



See Beyond My Skin

Courtney Fulton Interview with Nigel Ousey

Nigel: This is Nigel Ousey for See Beyond My Skin and today I am happy to be here with Ms. Courtney Fulton. Courtney teaches 7th-grade Ancient World and African History in Philadelphia. She also runs, For Brown Girls Blog which is committed to educate, uplift, support, and empower Black Women while on their path to wellness. I first met Courtney when she was my Cub Scout leader. Courtney, it is nice to speak to you again.

Courtney: It's nice to speak to you too. It's been a while.

Nigel: Thanks for being on the podcast.

Courtney: Thank you for having me.

Nigel: You've dedicated so much time to help empower young people. And at Cubs Scouts, you taught me how to make a campfire, how to use a knife, and how to set up a campsite. What made you start the Cub Scout pack?

Courtney: Oh, wow. I wanted my son to be involved in Cub Scouts. And at the time, I worked with Troop 1719 Scoutmaster, Ms. Ann Perrone. And I kept bugging her because they didn't have a Cub Scout pack at the time. And I said, please, please, please let me know when you are going to have a Cub Scout pack. So she said, "Okay, I'll let you know." So, in August, because we work together at a school, she came up to me and she said, "Okay, we're going to have a Cub Scout pack." And I said, "Oh, this is great!" She said, "But we're going to need a little help getting us started. And would you be able to, would you be willing to be a leader or be someone who helps get the pack started?" I said, "Sure, no problem." So she said, "Okay, come out for a meeting," came out to a meeting, heard what had to be offered. So I'd be willing to help. And I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but I just knew that I wanted to do something. So about two weeks later Ann came up to me at my job. And she goes, "I'm thinking Cubmaster." I'm like, "Okay, sure. Not a problem." I had no idea what that meant. I had no idea the responsibilities. And so I showed up at a meeting and everybody was looking at me to lead the meeting. So it was definitely a surprise, a pleasant surprise, but I learned a lot along the way. So, basically what got me involved in Cub Scouts was wanting to be involved with a pack for my son. And from there, it just grew into me leading a pack of awesome young men and their parents and families for the last three years, we lasted.

Nigel: Wow, You were a really good leader. So what happened to the pack?

Courtney: Well, I had some health issues and I wasn't as available to lead it the way that I wanted to. So I told them, I said, "Listen, I got to back down. I got to take care of my health." And it was touch-and-go for a while. But we did find someone, I helped train them, but it got to be a little bit too much for them. And unfortunately, no one wanted to step up. So it kind of disbanded, sadly.

Nigel: So, you needed to take care of yourself.

Courtney: Yes, it was a difficult decision. It was very difficult because I wanted to stick with it. I wanted to stay with the ones, the Tigers. I wanted to lead the pack up until they became Boy Scouts, but physically, I just could not do what I wanted to do. I couldn't lead the way that I wanted to lead it. And sometimes you just have to make choices that are good for you. And that was one of them. Am I sad about it? Yes. I don't regret it because I think everything happens for a reason. And those who were there were there for a reason. I think it ended for a reason, but I had to take care of my health because at the end of the day, I'm still a wife. I'm still a mom. I'm still a person. And I had to do what was best for me at the time.

Nigel: Thanks for reminding all of us that we have to prioritize our own health.(pause)

You have a quote on your social media that says, "I'm the part of a village that helps raise a child." What does that mean to you?

Courtney: So, one thing that I pride myself on is that I try to be very knowledgeable about my culture. I don't know which country from Africa my ancestors are from. But I do try to honor them in the way that I live and the way that I treat people and the way that I raised my son and just who I am. And that is actually an African proverb. It takes a village to raise a child. And I truly believe that the village, and that could be anyone. It doesn't have to be immediate family. It could just be friends. It could be neighbors, it could be religious leaders. It could be, if families are a part of the organization, whoever is in your life, that is someone who is special to you. I think it takes those people to help raise strong, independent young men and young women to help them become productive leaders of society. So when I was part of the pack, our unofficial motto was, let us be part of your village. So I think it takes a group of people who are special to you to help raise you to be a strong man or strong woman, or however you identify, to just be an independent thinker and a wonderful person and leader in today's society.

Nigel: That makes a lot of sense. And that leads us to my next question.

In what way do you hope young people will influence the future?

Courtney: Oh, wow. That's a really good question. Everything that is going on in the world, my hope is that young people know how to decide what's real and what's fake. What's factual and what's not. What the truth is from a lie, from good, and from evil, from what's right and what's wrong, because there's a lot of gray areas, I think, in this country. I think that people right now are angry. They feel unheard. They feel left out. They feel frustrated. There's a lot of negative emotions going around. And my hope that for young people is that they have the wisdom to know how to make things better, when to speak, when not to speak, when to step in, when not to step in. I just hope that... Just start that answer over again. I'm trying to think as I'm talking. Okay. But my hope for young people in the future...

My hope for young people for the future.

There's a lot going on in this world, especially in this country. And a lot of people have very strong opinions. Some of those opinions are valid and some of their feelings are valid. Some of their opinions and feelings, I think, are based off of ignorance. And there's a lot of information out there that people are believing that may not be true. It might not be true if they don't know where the source came from. So my hope for young people going into the future is that they learn all they can to be able to decide what's fact and what's not, that they would be open-minded to hear what the opposing side or what someone who has a different opinion from them. I hope that they're open-minded to hear what they have to say.

I hope that people are understanding and compassionate, and I hope that we are able to educate, or they are able to educate themselves enough to know what's right and what's wrong. But to also be patient with one another. I think a lot of people right now are hurting because they feel unheard. They feel left out. They feel that the government hasn't taken care of them. And I can't say that that's wrong because that's how they feel. But I think that we just need to try to... Instead of looking at our differences as something to divide us, my hope is that young people would try to embrace others' differences and understand it and learn from it.

Nigel: Yeah. It's hard to navigate through the world today. We need more people like you, who can guide us through.

The next questions are two that I actually ask everyone on my podcast.

The first one is, how do you see yourself?

And the second one is, how do you fear others perceive you?

Courtney: Oh, those are two good questions. Wow. How do I see myself? I'm thinking. I see myself as a strong black woman who has experienced a lot in life. Some of those experiences caused me to doubt myself, not believe in myself, to second-guess myself, to question myself. But then some of those experiences caused me to know that I have the confidence, and the ability, and the capabilities to overcome some of these things. Some days I'm more confident than others, some days I'm not.

But I see myself as someone who wants to use the experiences that I've gone through, both good and bad, to try to help people. I often say, I try to use my pain as a platform. If I can help somebody, then I feel like I've done a good job. So I see myself as a strong black woman who has overcome a lot, who was still overcoming, and who was willing to help people by showing them, and teaching them, and sharing with them, the experiences that I've had and that I'm having that has made me the person I am today.

What I fear people perceive me as, and this is something that I was just talking about the other day.

So sometimes I think people don't understand me. I think sometimes people see me as mean, or they don't know how to take me, or they feel that I'm standoffish in some way. It's all in my facial expressions. I'm not one of those people that smile benignly just all the time. Sometimes I look as though I'm in deep thought. I've heard a lot of times, "You look so mean." So that's how I fear people perceive me, that they think that I'm a mean person, that I'm someone that they cannot come to or talk to about things. When really that's quite the opposite. I'm actually very, very shy. Believe it or not.

And I like to think that I have a sense of humor. I can be very, very silly and I have a 13-year-old and I don't know what it says about me, but we both have the same type of humor where we laugh at fart jokes. And we think things that... The ridiculous shows he watches on TV, things like that. Some of the memes that are out, we just have a blast laughing at them. But I think people, or what I'm fearful of how people see me as that I'm a mean person that's very hard to talk.

Nigel: I think you have always been easy to talk to and It was really nice talking with you today. Thanks for your time and thanks for being a positive mentor in my life.

Courtney: Thank you so much.

Thank you. I am so very honored and this was unexpected. I'm so very proud of you, Nigel. This is a good thing that you're doing. I checked out your website. I have to go through it again, but from what I saw, it's very nice. I love it. I love your message. I'm teary-eyed right now. You know I'm a cry baby, but I'm so teary. I'm just so very proud. I'm so very proud of you and you taking this on at such a young age. That's what we need, young changers.

Nigel: Thanks so much. This is Nigel for See Beyond My Skin. And I was speaking today to Courtney Fulton. Stay strong and stay true to your story.