going.” So.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. Alright and go off of that: what was your major or program while at Tech?

Bruno: Mechanical engineering.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. And what was your kind of focus if you would say, like, what was your kind of, what's the thing you honed in on? Because I know electrical engineers, we have power systems, microelectronics, kind of your go-to, I'm focusing on this and this is all I'm going to do?

Bruno: So, with mine it was more broad. I didn't, I did a robotics class I did a machine design stuff like that. With mechanical engineering I didn't specialize on purpose because I didn't wanna limit myself with the fields, the job offers I had coming in. I didn't wanna--I decided not to specialize. I was looking at robotics and then the more research I did for like the career side of it, I was like I don't want to limit myself to what possibly specializing would do. So, with mechanical engineering it was a lot more of machine design and broader and that way no matter which avenue I was taking for the job, I can adapt to what I learned in school.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. Yeah, that's a very good—well, that just made me think. Because that made me realize that if you're only in one field that's pretty much all you're good for. That's all you have to your name. So, they're not necessarily going to hire you for it. [Unintelligible] to get jobs. Hm. I'm gonna have to keep that in mind as I keep going through. And so why were you, while you were going through your ME program what kind of classes did you take and what was kind of the difficulty of it?

Bruno: So, with ME we take every math under the book, right. We get all the way to advanced math and trigonometry for engineers. Which I think the year I graduated they ended that for incoming engineers. I've always been, I have never been good at theoretical math, right. So, if it's applied, I've got it. I can, I can picture it. I can see why this number matters. But in the theory is when you have symbols and sigmas and stuff and you're like "what is this, what does this matter?" That was always my hardest portion. So, the math side. The actual engineering courses, so like machine design, or thermodynamics, heat transfer. Heat transfer was challenging, but it made sense, right. So, those, those classes I took a lot of those. With mechanical engineering you do a lot of, like, I did a electrical engineering course. I did a computer science course. I did a chem e course. Like, there's, we take a little bit of every field and apply it to what we do. So I, I did enjoy that aspect. My favorite was senior design because we got to actually apply what we've learned throughout the years and create something and have a final product. So, yeah, those. We, we took so many courses. And I took a couple courses twice, three times to pass you know. And that's, that's one of those things that you have to learn, engineering teaches you that not—going into college you think, "oh, this is, you know, I'll do the same thing I did in high school." But it doesn't click and if it doesn't click it's perfectly fine with taking a course again. You know, at the end of the day it's you get that degree and you and you move on to a job that is going to teach you what you need to know.

Stewart: Right. Okay. And during that, what kind any there was there any like specific like assignments, or class activities, or group projects, or anything of the

sort that really stood out to you and you were like this is really either difficult or really fun?

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Bruno: So, senior design was the most fun. It was, I actually took it over the summer because I did a year and a half co-op. So, that's why the years I gave you, me being at Tech were a little, little wonky. But, senior design was over the summer so it was a full, full two, two and a half months of us creating a, you know, getting a project submitted to us. We worked with the agriculture farmers down the street from Tech and we created an egg grader. So, learning, learning how to grade eggs sounds very easy but it's actually by weight, right. So, we created something from scratch. I, just complete, completely new design and working with, with two other guys to not only design it, but actually create it and make it, you know. That was a lot of fun, because that that was allowing us to apply and actually have a final product at the end of, you know, all that work.

Stewart: And if you kind of want, it's kind of want to elaborate on the, your capstone project. So how did the, how did the process go really? Like, from in terms of, like, picking up the egg, grading it, if it's good, keep it, and grade it and put it in the right bin, and if it's not throw it out or that process?

Bruno: So, we actually use the weighted system. So, it's not by the size of the egg. So, you can have an egg, two eggs and they're the same exact size. But if the weight is different, that's what a grade A versus a grade, grade B would be, or grade C. I honestly can't remember the weights. But we, we just had it kind of on levers. So, it had an auger that would move an egg. And then there would be a pocket where it would weigh it and have on the opposite side you know bolts with that weighed about--I don't know, not even a pound or you know a couple ounces. And then if, if it balanced that, then it would keep moving but if it was heavier than that it would drop it. And it would be in that slot. So that'd be slot A. And then it'd do the same process in just different weights. So, the auger is—we had it on a, on a, on a motor and it would allow it to just slowly rotate and move the. the eggs along and grade. We did have a couple you know busted eggs because if you boil them it changes the weight. But, but there was a lot of lessons learned with that one. But that's as simple as that sounds, that's how we ended up grading eggs.

Stewart: That sounds really fun. Were there any, kind of, you had to go and get a computer engineer to help you with circuit boards or any kind of things like that?

Bruno: No, it was very much internal. We were able to do a lot of, it was a one, one motor. So, one phase motor, so it wasn't a lot of different wiring. So, we had to do, we did work with the machine shop a lot to get you know threaded rods down to the right spec and all that stuff. But we didn't have to really bring in a lot of outside majors for it.

Stewart: Very nice. Because I've always heard that some capstones require like a lot of collaboration. Some require like next to none. It's really just a mixed bag you know what the professors give you.

Bruno: Yeah

Stewart: That's really cool. And so if you don't mind answering that, where did you live while attending college?

Bruno: So, my first year I stayed at Tech. New Hall North...?

Stewart: Yes, ma'am.

Bruno: Back then, they were brand new. Like, it was the first year, so freshmen only could live there. And then after my freshman year I moved to an apartment off Gainesville. In, in Gainesville with my roommate from freshman year. And I actually stayed roommates until we graduated.

Stewart: Oh wow.

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: That's really nice. And so what was it like living in both the dorms and your apartment and everywhere else you had to go while you were on your co-op?

Bruno: So, when I left, the dorms were an adjustment. We, we had a little bit better just because it was, you know, it was New Hall North had, we had a bathroom within our dorm room. So we didn't have to do the communal dorm bathrooms. And then once we moved to the apartment, it was so much better. I love to cook so being able to cook and not have to depend on the meal plan and all that kind of benefited me. And then when I went off to my co-op, I was gone for a year straight. So I just did, a year and a half straight. My roommate had just graduated, so we just cancelled our lease at our apartment and I went off to Georgia and did my co-op with General Electric for the year and a half and then stayed in a townhouse there. And then once I came back I just moved in with one of my friends. It just kind of worked out time, time frame wise

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Stewart: So, very nice. So, this kind of deviates from the current topic, but how was your co-op at General Electric? Because that is a spot I'm trying to interview for as a double-E.

Bruno: Okay.

Stewart: Trying to get in, trying to get a little bit in, see how, what I can do in terms of broadening my horizons, so how was that for you yeah?

Bruno: So, I did it with Roper Corporation, which is a subsidiary of General Electric. It was a great co-op. It actually, I, I stuck with them for the year and a half because it was so awesome. They gave a lot of, a lot of these co-ops will sometimes you become a paper pusher. I actually had projects that I was doing. You know, like they gave me testing. You know, the first, the first portion of the of the co-op, the first session I guess they called it was over the summer. So, I was doing a lot of oven-door testing. So, it was the appliance comp—appliance portion of General Electric. So, ovens and ranges and stuff. You get a lot of hands-on testing and very much of like applied design. So, I learned quickly I did not want to be a design engineer because I did not want to be behind a computer. And then it, it gave you a lot of critical experiences because of the magnitude of the company. You know, you have brand new products that are launching in a year, you get to deal with that. I actually got to do a lot of electrical harness remakes and learning drawings on that. So as a ME, I was like not expecting to get that opportunity. But once again, when you don't restrict yourself you get a chance to learn something new. So I, I suggest anybody who can, get a co-op that's like that. Don't just get it for the money, but get it for the experience

Stewart: The experience will make you a lot more money in the long run.

Bruno: Exactly. I, I graduated with two job offers on the table.

Stewart: Oh, wow.

Bruno: That and I had—my senior year was just me going on trips to, to interview with companies. So.

Stewart: That's, that's really nice. Wow.

Bruno: It makes it a lot easier.

Stewart: And you've already covered, we already covered, but did you volunteer somewhere else while you were attending tech like outside of your co-op and any kind of internships you may have had?

Bruno: So, I did. I was involved in a lot of like NSBE we did some volunteer opportunities. I was involved in ASME. I was on the EJC council, so Engineering Joint Council that does like E-week and all that stuff. I also was every year I did Engineering a Future where it's like a summer's program for the girls for, for like I want to say middle school down to elementary. During the week of E-week, there's like a one-day big thing for E, for Engineering the Future and then over the summer there's a full week that the girls come to campus and get to do different engineering activities and stay on campus. So, I was a counselor for that. And then of course I was a mentor for the mentor-mentee program or I think you guys call it RACE now.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. And that's really cool. So, in terms of NSBE, because I am a student member. I haven't gotten to the E-board just yet. But, what was your experience with that in terms of what you did every single day, like, what was kind of the responsibilities, things like that?

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Bruno: So, with NSBE, I was more of a, of a member. Just being involved. One of my friends was actually one of the presidents, so she, she brought me in. And, and I was like "okay, let me get involved." It was, it wasn't as big when we were there. So, it was just like anything we needed to do, I was there. I was, I didn't hold a title. Now, for, I did do engineering Theta Tau. So, if you've heard of the engineering fraternity Theta Tau, I was Regent for that. And I was on the class that brought it back and, and initiated the first group and I can't remember how many years. But, yeah. It's, if you're in NSBE now like it's, it's a great thing it's something that goes beyond college. I suggest that if you want to learn leadership, you know, be able to apply leadership to your resume, it would be great to just get involved and just remember your limitations, right. Remember you are a student still so you gotta, you can't do it all. That was one thing I had to learn, was I was involved in a lot of things and my academics started slipping because of it. But, at the end of the day a lot of the things I was involved in are what caused me to have a really good resume, you know. So, and to kind of make up the that acade, academic portion.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. I'm definitely going to keep that in mind because I've been looking for a good way to kind of throw some leadership on my resume a little bit more. Because I'm the current Vice-President of the Aviation Society. We just—

Bruno: Okay.

Stewart: --restarted that. I don't know if you here that when you were attending?

Bruno: Uh-uh, not here.

Stewart: Okay, yeah. It was a group, I think, I believe it shut down in '16 or '18.

Bruno: Okay.

Stewart: I can't remember the exact date and then we restarted it January of 2020.

Bruno: Okay. Cool.

Stewart: So last year. So, definitely looking for more opportunities that way. So thank you for that. And can you, and moving on, could you speak on any faculty or staff in specific or in general who influenced you or that you were really close to?

Bruno: So, I was really close to Dr. Owens just because he's like the first face I saw. Marc Bernard was, was a big, a big guy for us. From the engineering group, Dr. Craven. She was a big influencer. That's really it. Like, we had a lot of

professors that were just strict and weren't there for the culture I like to say. But, so, it becomes--people who fully impacted me were the names that I, I listed.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. I can, I can definitely attest to Dr. Rob, he's a great person.

Bruno: Yeah, it's weird for me to call him Dr. Owens because I'm used to calling him Rob, but.

Stewart: Yeah. Yeah he's, he's definitely helped me out with all of his, everything he's given us. Every, all the classes we've had with him because we have the RACE PLUS class and then, well, yeah, the RACE PLUS class what we're doing this for right now. And then the, the initial RACE class back in your freshman year. He gave us a lot of really good nuggets--as he--

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: --nuggets as he called him.

Bruno: Yeah. He's—

Stewart: Helped me out.

Bruno: Yeah. I had many a moments I was in his office crying. So, frustrated, or things weren't going right, or whatever. But he's definitely a good one to have your back. And Dr. Ojo, I don't know if she's still there.

Stewart: I'm not familiar—

Bruno: Ojo?

Stewart: I'm not sure. Was she in the same department as Dr. Rob or was she somewhere else?

Bruno: Yeah, she was, her office was, it's in the BCC. Or was in the BCC. But she may have retired.

Stewart: I believe she has, because now the acting President is Ms. Charria Campbell and then he is the. . . Vice or. . . Ah, he's gonna kill me for forgetting this. But he's, he's currently over Multicultural Affairs since Mr. Marc, he retired.

Bruno: Yeah, yeah that's fair. It's been a minute since I've been outside. So.

Stewart: Whenever this whole pandemic's over with, it might pay to come back.

Bruno: Yeah, definitely. We were planning for homecoming, but we'll see what happens with this pandemic.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. And speaking on the pandemic, has it really affected your work or any kind of things you've done?

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Bruno: So, I work for PepsiCo Frito-Lay. So we, it's a the magnitude of the company allows us to keep moving right we make chips we make edible products so it quote unquote puts us as an essential company. In March when everything started like people started seeing what was happening with COVID, we were sent home like the second week of March. And we've been working from home since March. So, I'm in the engineering, supply chain engineering group. So we were grounded. Like, we weren't able to travel to plants for the first like three months. But, we, we've still been in business as usual just working from home. We won't return back to the office until June. But that's where when you're looking at careers, you take into account certain things. You learn that certain companies will, they may make money fast, you may make your money fast like in the oil industry or you know oil and gas industry. But then you, something like this pandemic happens, right, the first things that are shut down are oil, gas. I had between Goodyear an offer and Frito-Lay. And choosing tire, or choosing edible snacks, right, over tires kind of saved me, right. So, I've been with the company for six years and this pandemic has not slowed us down. It's actually made us pretty busy. I mean the company has led the way within not only the pandemic, but the social injustices. They've been the forefront of making sure that people know that PepsiCo is not, it's not, we're here for our people, and we're also here for people, right. So, in, in, in words of the actual pandemic, thank God it's, it's been business as usual, just being at home.

Stewart: Yeah, that's really good to hear, because when I heard you worked at PepsiCo I figured they would have like started, start trying to cut people off or do it do anything like that. But I'm really glad to hear that they've really helped you all out and keep kept you all on staff. yeah

Bruno: Yeah. Yeah. We're—

Stewart: That's really good.

Bruno: We get to spend 100--1.3 billion dollars this year in engineering, so. People love their chips.

Stewart: Yeah.

Bruno: Yeah. So.

Stewart: Yeah, that they do especially in this, since you've been in lockdown.

Bruno: Right. Yeah.

Stewart: Yeah. So, did you use the BCC while you were student and if you did what was that like?

Bruno: I used it every day. So, the BCC was our, like I said before, our safe haven. It was the, you know, time, to kill time between classes. Especially when I was living off campus, right. You've seen, I'm sure parking now is worse than what it was back then. They've eliminated a lot of parking spots. But it was just a safe haven. It was easy to come in and you were gonna run into somebody you knew. You're gonna run into somebody studying who was probably studying for the same you know test you were. Or you were gonna run into a upperclassman who's taken your class before, right. It was honestly just the home away from home that we all needed.

Stewart: It's still that way to this day to be a fact. Yeah, I spend a lot of days up there just either doing homework with people I know who have the same classes like you said or sometimes just sitting back and trying to help people with what they need. So, you're definitely right, it's more of a, more of a family center—

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: --to be honest. Home away from family. So, and so outside of coursework and your co-ops and all the really important serious stuff, what did you do for fun outside of it?

Bruno: So, I played intramural sports. So I was on the like flag football team and then—which we were actually really good. We went to like MTSU and played championships and stuff. And then played basketball intramural. Did a lot of--we were in the Fit all the time. Working out. I was never a party person so like I'd have get-togethers at my house. We'd have game nights and partake in fun there. But Tech's never really been the party school, right, so it's never a thing. But going to basketball games. A lot of my friends were girls basketball players, so--are women's basketball players. So, supporting them, supporting the guys. And then if not, if I wasn't at Tech I was back at home seeing family.

Stewart: Yeah, that sounds, that sounds like a lot to couple together with all your coursework for, for an ME. Did you kind of get through it without too many issues?

Bruno: Yeah, you learn balance. And it was, all, you know, there's times where depending on the semester I wasn't seen and there was times where I was. So, it just got, you just learn how to balance it and what's, what's important.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. And so what was it like being a minority student on campus while you attended?

Bruno: Um... It was—

Stewart: That was a loaded question.

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Bruno: You learn, you learn, you learn some strength. You learn... we didn't really go anywhere by ourselves, honestly. We didn't deal with as much—within Tech's campus, you didn't deal with as much adversity as you would if you got off campus. But you were always mindful. I'm a military brat so for me it's always like different things or stuck behind my head right or taught ingrained in us. But we, we did a lot of like I think it was very rare that we would be anywhere by ourselves. Our, you know the probates and stuff like that was some of our most fun times. Getting to see that and greek life on campus and being involved with, with people, you know. And seeing just the genuine families like we created, you know. My closest friends are from college. Some, some majority of my closest friends are from, from Tech times.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. And speaking on that this may be kind of a hard question if you're not comfortable answering, answering with it just let me know any time and I'll move on to another one but were there any kind of issues with like racism from other classmates kind of any major issues with other ethnic groups in your community?

Bruno: No, not, not at Tech. It wasn't—people weren't as vocal. There's more issues of being a woman in engineering than there was you know being a minority in engineering. Now, when you got off campus I had issues in Walmart you know being followed thinking I'm stealing or, you know. There's different stuff like that. But with, I will say with, with that era—and, I that sounds like I'm 45—but, we were not seeing as much injustice. Obama was president, right, you know. We, I was in the BCC when Obama was inaugurated. So, like that that kind of created a buffer I, I believe to what is happening currently. Because Tech would have definitely been—you know, you saw, you see the Confederate flags. You see all that. That's what Tech was. We saw those, but it wasn't as crazy as and out front in the open as it is now.

Stewart: Wasn't as blatant.

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: It's not misunderstandable. I mean occasionally I see, I'll see the giant like old booney country trucks lifted and with the—

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: —flags on the back of it. Confederate flags and everything, but. Yeah, for the most part I do agree with you we weren't really bothered in terms of just out of the blue.

Bruno: Right.

Stewart: Like you'd have to you have to do something and make someone angry for them to—

Bruno: Right.

Stewart: —come out and bother you.

Bruno: Yeah, yeah.

Stewart: And this is kind of in line with that did you venture off campus into Putnam County or Cookeville or beyond while you were still in college and if you did what was your favorite spots and where did you go?

Bruno: Yeah, so Stroud's Barbeque was like my weekend place. Loaded baked potato. We always were at Walmart. Walmart was the only place that was open back, back then in Cookeville like 24 hours. Like I said we were much of the friends that ended up having apartments, we would just be at each other's apartments. It wasn't a lot of being out in, being out in Cookeville or Putnam County. I was, I did a, like, I was a tutor for one of the like middle schools so I would do that. What middle school was that... I think it was Putnam County Middle School I think that that was the name of it. But that was about it. Like we did not interact with, with Cookeville. And if we weren't at El Tap or Cicis Pizza or Stroud's like we were at each other's houses and apartments.

Stewart: That's understandable. That's kind of how it is now as well it really hasn't changed that much.

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: Which now they have a bunch more spots, like, was Revolver there when you were on campus? The nightclub?

Bruno: Uh-uh. There was—is it over there by Walmart? Like in that—

Stewart: It's, I believe it's heading that way I've never been.

Bruno: Yeah, yeah. It used to be something else. It was a place that always got changed multiple times. But I, I didn't freq--yeah I didn't frequent it because I wasn't a club person.

00:40:00

Stewart: Definitely feel you there, yeah. It is not my cup of tea.

Bruno: We did a lot of hiking and you know going to Sparta to see like do the hiking trails and stuff, so.

Stewart: And speaking on your hiking trails kind of an off question a bit but which one was your favorite that you can remember?

Bruno: Coming, Cummins Falls was always great. With the waterfalls right there at the very bottom. That was, yeah, that was my favorite.

Stewart: Yeah that was, I think I've been maybe twice since I've been back to college, but it is a really nice. Like, honestly if there's Wi-Fi out there I'd probably be out there just studying to be honest. It's just really relaxing.

Bruno: Relaxing, yup.

Stewart: And so, kind of going back to the question prior, did you feel kind of safe or welcomed when you were off campus like around other people that were not part of the community or anything like that?

Bruno: If I was, like, I think when I was off campus, I was usually in some type of Tech gear. Just now that I think back, we usually were wearing something with Tech on it. Or our cars had Tech on it. And it would, I never really went anywhere completely by myself. It was you just sensed some of the community not being as open as all. You know, so just safety wise, it wasn't opening. Like, I live in, in, like, north of Dallas, Texas, now so like anywhere I go I'm like okay, but I'm also grown, right. But when I was in Cookeville it was definitely a buddy system as funny as that sounds. Or being aware of your surroundings or you know it was a lot of lifted trucks which you, you see in Texas area, in Tennessee anyways. But.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. Yeah because I, I do agree with you there. It's you kind of feel okay but you still feel like you kind of got eyes on you wherever you go. I mean, I'm, I'm a big dude. I'm not that worried about—

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: --kind of getting attacked or anything but still at the same time, not as comfortable going out by yourself as you would with like two or three people with you.

Bruno: Yeah, exactly.

Stewart: And kind of getting away from all the kind of dreary topics what did you do after you graduated?

Bruno: So when I graduated I actually started my job at our Fayetteville, Tennessee, location. So, at a Frito-Lay plant. And that's where I started with, I had a team of 30? Of 30 team members that reported to me. I was running a production line for potato chips. So, making chips for a living. And then I was at Fayetteville site for four and a half years and I ended up getting up to like manager level. I had

people reporting to me, did multiple startups, did a multi-pack startup, did, ran departments, and then decided I wanted to come to headquarters and pursue like the engineering portion of it. And now I'm a project manager. So six years in, I'm a project manager for national projects for Frito-Lay.

Stewart: That's really good.

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: I think really not a lot of people get to say that especially in six years.

Bruno: Yeah.

Stewart: That's really good.

Bruno: It's, it's fun. It's a brand-new role, actually. So, I'm in the middle of like catching my hair on fire. But it's, it's definitely good.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. Wow, that's really good and so kind of going this way with that, what, what accomplishments are you the most proud of in your entire school career from K, from K through college?

00:45:00

Bruno: Our basketball team going to, to state for Tennessee. And then AU basketball, for, we went to nationals. We ended up being third in the nation back in the day. I can, I can play a little bit. And then honestly my, from, from college I got mentor of the year my senior year of college. That one was important to me just because of the fact that, you know, I, I've always been a big advocate of bringing people under my wing. And, you know, if you've got questions, if I've gone through it, why should you? type deal. So, that was a big one. And then with my company, I was nominated for a minority and diversity award. Just simply being nominated was, was a big thing. It's you know through PepsiCo and I, I'm one of five that was nominated because it just shows like I've always been that person that if you need that person to raise their hand that's me. You know, I'd rather make it easier for somebody else than, than it was for me. So.

Stewart: Kinda being the vanguard in a couple uncomfortable situations.

Bruno: Uh-huh.

Stewart: That's really good [unintelligible]. And so, after you've gotten through all the, the pain that is some engineer programs and the classes and all the late nights what is your life like now? That you've gotten through and you've pretty much accomplished?

Bruno: Life now is, you know, it's still a challenge every day. There's a challenge with my role which I enjoy because if you're not learning something or challenge

yourself you're just going to become stagnant. And creating, you know, the home life. I've got two dogs. Then my girlfriend and I are in the process of next steps of, you know, marriage and all that, so there's that chapter of life that we're excited about. So, career constantly evolving, you know, my goal is to keep growing and get to a point where I'm managing people and able to open doors for people like us, right. Because that's important to me. And trying to, you know, every day figure out what we're going to do next. I've only—I can only build so many things and redo rooms so many times with this COVID pandemic, so.

Stewart: Yeah, yes, ma'am. And first I would like to really congratulate you on your upcoming marriage.

Bruno: Thank you.

Stewart: Really an accomplishment. And so at your job, going off of your challenges, what will be the most challenging thing you've had to do to date if you're allowed to speak about it or anything?

Bruno: So, the most challenging is actually what I'm currently in. So, I'm transitioning to a project manager role. So we have, with the time of the year we have forecasting and financials and it's a 34 million dollar project, right. So it's a lot of money of trying to figure out that aspect of it under a time crunch. I think that's the most challenging honestly and it's just because I've never done it. So I'm taking it on and you start looking at these numbers you're like "whoa." Like that's, that's okay, alright, we're doing well.

Stewart: That's a lot of, to juggle with, like, right now. Yeah. And do you have any favorite memories of tech that you haven't mentioned yet and if you do could you describe those just a little bit?

Bruno: So, actually one of my favorite memories from summer scholars. So, one of our projects was creating musical instruments out of like random material. You know, we took it to—I forgot what it was called, it's in the square but it was like a science classroom for kids type thing. And working along with like we were all brand new kids, too, freshman year, right. We worked with, within our groups and we created. Ours was a xylophone out of PVC pipes. So, like getting to create that and figure out the sounds and all that. And that was one of my favorite projects. Any one of our mentor mentee programs that we've had has always been fun. I love seeing you know when we get back from, from, for homecoming we always see each other and it's like we, we don't miss a beat. Homecoming is definitely one of my favorites, favorite memories from Tech.

00:50:00

Stewart: Yes, ma'am, I definitely agree with that. It's really, really fun. Everyone finally comes out of their hidey holes from assignments and you get to see everybody. It's really nice. And speaking of Tech, do you have any challenging or stressful memories of Tech that you're comfortable sharing?

Bruno: Any, any one of my math classes that I was studying for. Being you, know, be it or even finals preparing for finals. And back then Tech didn't shut down for, for any type of winter snow or whatever so we, we would have finals and it'd be ice outside and we'd still have to go to our class the next morning, like. I think finals was the, the most stressful.

Stewart: [Unintelligible] the entire semester you may have forgotten this one a little bit and it's like five or six questions. Yes, ma'am.

Bruno: Uh-huh.

Stewart: Yeah, yeah, the finals this year were a little bit rough, too. Especially calculus 2.

Bruno: Yeah, I bet and you guys are all remote, right? Or are you on campus?

Stewart: I'm on campus hybrid. So I'll go to, I'll go to class like once every--I'll go to one class a day and or something like that. But everything else is online.

Bruno: Cool.

Stewart: Right, yes ma'am. And what advice would you give the current minority students at Tech?

Bruno: Current, you know, I would say make life what you want it. Don't hold back. Don't let any type of reasoning hold you back whether it's you're the only or whether you're, you've never done it before, you know. You don't know until you try. And Tech allows you that opportunity to have people behind you, you know. How many times have you gone into the BCC and said "oh, I got this test" and then you said the date and people are like asking you how are you doing, you know, have you studied. Just take life by the horns. You, you will, Tech will be a portion of your time, but it will create a lifelong of memories and friendships and opportunities, you know. So, don't, don't let certain things get in the way of you succeeding. Don't be afraid because some people aren't and see how far they go, you know. You just take life by the horns.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. That is very good advice. I'm definitely gonna have to implement that a little bit into my current situation. Yes, ma'am. And, and I think we're--you have anything else you'd like to add? Because I think we're just about good to wrap up maybe, unless you got something else you want to speak about.

Bruno: No. I've definitely enjoyed this conversation and bringing back all the memories. And, you know, it like I've said before, if there's any way that I can help whether it's, you know, you said you were looking at co-ops and stuff. You have my email, you have my number. I'm always here, too. Just because this was an

interview, but this you know creates networking, right. Shoot me a text and be like “hey, I’m looking at this” or “what do you think about this” and I’m always here to, to help.

Stewart: Yes, ma'am. I really appreciate it. Well, alright suppose I’ll go ahead and let you go on back. And I will be emailing you the register of the deed--which pretty much all the deed says is that Tech, that the school can use this. They can keep it and all that kind of stuff. I’ll make sure to email it to you within the next 30 minutes and get that to you and get it signed. Yes, ma’am.

Bruno: Okay. Yeah, no that's, that's good.

Stewart: Alright, it was really great talking to you.

Bruno: Likewise, Aaron. Take care.

Stewart: You too, thank you.

Bruno: Bye-bye.

End of transcript.