

Salvation Army Pathway of Hope Oral History Project

Interview With ShaNeika Mitchel-Peters

October 9, 2019

Interviewer: Grace Priddy

Narrator: ShaNeika Mitchel-Peters

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00:00

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00:05

GP: Hi, my name is Grace Priddy and today I am interviewing ShaNeika Mitchel-Peters at the Williamson Road Branch Library in Roanoke, Virginia. Today is October 9th, 2019 and this is for Dr. Rosenthal's Public History course at Roanoke College and our Salvation Army Pathway of Hope Oral History Project.

We know just the basics of how the Pathway of Hope program works. From your experiences can you just give us [how] you have seen how the Pathway of Hope program works?

00:44

SP: I've been in the Pathway of Hope program for maybe about a year to a year and a half now. It all started when I did the Angel Tree. So it started from there, when I would go pick up my son's Angel Tree gifts. They had asked me if I wanted to do an essay. So I told them "sure, I would do an essay." Well, if you win you win a hundred dollars, first place, then there's second place and third place. So I said "Okay, fine," so I went and did my essay, and they called me a few months later and was like "Well, congratulations, you won." I was like "Oh, yay!" So they called me, I had a plaque, I took it with the lieutenant and they gave me one hundred dollars. And basically my essay was about at first, when I first started, it was only just me and my son. So I just basically said that I want to help the community. I have a heart for helping children, because I am a teacher. So I have a heart for helping children, helping families, and different things like that, and also to help my son to have a better education, and future, and everything.

They helped me get on the right path, gave me budgeting classes and just basically asked me what is it that I wanted to do as far as them helping me to make my life and my son's life better. So I basically explained to them that I wanted to get my own car. I wanted to basically have other resources of education to help my son's future become more brighter. Help me with my finances for me to get them in order, not so much for them to do stuff for me but to tell me how to get everything in order so that my son could see that my mom has helped me a lot because I am a single parent. Of course they helped me, they gave me different resources to help my son get on a higher educational level, make sure he has everything that he needed education wise and make sure that I have everything I needed so I can keep him happy as well as give him everything that he needs. I was working with one of the instructors and basically any event would come up, anything learning wise, anything with the library, anything like that she was telling me about it. And I was like "Oh, okay." So they make sure you stay on top of everything. I was like "Okay, that's cool," and I needed that extra push. Even though I have my mom, but you know, we always listen to our moms, but I needed that extra from outside of my family box. And they were very patient. They weren't trying to push me, but it was like "Hey, I see that you are feeling down, let's give you a push up."

They really want to help the community, and that was one thing that wanted to do was give me different community projects that were out there to do. So they really listened; not like a counselor, but kind of around [like a] counselor. They basically were—I don't know what you can call it—my back up. If I feel like I'm about to fall, they're going to push me back up. They helped and assisted and everything. They make sure every year I know different parenting tips and tricks and everything. So I was like "Oh, okay." Then I finally got pregnant with my daughter, and they made sure I kept my appointments, they made sure I stayed healthy, they made sure I had everything that I needed. They were there for me as far as if I need anything for my daughter, or my son, or myself, making sure I didn't fall under the postpartum depression. They would call to check and make sure, "Hey, are you okay?" They wanted to make sure I checked in once or twice a week, just to make sure that I am still in uplifting spirits. I really appreciated that and they were awesome.

They also, when it comes to trying to help families, it's not like they were trying to enable them. They're trying to make sure they can do stuff on their own, and they're not being a crutch. So I

was like “Oh, okay” and I liked that. I like positive feedback, as well as you can tell me direct criticism. Tell me if I am doing something wrong and I will accept it, and they were really welcoming on that as well as watching to make sure that my feelings weren’t going to get involved. But they helped a lot. I mean, I’m upset that I’m leaving them. But they’re pretty good, they’re great. And actually all of them have grown up with my son and with my daughter, so I would recommend them to just about anybody.

06:20

GP: So you touched on what you learned about it, and what brought you to it. So, in the beginning, what was it like? Them being there now? What was life like?

06:34

SP: My life was pretty good. It was good cause I had a good head on my shoulders and everything. It was basically just them raising me higher, at a higher standard. Because I was basically borderline, like “Okay, let me do the bare minimum.” So they helped me to do more than the bare minimum. Like, let’s take you a little bit higher, let’s put you out there, step out on your faith instead of just thinking about how “Oh, I can’t do it.” Oh let’s just try, then if you can’t, then we can adjust and see where we can push you back again. So they wouldn’t let me give up. So I was like “Okay, that’s pretty cool.” Now? It’s like I’m out there like, “hey, I’m about to try this, I’m about to try this, I’m about to try that,” and it is because they were right there to push and make sure that I stay stable. So I was like “Oh, okay.” So now I feel like I can basically just conquer the world [*laughter*].

07:35

GP: With your children, your son and your little baby, how has the Program really helped them and assisting you with them?

07:45

SP: A situation happened with my son where he had [been] bruised by his teacher, and of course I went to my worker and I talked to her about it, so it was a whole situation that I had to go through of trying to get him into a new school and transportation and everything. She basically went out to make sure I had all of the resources that I needed. The system went and basically pushed me and my son down, so she made sure I had resources of how to have transportation for my son, and if they could, make sure I talked to the right people about him getting bruised, and different things like that. With my daughter, they have helped me with diapers, clothing, getting her a crib, changing table, making sure that I stay on point with her getting her shots, and making sure that I’m still in high hopes with them and encouraging them, as well as trying to make sure that I am caring for myself.

08:53

GP: So you mentioned your mom, tell me more about her?

08:57

SP: My mom’s awesome [*laughter*]! I love my mom, she is awesome. She’s my biggest support, because, of course, we’re not from here, we’re from Washington D.C., so it’s just me and her down here besides my two children. So she’s a huge part of my life. Before I was able to

purchase my own car, in July, she let me use her car for me to get to work, for me to get to church, get them to their appointments, get my son to school, all of that. So my mom, I really can't even explain it, she's amazing. She's always supporting me, making sure that I know that I can do everything, anything that I can put my mind to. So she is right there, and anytime I have any issues or anything, she is there to tell me if I'm right or if I'm wrong. "Nika, you need to do this." "Nika, you don't need to do that." She's basically, I don't know what to even say, she's my best friend. She also encourages to not think about what others think, as far as with me being a single mom and having my two kids. She's like "Nika, don't even worry about all that. You're doing a good job. You're providing for them. Keep going with what you're going with." And she also encourages me to go back to college and finish, because I stopped, and she's like "No, go back. I will help you with whatever you need, I'll help you watch the children, whatever you need, even if you need some 'you' time, I'll get them." So I was like, "Oh, okay." My mom is my biggest, biggest, biggest supporter.

10:39

GP: So you went to college, and then you left? Where did you go?

10:45

SP: Virginia Western. I went for early childhood development. But of course I did not continue. I only went for like a year. So my mom was like "hey, you only had one more year, what happened?" And I was like "I think I really got burned out coming straight out of high school and going straight in, I think I kind of got burned out." She's, right now, like "Nika, come on, let's go, you can do it." And I think I really got relaxed because I have my CDA, which is equivalent to an Associates [degree], but she's like "No, let's push higher." And I'm like "Okay, fine." So I'm planning on trying to go back in January. But I think my worse thought is I'm afraid of fractions. [*mutual laughter*]

11:30

GP: How has the Salvation Army and your mom, how have they... I don't know what I'm trying to ask here. I'm formulating the question! [*mutual laughter*] I'll come back to that. So, you're transitioning out of the Salvation Army, going out into the world, and going back to college. How is that process going?

11:58

SP: It's going smoothly. They actually told me ahead of time "Hey, it's about coming to an end." And they didn't want me to go because I'm very high spirited and they love when they talk to me and different things. But it's going smooth, and they have also told me that if I need anything, I can contact them, any encouragement I need, I can still talk with them. It's just the program part, the Pathway of Hope, I'm getting out of. As far as the Angel Tree and everything, they said I can basically do that program still, until I get up to three times, then we're done. I think, basically, since last year when I first did the Angel Tree, with the help of Pathway of Hope, it has helped me budget my money more. So I can have my bills paid, as well as provide for my children. They taught me how to have this budget for my bills, and budget for extras like as far as Christmas and if something were to happen, like at the time you get your car and with me doing the budgeting class, so I was actually able to purchase my car a week before my birthday in July. Which they were excited about. They were like "yes, we made a big

milestone!” I’m like “yes!” Cause I didn’t have a car for like four years, so with the budgeting classes and their encouragement they helped me to be able to get me my own car, which I love. [laughter]

13:40

GP: Can you tell me more about the Angel Tree?

13:42

SP: The Angel Tree, they allow each child three times to—three years—to get assistance. So they’ll ask me the mandatory stuff, which is shoes sizes, coats, clothing if you need it. Then they’ll ask for three different items that your child really wants. Of course, over the years I’ll listen to my son to see what he wants, and I went and basically did it. And they were like “Okay, that’s pretty good.” So last Christmas, when I got his items, it was right on point what he needed. So this year, they gave me the opportunity to come ahead of the crowd and do for my son and my daughter. And even like when he was sitting there playing, they were attentive to listen to him as he was playing with his toys. He wasn’t so much talking to me, but he was playing with his toys and they were like “Do you think he’ll like Legos?” And I was like, “Sure, yes! How did you know?” And they said “We can tell he’s very hands on.” Like unless you were really paying attention to my son, you would not think he is hands on but he’s very hands on and he loves books. So they got excited because I didn’t just ask for toys, I asked for learning things as well, like books and little flash cards, and different things like that. So they were like “Oh my gosh, yes! That is awesome!” I’m like, I’m a teacher, like come on! They were very attentive and they were watching my daughter as she was playing with my son. And they were like, “Oh, it seems like she likes loud things.” And I said “Yes!” It was like they made the process easy because they were attentive and watching them as well as talking to me and get a feel out and ideas from me. Which I like that they have a variety of things. They don’t have “You can’t get this; you can’t get that.” They more so want a child to have something they are going to learn and play with instead of video games and just them sitting there watching a TV all day, which I like that as well.

16:04

GP: So you get involved with other activities throughout the community, can you tell me some about those?

16:10

SP: I help with if they have those book-bag drives, I’ll go and try to assist if they need my assistance. Or I’ll ask “Hey, do y’all need anything?” Or when they have the activities for my son’s age, they’ll invite me to come so I’ll go and just overlook and see what’s going on, what I need to [give] my input on, or not say anything. Different activities, I bring to them “Hey, y’all should try this, try that.” Or if they have a coat drive, or I know I did when they needed clothes I took bags of clothes for the needy families and different things.

17:08

GP: So you moved here from Washington D.C.?

17:11

SP: Yes.

17:12

GP: What was that transition like from Washington to here?

17:15

SP: Oh it's boring. [*Laughter*] Well I moved here when I was younger. I think I was about 10. So the transition was kind of hard for me because I was leaving all my family. And it's not, as far as I said, it's boring, there's not as much to do here as it is there. Here everything closes literally at nine. There you can go to different stores and do different shopping and different things like that. So the transition was really really hard because I was leaving my family. Which I grew up, all the way until I was 10, with my family, so that was more so the hard part. But of course, my mom and my dad they made it smooth. We came down here and we visited here a few times back and forth, but my mom was like "Nika, we gonna move here" And I was like "Huh?" I missed my friends, and I missed my family most of all. But it was kind of a smooth transition because my mom didn't just throw it on me, she eased it in. So it was kind of smooth.

18:23

GP: What was it like growing up in Roanoke?

18:26

SP: I was popular. [*Laughter*] I really didn't too much do anything, because I was into Barbie dolls and reading books, so I wasn't really into going outside and playing. I did go outside and play little bits with my cousins, some of them would move down here. So I went outside and played with them. As far as school wise, I got straight As, A/B Honor Role, President Award for academics, like all that. So I made sure I read. My mom, when I was younger, she made me look at different words in the Bible—not in the Bible, in the Dictionary—and basically do definitions, maybe five different words each week and do the definition and learn that way. I was great at math, still am. I did spelling contests. I played basketball. So basically I was very athletic. I was the only girl on my all-boys team, so I was like "Hey, this is pretty cool." But I stayed very active, I wasn't just sitting around the house. I did other things as well as family vacations and different things like that.

20:03

Looking back, at the past year, year and a half, what is something you would tell yourself then, now?

20:16

SP: Keep pushing, and move forward. And try to get your education and basically think more highly of yourself. And just encouraging myself, like "I can do it. Don't give up. You can do this." And just pushing myself forward to become more successful.

20:40

GP: [For] people in the community, would you recommend going to the Salvation Army for that extra push, that back up support?

20:48

SP: Yes. I very much would.

20:50

[Silence]

21:06

GP: Your son, did he get his love of reading from you?

21:10

SP: Yes!

21:11

GP: Yeah? Tell me some about that.

21:14

SP: My son, at first he didn't like to read, because he can hear that he has a small lisp. I couldn't hear it, but his doctor discovered he had a small lisp. So he liked to look at books but he wouldn't too much read out loud. He at two years old he had a whole big book shelf full of books that he would look at, and I would hear him in his room, but when I would come around he wouldn't too much say anything. He loved to talk, but when it came to structured talking he wouldn't too much say anything. I kept encouraging him, of course, and helping him to read different books. And of course he was looking at me like "Mommy, do I have to?" But I basically just kept encouraging, kept encouraging. And basically I finally went to his doctor, and, I love her, she encouraged him as well to read a small, little book. And she noticed, and was like "I have to talk to you." So he went out into the hallway with my mom, and she was like "He has a slight lisp. Unless you know what to look for you wouldn't know he has it. But he can hear it, even if you can't hear it. So that's what's making him so shy to read." So we got him involved in speech therapy, and she's helping him. She said his lisp is very, very shallow, but when it comes to hearing yourself, you can hear it more so than the person that's listening. So she said that's why he's shy to read out loud to his class or to other people.

So once he started doing speech therapy, and me being very patient with him, and helping him to say his words properly. Then now, he actually just got called in his school for being one of the best readers, the top readers. So I was like "Yes!" It basically boosted his confidence more, so now he has his book now, it's called *Dog Man and Cat Boy*, and he loves that book. So now, he's like "Mommy, I want this, I want that one." And I'm like "Okay, okay, okay." It basically helped him, as well as my mom's like "Nika, we just got to figure out what we can do and everything." So now, I told him let's read to your sister. So, what his doctor said is with me doing that its going to boost [his confidence] more cause his sister is on his level. Cause its not an adult, or his peers, or his friends, its his sister. And she said, well family members, children have a thing that they know that their family members are not going to judge them, but their friends will. So they were like, to boost it up let him continue to read to his sister. So he'll be like "Okay, let's read a book," and she'll just sit there and smile at him and smack the book and everything. But he'll read to her, and he'll say the words right. Now he's not afraid to ask me "Mommy, what is this word, what is that word?" or to sound it out. So he's gotten like a

thousand times better, it's like a thousand times better, with having the confidence to read. So he's great now with reading.

24:58

GP: So the Salvation Army has different programs throughout the week, correct?

25:04

SP: Yes.

25:05

GP: Can you elaborate on those?

25:07

SP: A lot of programs I couldn't go to, because of my work schedule, and because I am the lead teacher of a classroom, they were like "you're never getting off, you got to be in the classroom," so I was like "Oh, okay." But they have different programs. Like they have paint night, they have some type of Lego night. It's not "Lego Night" but the kids can build stuff with Legos. They've had where they'll tell the parents about having different skate nights in Vinton. I don't think [at] Star City too much, but the Vinton skate rink, Firehouse Skate Rink, they'll let you know "Hey, this event is going on, we have free tickets, come pick them up, how many do you need?" They'll try and make it like a family get-together so you can also be with your family, but introduce yourselves to other families. They have bowling nights where, I think it's the bowling alley on Williamson Road, that they say "Hey, you'll get free bowling, free shoes rental, everything, you ask if you need." They do the circus. It was another event, it was a concert, a Christian concert, they asked me if I wanted to do that, and I was like "Sure," and that had other families as well. So we got to do that. It's so many different activities that they're like "Do you want to do this? Do you want to do that?" And I'm like "Yeah, yeah, okay, okay." Then they have the parents' night, where the children will go and be amongst their friends or peers or new friends that they can meet while they have little talks and snacks with the parents. For the parents they have parenting classes where they'll watch the children and then they'll do the parenting classes. There's like so many classes and activities it's not even funny [*laughter*]. But they keep you involved and not just sitting at home and not doing anything. And they keep you involved, as well as your children, so your children won't fall short of not having that love and caring and everything.

27:29

GP: What friends and people have you met throughout all the different programs that you've been to?

27:36

SP: I've met three people. I like to help the community, but, I don't know how you could say it, I liking helping others but at the same time I'm standoffish. I'm weird, I know. As far as when it comes to people, I'll help whoever, but at the same time I'm like "Okay. Alright." I've met three families. And they're pretty cool, and my son plays with one of the family's daughter. So it's pretty awesome and we actually found out that one of the families they play Upward

Basketball with my son, so I get to still see them when basketball season comes around and he still gets to interact and play with them and see them.

28:41

GP: What really developed your passion for teaching?

28:45

SP: Oh! That's easy. I love kids. Like children—that's my thing. I like to see them having their own personality, how they develop, how they learn. I want to be the one to assist them with getting their life, like encouraging them and being successful. I'd rather start when they're younger because most people, they try to help the older kids, and the younger ones fall short. Because people don't have the patience to deal with the younger ones so I'm like, "Hey I'll be the one to deal with them." I teach them basically anything you can think of: like how to self-help, self-soothe, help them with learning, anything like if I see a child put their head down I know it's something that they feel that they're not going to be successful with. So I'm like, "Okay, let me figure that out," and basically boost their confidence. I teach them as many languages that I know so they won't feel that they're basically secluded in this one box. I help them to explore and like, "You can step outside the box. Let's go outside the box." I help them with that and the main thing is having the patience. And making sure that they stay on track and them knowing that they can do it, and encouraging them. I love just watching their faces, how they glow when they are doing anything, and even if they do it wrong, let them know it's okay. You can do wrong. And basically helping them be okay with themselves, not think, "Oh, I did this wrong, let me back up." But let them know it's okay to do wrong but you can learn from your wrong. Maybe you're wrong might make a new right. So it's like, "Let's try this out. Don't be stuck in this bubble like you can't do other things." And with children, they are like glue. Anything you do, it sticks to them. So I want to help them basically broaden their mind instead of being so small and don't know it. Like "I can't do this, I can't do this." Yes, you can. You can do anything that you put your mind to. Basically children, I love them. [*laughter*]

31:18

GP: How have you used your skills that you developed in the classroom outside the classroom?

31:22

SP: I know one time, I can give you an example, I was at a grocery store. And this mom could not figure out why her child was shutting down on her. And she tried everything, and she was like, "Hey, I'll give you candy. I'll do this. I'll do—." And she couldn't figure it out. Well, I asked her, "Do you mind if I try something? I'm a teacher. I'm not weird." And she was like, "Sure." So I was like [to the child], "What's going on? You can tell me what's going on. I won't think of you any less just let me know what's going on." And it was something as small as he didn't know how to tie his shoe. And other kids teased him for not knowing how to tie his shoe. The mom was like, "He never talks to people. Like what is going on?" And I was just like [to the child], "It's okay, you can learn any kind of way you want. You don't have to learn just like your friends. You can learn anyway that you want." And he was like, "Okay!" And he got excited and like, "Mom, I can do it! I can learn any kind of way!" And she was like, "Okay!" So I basically just told her, "Go on Youtube. It's different things, techniques that he can learn. You don't have to just learn two bunny ears then you tie. It's a whole bunch of different techniques."

I said, “If he doesn’t figure that out, then do a different one. Keep trying and have patience with him until he figures out one that he can use.” And I told her, “Just let him know that he has a voice, even though other people are telling him, ‘You can’t do this. You can’t.’ Let him know he has a voice and he can have other ideas. You don’t have to go with the flow of everybody else.” And she was like, “Oh, thank you so much!” Well, I think it was like a year later, I saw them. And every time he sees me, he’s like, “Hey!” And he hugs me every time he sees me. And she was like, “Oh my gosh! He was like, ‘You helped,’ and all he talks about is you and how he can do anything. And I was like, “Oh, why thanks.” *[laughter]*

33:19

GP: So you mentioned “Upwards” and you’ve mentioned the “Back-Pack” Program and the Christian Concert: Are you a Christian?

33:27

SP: Yes.

33:27

GP: You are?

33:27

SP: Yes. Ma’am.

33:29

GP: How—*[SP sneezes]*—Bless you.

33:31

SP: Thank you.

[Both laugh]

33:34

GP: How has church and your religion helped you throughout your time?

33:39

SP: I just know, like, as far as my church, they teach having faith and everything. They teach basically through anything, no matter if you feel that you failed, or anything, just make sure you have the faith of God and always call on Jesus no matter what. I’m teaching basically my son the same thing and my daughter understands. I teach her the same thing. But, I basically lean more so on our religion, on being a Christian, because I’m like, “If anything, I need help.” My pastor, she’s great with teaching us: no matter what’s going on, make sure you still pray. You, even though you might feel at your lowest, still have faith. Because, at the end of the day, God helps with whatever it is that you need. I take heed in that. And even when I feel sad or anything, I go and I talk and I pray to God. And then, later I feel more uplifted. So this whole process is like, I stay consistent as far as talking with my pastor, and praying, and making sure everything is going like it’s supposed to be. So being a Christian is pretty cool, because I know at the end of the day God has my back and Jesus is watching over me. And I have the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me.

35:31

GP: Going back to your mom, how has she inspired you to grow into this very strong woman that you are today?

35:38

SP: My mom is very strong. She's very strong in how her faith is [as] well. So she encourages me and she prays for me like constantly. Or she'll, if she sees that I feel a little bit stressed, she'll be like "Nika, let's pray." Of course, we'll pray and everything. And she is like, "It's not as bad as you think," or "It's not going to go down this path. Let's think more positive, towards this way." My mom, anything that my mom has ever went through, she came out of. And I believe it's because of her praying and getting through it. Like right now, my mom, she's dealing with her sciatic nerve. And me watching her keep pushing though even though she will be hurting and everything, she still pushes through to make sure that I'm okay and make sure that my son's okay. My mom, she's a pusher. And she's very strong. So she's like, "Nika, no matter what goes on, just basically stay strong. Smile. Keep the faith." And my mom, her main thing is to smile. She's like, "If you smile, all darkness will just basically shatter." So she's like, "Just keep smiling. Just keep thinking positive. And if you ever think that, oh something is going to go wrong," she said, "No. Think about what will go right." No matter what we've gone through, as far as the move here [to Roanoke], me going through different relationships, she's always like, "Nika, you're going to get through it and you can do it." And she's like, "Just stay strong through everything, because nothing in life, like as far as what you did those years ago, well you'll probably forget about it in the future. And you'll be like, 'Oh, that happened?'" So she was like, "Don't let one situation just bring you down. You'll have other experiences, other lessons to learn, other things to get through." So I'm like, "Oh, okay."

37:48-37:59

[Silence]

38:00

GP: So your mom helping you through your relationships, do you want to talk about that some more?

38:03

SP: Um, I just had a few relationships... things that happened [*laughter*]. Basically, I was the positive one in the relationships and they were always negative. So my mom was like, "Nika, you need to leap out of that." Because any positive that I would bring, they would try to bring negative and push my positive down. So, it would push me down. Like, whoa, shoot, okay maybe I shouldn't think positive. But my mom was like, "No. Always think positive. Even if something bad has happened, still think positive."

And she was like, "Nika, if that situation is not working, that's not the only relationship you'll ever have." So I was like, "Okay." Of course I was like, "Well, fine." So with my mom, she hasn't been in a relationship, like her [own] mom and step-dad got a divorce and basically me seeing how she can still move and get through stuff, I'm like, okay, that's fine if I don't have a relationship. And she's always telling me, "Wait for the right person to come."

She was like, “Don’t just settle. Wait for the right person to come. And I’m like, “Okay.” And she’s like, “When the right person comes, they will see that your positive will boost them up instead of them trying to push you down.” I was like, “Well, alright. That makes sense.” So I was in two bad relationships where they wanted to just push me down. Nobody ever hit me, no. But they wanted to push down my high spirits. They were like, “No. This is going to go wrong. Well, no, don’t think positive about that, that’s going to go wrong.” So I was just like: you know what? Run for the hills. And I did. Basically, I’ve been single for eight years. And it really doesn’t bother me. I mean, I see people and I’m like, “Hey, hey, hey.” But it really doesn’t too much bother me, because I’m going on what my mom is saying. Like, the right one is going to come. It’s going to happen. I’m not really trying to be like, “I got to find it. I’ve got to find it.” And my mom was always like, “The right man will find you.” And I’m like, “Okay!” [laughter] So I’m pretty good and secure.

40:16

GP: Has your mom’s influence impacted your children in any way? Like have you seen her personality in them, you’re like, “Whoa”?

40:24

SP: Yes! [laughter] But my son is so much, there is so much my son does like my mom. It’s not even funny. Like, he talks like my mom because, my mom, she says every syllable and he do that. And I am like, “huh?” Cause like her “s” carries, and his does the same thing. And I’m like, “Oh my gosh!” And with my daughter, she is very loving like my mom. She’ll give a hug in a minute. She’ll try to encourage anybody. And if I’m giving her a hug, she’s like, “No! No!” Cause she’s only eight months old. Like, “No, no!” She goes, and I’m like, “Okay, you want a hug, okay, come on.” And my mom, she suckers you in. And I say, “You do the same thing.” So, it’s like basically different pieces of my mom’s personality is in like different ones of my children, each one of my children. So, I’m like, “You’re acting like your grandma right now.” But, one thing they did get is her positive attitude. And, they’re always smiling. Like, always smiling. So, I’m like, even when I feel like I would like to be left alone. It’s like they pick up on it, and they come in, “I love you mommy!” Well, my son and my daughter, she goes, “Ma-ma-ma-ma!” And I get her, and she’s hugging and kissing on me. It’s like, my mom has that, it’s called a discerning spirit, and she can pick up on anything. Like, literally. And I’m like, “Man!” So, my son is the exact same way. Like I can smile, I can act like everything’s okay, even if I am stressing about something at work. I can smile, and he goes, “Mommy, how was work today?” And I’m like, “How did you know? What is going on? This is so weird!” And I’m like, “Oh, I’m fine,” And he goes, “No you’re not. You’re sad.” And I’m like, “What? How do you know these things?” And then, the next thing I know, my mom is texting me, “Well, how was work?” And I’m like, “Wait a minute! Do you have a camera in my house?” And I’m like, “Why? What’s going on?” And she’s like, “I don’t know, you just seem off.” And I was like, “No I didn’t. I was smiling.” And she was like, “And I’m your mom, I can read through that.” And I’m like, “Yeah, okay.” But like, I was like, “My son asked the same thing.” And she was like, “Well, he’s his grandmother’s child.” And I was like, “Hehe.”

But her strength, as well, has impacted both of them. My daughter can fall and hit her head, and she will not cry. And I’m like, “what in the world?” But she would go like this, and she’s good. She got that from my mom, and same with me because I got it from my mom. So, I’m like,

“Huh, you got that from your grandma.” And, like with my son, he’ll do something, but be like, “But, it will be okay. It’ll be okay.” And he’s more positive. Even if, something if he got an F on his test. He’s like, “Oh my gosh! But it’s okay! I’m gonna do better. I’m going to bring it up.” So, my mom does the same thing with him. She’s like, “It’s alright. You can always bring it up. It’s just one test. Just keep going forward.” And he thinks like that now because also I do the same thing. So it’s like, if you see my children and me and my mom is not around, you’ll be like, they got some positive people around them because anything that happens, they are like, “Okay! It’s gonna be okay!” And they’ll keep going forward.

43:49

GP: So growing up, she was always like super positive, like smiling?

43:59

SP: Yes!

43:59

GP: Very strong?

43:59

SP: Yes!

43:59

GP: So tell me about your teenage years, and like growing up with your mom.

44:01

SP: Oh! Those were cool. I never really got in trouble. My mom, she’ll sit down. And she’s like “Nika...” She’s like one of those open moms. She’s like, “What’s going on? Tell me what’s going on. You can talk to me.” So, anything that I ever went through—good, bad, exciting, anything—I could go to her. I can basically be like, “mom this is what is going on.” And she’ll see my point of view. She’ll see my point of view, and she’ll be like, “Okay, Nika, this is what you might need to do.” Or, “Okay, Nika, let’s add this into it. So, my mom she encouraged me when I told her I wanted to play basketball. She was like, “Okay!” So after maybe three years of doing basketball, she became our basketball coach. She was like, “Well, I wanna try, too.” So she asked me, “Nika, do you think I can do this” or “I think I can do this, what do you think?” So we both basically complemented each other and made sure like, “Yeah mom! You can do that! You should try it!” So, she basically encouraged me the whole time. If I didn’t want to do something, she was like, “Nika, you can do it.” So, I told her, “Mom, I want to cheerlead.” She was like, “After basketball, what in the world?” And she was like, “Okay, well you can try it.” And I tried it, and she was like, “You don’t like it?” And I was like, “Unuh.” So like, anything that I say ‘mom I want to do,’ she’s like, “Okay, go for it! Just try it out, there’s nothing wrong with trying.” And like if I wanted something, she was like, “Nika, there is no harm in asking. It’s best to get a no, or you think you’re gonna get a no, but you might actually get a yes, so just ask.” And I’m like, “Oh, okay!” So, she encouraged me to work, and once I got my first job, she was like, “How are you liking it?” She was always like there, like if I had issues with my job, she’s like, “It’s up to you. Whatever you want to do. Don’t just stick to one thing, if you want to do something else, try it.” So including when I was like eleven, I was helping her do her own in-

home daycare. And I was like, ‘that looks fun,’ and she was like, ‘If you want to help, you can!’ So, she never really let me say that I couldn’t do anything. She was like, ‘Just go for it. Just try it. There is no harm in trying.’ So I was like, oh okay. We basically were best friends even in my teenage years.

46:35

GP: So, going throughout the program, what was her encouragement like then?

46:37

SP: She’s still encouraging. She was like, ‘If there is anything that you don’t think I can help you with then you can ask them. Or if you think my point of view might be too strong, ask them.’ She’s like, ‘You can ask other people; you don’t have to be confided in asking me.’ She was like, ‘Sometimes, even though I might tell you a point of view you might not see it because I’m you mom. Your thing is, mom is going to tell you this, that, and the other.’ She says, ‘You can ask for a second or third or fourth opinion. You don’t have to just stay with talking to me. But always know I’m going to be here, whenever you need me.’ Or anything like that. She was like, ‘If you want to do it, you can do it.’ Even when I was doing my essay, she was like, ‘You know how to write, go for it!’ And after I read it, she was like, ‘Goodness girl, I didn’t know you knew how to write like that!’ So, my mom, she was very encouraging, and telling me that if I needed any advice or anything, to just come to her. But, she’s like ‘you’re grown, so do whatever it is that you want to do. And if you fall, I’m here to pick you back up.’

47:43

GP: Your essay, what was it about?

47:45

SP: It was about basically me helping children, helping the community, helping families, me being a teacher, as well as making sure my children—well, at the time it was just my son—was on the education level that he needed to be on or higher. Make sure I stay encouraging, positive. It was about my mom helping me, allowing me to use her car. Or, she would take me places. She is always encouraging. Whenever she could help, she was going to help. It was also about me being a teacher, me wanting to move forward and get my own car, and soon to be a homeowner. And just different things like that. But to mainly make sure that my children had stability and had that success level. And making sure that they can do whatever they set their minds to, as well as me making sure that other children in the community know that they can make it. Being a single parent is not as hard as people make it seem. That single moms could do whatever it is that they want to do.

49:07

GP: Out of all the community service and work that you’ve done throughout your life, in the community, what is your most memorable experience?

49:17

SP: Trying to think. [pause] There’s a lot of them.

49:32

GP: Well, share ‘em all!

49:35

SP: My most memorable, I think it would be when the church had this event that we did, and I had basically asked my church family because I knew that we had to do a coat and hat drive, and glove drive. And I went, and I normally don't like talking in front of people, but still at my church I talked in front of them and asked could they help with the coat and hat drive and everything? They assisted as well as me donating my son's old coats because I'm a mom that you got to keep stuff nice. So, I just washed up his coats and took the coats and hats to a drive that was going on in the community. And I took all the coats, the hats, box of clothing, everything to, what's it called? It's a shelter. I can't remember the name of the shelter. We took them there and just looking at how the families went through the stuff, and they were smiling and excited. I was like, I got to help them, like this is what life is about. Basically putting smiles on other people's faces. I just basically took the stuff there, and they were smiling and happy. As well as we were having a drive at my job, and I got all my son's shoes, his clothes and everything, and I took it to my job. And, the people just get whatever they wanted, and they did. They were like, "I don't know who did this, but thank you! Thank you!" I always tell people that I want to be anonymous. I'd rather they see what was going on than to say "Oh, thank you!" "No, this is just a helping hand, and it's just to help you get through whatever it is that you need help with." So basically my most memorable is giving donations to the families that are in need, and basically just giving them the leg up. Like, "Hey, even though you might not have the money, it's somebody else that will help you out and give you what you need at that time." I think that it is basically giving things that I don't need or use to needy families.

52:09

GP: So, in the program, going through it do you set tiny goals to get to this checkpoint, and to get to this checkpoint, to kind of work your way up?

52:20

SP: Yes. My first goal was to make sure that I had my finances stable. So, I did the financial budgeting class, which was my first goal to make sure that I stayed steady instead of just saying, "I have money! Let's go!" They helped me to be like, "Okay, stay focused." So, I made a plan, and I basically executed my plan of 'get what you need, not everything that you want.' You can take a little bit of money and splurge, and get something, but don't just go splurge. And then you're like, "Aw, man, I need this, or I need this." So I basically executed that. As well as make sure that with my finances, that I fix my credit. Get the little things off of there, which everyone has hospital bills, and get little things like that off to make sure that the bigger picture was me getting my car. So I basically executed the small part of making sure my finances were in order. Then my next step was making sure I take care of my debt. Then after that, it was like, "Okay, well let's save the money." Then, it was higher and higher until I could actually go and purchase a car. And then, as far as with my children, making sure they have what they need, everything they need first. Which is shelter over their head, lights, water, different things like that. Then go into the clothes and the food, and then get higher and higher, to be able to when we go to the store and my son says, "Hey mom, can I get that?" I'm like, "Sure! Go ahead!" And it's not like I go, "well we don't have money for that." So it was like starting small because basically everything we do revolves around money. So, I had to make sure my finances were good and

stable before I could go any higher and say, “Hey! I can do this!” Basically, I made sure that I had a solid foundation with my finances before anything else can stack up.

54:47

GP: You told us what you would say to yourself going into the program. What would you say to other women that were in the same situation you were going in?

54:57

SP: I would tell them, there are other people out here that could help, because at a certain point, people think well, if I ask for help, I would be begging. I tell them, you can get assistance, you don't have to beg. You can get assistance. Don't be ashamed to want to get assistance or help. Even if people say, “Oh, well, people that get assistance, they put them in this category.” No, you can get assistance to help you to basically blossom up, and you don't have to stay on that assistance, but just get the small—start off small—and get a little bit of assistance and then grow out to where you can do it by yourself.

55:49

GP: Thank you for coming here and interviewing with us. We really appreciate you telling your story.

55:55

SP: Oh, thank you!

55:56

GP: And letting us listen to your story, it was so cool! Thank you so much!

56:02

SP: You're welcome! Thank you!

[END]