**Nigel:** This is Nigel Ousey for See Beyond My Skin. Last week Cemah Turboh introduced my project to his engineering firm's Diversity team at STRATIS. They had an amazing, honest conversation about how their race and cultural upbringing affects their lives today. We also talked about the racial divide in this country. I wanted to continue my conversation with Cemah and see what he thinks our future holds.

Cemah, thanks for being willing to talk with me again.
When we spoke last time, we agreed that our country is a mess right now.
What do you think needs to happen next?

**Cemah:** From my perspective, I think what needs to happen next is that we all need to let our guards down, right? We've all been conditioned into this world where, I don't want to call it negativity but, I don't... I can't find a better word to describe it, but we've been conditioned to this world of negativity where negativity is what sells, right? Pitting people against each other, brewing this tension of Black versus White, straight versus non-straight, you name it. The rich versus the poor, and I think until we can learn to really put our guards down and be willing to have a conversation, which isn't easy, and I might've mentioned this at some point during our conversations, just... It's hard for me to really tell someone how to feel because I haven't experienced what they've experienced, right?
So I don't know how it's really affected them on a personal level. So, it'd be ignorant for me to say, hey, you need to get past this, you need to come to the table and be able to have a discussion with a party that maybe you feel has wronged you, right? And that's the last thing I want to do, I don't want to force people into a situation that you don't feel comfortable. So, what I think needs to happen next is I think people like me, who want to see the change, and I put this on myself, need to be able to be the first ones at that table and set the example of what we want the world to be, right? So, I don't know exactly what that table looks like but, I can do it by giving everyone the benefit of the doubt and giving them a fair shake of them being a good person in life.

I don't... I try not to generalize this because you fit this demographic, you must be this type of person, right? And I think by showing that to people who are in my group, who might be in a group of minorities, and just being able to show them that you have to get past, to hurt, in order to move on. My hope is that we can all expect to have these conversations where it's not so much of what you did X, Y, and Z to me. It's more of, this is what happened, this is how I felt, and if you can acknowledge that this was wrong, then I think you can start to move past it so, I think, to sum it all up, it's going to be a combination of those who were hurt having the personal

courage or personal strength to be able to come forward and say, hey, this really hurt me. Right?

And I think the people who have done that hurt and maybe not directly, but have been part of the group who's done to hurt, is able to say, you know what? I acknowledge that this has hurt you in this type of way, and I'm sorry. How do we move forward? And I feel like until those two parties can really come together and have an honest discussion without feeling as though the other is attacking them unjustly, I believe that will be the first step forward, right? It's just having empathy on a human level and it's not seeing someone trying to knock you off the pedestal or take your power position away from you but someone truly expressing how they feel and you can see them as human people who hurt, people who have pain and feel emotion. I think once we start to view each other like that, everything else will fall into place.

**Nigel:** You have to get past the hurt to move on. I agree. It is not always easy to do.
So many times our responses often boil down to black and white arguments- literally and figuratively. You see this a lot on social media. How do you think social media affects our outlook?

**Cemah:** Yeah. I think my biggest thing with social media is it doesn't really portray what happens in real life, right? So, I think social media has been a great thing, it's been a way that I've been able to keep up with family who may not live in the United States. I keep up with friends from high school, who I don't see on a regular basis 'cause we've kind of all moved on to a separate point from lives. So social media does have its benefits but, I believe what social media has turned into is kind of portraying this life, this fallacy of life is perfect, right? Everyone's happy, pictures are sort of them doing something that is..
Brings a smile to their face and what's lost in social media is the fact that at the end of the day, the people behind these pictures are human.
They go through real things. So even though they may paste a picture of them in Costa Rica or Mexico or Florida, wherever the case may be, that's just what you see in that moment, right? There's 24 hours in a day to 7 days in a week to 52 weeks in a year, right? What happens about the other X amount of hours, days, minutes that we don't see them posting those pictures, right? The picture only captures a certain moment in time and we could be capturing those moments where they're happy. But I think social media doesn't really help people realize what happens in those moments where they're not happy? Where they're not really expressing themselves? Where they're not able to show the part of their lives that they feel comfortable with. And I think, social media, not that we need to get off of it, but I think we need to come through the reality of social media only shows one side of the coin and we can start to realize that. And when people understand that there's another side of the coin, right? It's not just take what's on social media as gospel, and not to get religious, but, we see on social media isn't what's on real life. So even though someone may look happy, it doesn't mean they always are. It's because someone looks fluffy, it doesn't mean it... They were born with it, right? Because someone has a fancy car, doesn't mean everything they have in life is perfect. So, when we can start to dissociate the 2 and start to see people as human beings who also have trials and tribulations to go back to my earlier point. I feel like social media will then help us understand that even though they show us what they want us to see, that there's another side that we should be more empathetic and be

more wanting to learn about, right? Because the more we learn about people, and the inside of them that don't necessarily come out on a more casual basis, let's say them posting a picture, right? But then, maybe at their worst moment, someone that's close to them has passed away, or their dog died or, just having a bad day and they want to share it with the world, right? When we begin to see people as humans on social media, who go through the same struggles as we do, and not as people we envy or try to be like, we'll try to keep up with, then I think, social media will have more benefits than it does negativity.

**Nigel:** That especially makes sense, monetary success to personal success. You have a good job, a house and car and that means you must be happy

**Cemah:** Yeah. I think you summed it up perfectly. It's just... We check off these boxes. Do you look happy? Do you look like you have money? And do you look like you're having a time of your life? If those three things equate, then what are you crying about? For someone like me, even though I'm not a big social media person, if I was to post on social media, I have a nice car, I live in a fairly nice house, I have a fairly decent job, I work for a good company, you would think everything's great, right? But, something you wouldn't know about me is, I was at one point in my teenage years homeless, right? By no choice of my own, I was kicked out, due to some crazy extreme conditions, not to get into detail but, life wasn't always great for me. And, I still kind of have residual... I don't want to call them effects, but I have residual sensory effects of those life experiences that kind of make me who I am. So for example, I'm afraid that whatever I had today might be taken away from me, right? So even on my post, that picture of me and my family happy, what people don't see in that picture is in the back of my mind. I'm always worried about how am I going to keep this going? What happens if the world stops tomorrow? If I lose my job, if X, Y, and Z. So I'm always constantly in this panic mode of where I need to get to the next thing, I need to be able to provide for the next day, right? And I think social media is something that doesn't portray that life because I'm smiling, I look happy, I'm on vacation, I'm in some country, the sun is shining, I got a great background behind me and so my life looks great. But, what people don't see is that behind that smile and whatever else you want to call it is a real human being going through real things, things I don't share personally with people because that's not who I am. I'm a very closed off person but, they happen and I feel as though if people knew about that... maybe it would still work, but maybe no, maybe I will relate to them. Maybe there's someone... somewhere out there in the world, who's going through the same thing as I am where they feel that if they don't get it today, it's not going to be there tomorrow and so, they're constantly in the survival mode because it's what they grew up on. And, I think, the sooner we can start to see and realize that people have these struggles and empathize with that, the better off we'll be. And so, I think I need to do a better job as an individual showing that side of myself. It's not something I'm comfortable with today.

**Nigel:** wow, you gave me a lot to think about Cemah. Being a homeless teenager must have been tough. We do all live wondering if what we have will be gone tomorrow. Sometimes Social media only shows us how we wish to be seen.

**Cemah:** What I have now could be taken away tomorrow. So I'm one of those people who's constantly... I'm in a mode of survival, aka, I need to strike while the iron's hot. Right? And I think that's something social media doesn't show you. I think social media shows you the good in life, but it doesn't show you what people deal with when they're not on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or whatever platform they use. Right? Which is the day-to-day struggle of whatever... If you want to call it baggage, call it baggage. Whatever demons they deal with on the inside. And I think if people learned to be empathetic to that and not just take social media at face value of, "This is what I see, so this is what I presume this person would be," then I think we'll all be in a better place. Because I think social media only tells half the story and the other half, until you get to know the person behind social media, you won't fully understand the full picture of who they are. So I think that was ultimately going to be my point.

**Nigel:** I'm so glad you shared this story with me. Thanks again, Cemah, I hope you will continue to help me with this project.

**Cemah:** Of course.
Nigel, let me start by saying thanks again for having me on. To reiterate for the hundredth time, I really do think what you're doing is cool. And I think this is something that a lot of people would benefit from. Oftentimes when you become an adult, and this isn't something that's put out there a lot, but as you get older you have a lot of responsibilities. You start to have a family, your career starts to take off. And often times these are the types of questions that you don't really think about because you start to compartmentalize things in order to get through the day. And what I appreciate about See Beyond My Skin and just you in general is that you forced me to stop and think. Right? I mean, you forced me to really think about who I am in this world. It's something I don't do often.
I think often times it's like very impactful moments in your life, whether it be losing someone or something very close to you or some very dramatic experience, they really make you stop and I would say smell flowers and realize where you are in life. Other than that, it's kind of like you go from one day to the next, to the next, to the next. And until I got your email with these thought provoking questions, it was something that I probably hadn't thought about in maybe three plus years. I was in a routine, and I was in the groove, and I was just kind of going. So it gives me hope that individuals as young as you are really starting to have these tough conversations that oftentimes we as adults, me included, kind of push to the background because we can't really deal with it at this point in time.
Sometimes no fault of our own. But my hope is if individuals like you in the next generation are starting to have these tough conversations that one day we'll be able to get to this proverbial table where we can all kind of put our real selves out there. Where we don't have to be what society thinks we need to be. Which is a macho man. Which is a strong emotionless person. Like, no. We're all humans. We all have good days. And for sure we all have our bad days, me included. Right? But if I'm able to go to a place where there's people like you around and I'm able to be like, "You know what, Nigel, I'm just having a really bad day because I feel like this country really isn't understanding who I am as a person or what I stand for, or this specific event in our nation's history really upset me."

And instead of the reaction being, "Well, if you don't like it leave." Right? Which automatically puts me on the defense mode. If it's more of a, "Well, you know what, Cemah, I'm sorry you feel that way. How about you tell me why. Or, "what can I do to help?" I think the more individuals you have like that in the world, the better off this world would be. And for someone like you at an age, relatively young, to start these conversations is so impactful. And I'm so grateful for you for that. I really do honestly and sincerely hope that this project takes off and it becomes bigger than just what you initially thought. Because I think it can help so many people on so many different levels that they themselves don't know yet that until it becomes relevant to them, they won't really, truly understand your impact. And it all started because Nigel had an idea to try to better the world. Which my hat's off to you for that.

**Nigel:** Thanks for your confidence in me, Cemah. It would be my pleasure to sit at any table with you.

Thanks again Cemah. This is Nigel Ousey and my interview was with Cemah Torboh for See Beyond My Skin.