



## **See Beyond My Skin**

### **Brian Kirpruto Interview with Nigel Ousey**

**Nigel:** Today is my second interview for See Beyond My Skin. And, today I'm speaking with Brian Kipruto. I first met Brian and his wife Jamie, when they lived in the same apartment building as my family in the Germantown section of PA.

Brian was always an outspoken person in the community and someone who helped me start, See Beyond My Skin. Brian works in IT at the Philadelphia Art Museum.

Hi Brian, thanks for being willing to speak with me today. I'm always glad when I get a chance to talk with you.

**Brian:** Me too, it's a pleasure speaking with you today, it's always a pleasure learning from you and also maybe, teaching you something too. But, I'm always learning from you, so.

**Nigel:** So let's get into the questions.

**Brian:** Sure.

**Nigel:** Have you, have you always lived in Philly?

**Brian:** Actually, I was born in Kenya and I moved to Philadelphia at a young age at about four years old. I lived in Philadelphia most of my life. There's some points where I lived in Savannah, Georgia, but yeah mostly Philadelphia for a good portion of my life.

**Nigel:** What made you move from Kenya? Do you miss it?

**Brian:** I moved when I was very young and it was more a family move. We moved here to be with my father, he was an American citizen, but my mom and I were not originally. And, I do miss aspects of Kenya, from what I can remember, and from when I visited it's definitely a different way of life, not as chaotic, and everything is more "go with the flow."

**Nigel:** Have you bridged the culture of America with your family culture?

**Brian:** I'm more Americanized than other families from Kenya. But, I've definitely bridged that culture. I live in both worlds, mostly the American world, but I live in both worlds in a sense.

**Nigel:** I know you work in IT at the Philadelphia Art Museum, as a person of color, was it hard to get into the tech profession? And, do you think the tech industry is biased?

**Brian:** Well, getting into the tech industry as a person of color did- I didn't even think that, that is that way too. Uh, I know that we are under-represented in the tech industry. I mean, some of that might have to do with systemic biases, versus actual talent. I was lucky enough for someone to recognize my talent and give me a chance to show my skills. I didn't come from the original technical background with a college education in the IT field. But, it was all self-taught and they saw that and they saw that I could excel and achieve. I definitely do think there are biases in the tech industry. That's because people are not represented fairly. Even with the opposite gender, women are not represented fairly in the tech industry, and race isn't represented fairly in the tech industry, and that goes with any industry honestly. I live in a city that's predominantly African American, but the workforce of museum employees is less than eight percent. There are some biases here and there, whether they're intentional or not.

**Nigel:** Hmm. That's really interesting. Brian, I know you're someone who never shies away from conversations about race, and someone who isn't afraid to say how you feel. Does that sometimes land you in tough situations?

**Brian:** Yes. (laughs) Um, yes, but I think I always navigate out of those tough situations, in a sense, but I haven't been in any situation where I haven't been able to get out of, never really faced negative consequences that I know of, my outspokenness and never willing to back down from the topic. Even in the workplace, it's interesting, I bring it up all the time, and it's never overlooked I should say, but it's never frowned upon. And, it's encouraged at my workplace, at the moment. But... I can't say that's the experience with everybody else.

**Nigel:** Hmm. That... That's actually... That's actually really cool.

**Brian:** Yeah, my department is a unicorn in the museum also, so... that's a different thing. And, by unicorn I mean my managers are definitely not the norm of most departments at the museum, so I think I benefit from that more than other people at the museum do.

**Nigel:** Okay, um... You helped me with some of my ideas for my non-profit. So, judging by the beginning of 2021, what do you think would be a peaceful way we could change the way this country perceives people of color.

**Brian:** Well, that's a tough one. I don't think there's one way. That has to be multi-faceted, I mean, to help and please people of color you need to end systemic racism. At a top-level down, all the way down from education to healthcare, to jobs and, and equality and access. 2021 is off to a very interesting start, that's for sure. What happened earlier this week, during the capitol riots but, you know African Americans and people of color can't go anywhere if white people don't also step up and step in. The only thing I can say is that more people need to step up. More people need to step in. More people need to vote and vote for the right politicians. More people need to be more informed about who they're voting for. And, we need to get rid of false

sources. False information should not be shared regularly. And, should not be actively... You know, should not be censored, but you know, um, heavily ostracized, I guess. This is not real information, you know, make sure it's, only on satire websites. Or, stuff like that. The Onion doesn't get in trouble because they're a satire website. And, they know they're telling jokes and they're just like, "this is not real." But, other sites are saying, "this is real," when it's not real. And people should be held accountable for that.

**Nigel:** That makes sense. I have another question.

**Nigel:** When you went to the topic of the capital riots, it also reminded me of the one video of the lady who is yelling at this- I think it was like a 15 year-old black kid who she thought had stolen her phone...

**Brian:** Right.

**Nigel:** What was your reaction to that?

**Brian:** Yeah. Well, my reaction to that is... well, the lady who stole the phone doesn't identify as white, but she was using white supremacy in a sense to try to get her way. She didn't, obviously, say in the video, "this black man stole my video," but, she did use her perceived-ness. She's perceived as white, even though she doesn't identify as white. I forget what the terms is called, but being like, white identifiable, or being mistaken as white, and so using her power to be mistaken as white, she tried to use that as leverage to inflict damage or get somebody in trouble. Obviously, an innocent person, in trouble. Seeing the D.C. riots of all these white people basically storming the Capitol, beating up police officers, one was even murdered and seeing them virtually get away with it in a sense, you know. They're being arrested now, after the fact, but if it was like a Black Lives Matter protest... The first day of Black Lives Matter three times as many black people were arrested during those peaceful protests. Versus these people storming the Capitol. I have a lot to say about what happened. I do believe that law enforcement was also inside on it. Not everyone in all law enforcement wasn't on official capacity, but, there were definitely law enforcement officials there who let people in. There were law enforcement officials who used their credentials and their status to get in. And, you know, it's sad. Honestly there's two different Americas. That white people, when they're rioting and actually attempting to kidnap a sitting vice president, barely get a response from police. They planned it for weeks. It wasn't like, new information.

**Nigel:** One of the... kind of big things that people were finding kind of hypocritical was that, if it was a Black Lives Matter protest, with the same amount of people there would've been a lot more people being outraged.

**Brian:** Right, it would've been a lot more police presence. And, I have something to say about that too. A lot, a lot of police officers are Trump supporters, and they didn't view this as a threat. Because, they're just like, "How are my people a threat?" You know, "I'm just like them," not realizing that it was all a threat to all of democracy at the beginning. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Nigel:** Yeah, I feel like, this won't be the only protest that would happen, or riot, to say...,I feel there will probably be an even bigger protest, or something...

**Brian:** Yeah, I'm not sure what's going to happen. There are rumors that they're going to protest. There are rumors that they're going to try again and if that happens I hope they get charged. And, I hope they face the consequences of their actions. They're not doing anything constructive, they're not asking... unlike the black lives matter protest, where they ask for fair treatment. This is just trying to steal a democratic process. The people believe in conspiracy theories, and they get, they get sucked into these things. I feel sad that people have to suffer, but they did it to themselves in a sense. They caused their own suffering, and they caused their own pain. And they inflicted all of this, nobody did this to them, nobody forced them to go do this thing. They did this on their own.

**Nigel:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Brian:** Yeah.

**Nigel:** Yeah, to move to the next question... What advice would you give me for really getting things to impact more people with this non-profit?

**Brian:** Um... Be honest with people, always be honest with yourself. Be honest with people, that's one that people latch onto the most is honesty. And also, be fair, and hopefully we can reach the right resources and the correct target audience to help this awareness and get the help for what your non-profit is trying to do.

**Nigel:** Yeah. Thanks. And lastly... How do you want the world to perceive you?

**Brian:** Uh, hah, hah, I guess everybody wants the world to perceive them as a good person. You know, I don't know how else to put it. A good person, who did things for people, who helped out, was kind, I don't know. That's a difficult one. Well, I don't have a good answer for you.  
(laughs)

**Nigel:** That was a pretty good answer.

**Brian:** Thank you.

**Nigel:** And, thanks for taking the time to speak with me. Your friendship and opinions are really important to the non-profit.

**Brian:** Thank you so much, I appreciate that. And no, thank you, for starting this non-profit and getting the ball rolling, you know? It takes people like you to make change.

**Nigel:** I wouldn't have actually started this non-profit if you hadn't given me enough momentum for it.

**Brian:** Well, I appreciate that, it's good to hear. Well, I'm glad I was able to inspire you, and, I'm glad that, you're gonna be able to change the world. So, even though I inspired you, the credit's all yours.

**Nigel:** Mm-hmm (affirmative). Anyway... Thanks.

**Brian:** You're welcome.

**Nigel:** And, have a good rest of your evening.

**Brian:** You too, it was a pleasure talking to you, I appreciate it, and I hope to hear more going forward and I hope to be more a part of the... non-profit. Good luck.

**Nigel:** Goodbye. That was Brian Kipruto and I'm Nigel Ousey. Stay strong and stay true to your story.