**TRANSCRIBER NAME: Connor Knowles**

**Date: 26 May 2020**

**Participant #: 145**

**Interviewer: Dr. Celeste Raver Luning**

Interviewer (Code in Blue)

Participant (Code in black)

Interviewer: Um, so again, I’m recording. Is that okay?

#145: Yes.

Interviewer: This is participant #145. Now I can ask the questions. So easy questions first, how many siblings do you have?

#145: Three.

Interviewer: Uh, what’s the birth order?

#145: I’m the oldest

Interviewer: Um, and then what’s the gender of your siblings?

#145: Two younger sisters and then one little brother.

Interviewer: Are the sisters..?

#145: They’re in the middle, yeah.

Interviewer: So what do you think were your life experiences. If you think of your life experiences, what might you think of as the crucible or life shaping experiences?

#145: BUD/S

Interviewer: Other than BUD/S (spoken around the same time as #145)

#145: Um, prior to BUD/S?

Interviewer: Prior to that, yeah.

#145: Uh, so, um, I came from the, I came from the Naval Academy so there are a few things there. Um, there like, there’s some events. Uh, screening (indiscernible) to come to BUD/S that are designed to do that so that was the screening to even get here was probably some of the hardest stuff I had to do in my life, but then growing up, um, playing sports, uh, like I had a really tough high school soccer coach. Uh, and swimming, um and uh, that was probably my my introduction to physically challenging stuff.

Interviewer: Anything that happened in your childhood kind of formative?

#145: Sure, uh, my parents divorced

Interviewer: Okay

#145: Um, that was, uh, that was like a different kind of challenge, um

Interviewer: And how old were you?

#145: I was a freshman in high school.

Interviewer: Okay

#145: and the three younger siblings sort of like challenged made that more challenging cause I felt like I had to hold it together for them.

Interviewer: Yeah, um, how do you think those experiences factored into your experience here at BUD/S?

#145: um, being like I said through that through that divorce like I had to lead my siblings through it

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: Um, and then through through BUD/S I was I was a boat crew leader and in charge of a collateral duty and, um, so that that was sort of the just being an older brother was the first time I had to be like a mentor or a leader, I think. Um, so that that you can trace a line straight from that to what I do here and um the physical the physical hardship stuff like I said the sports um were uh how I learned to push through pain and work hard.

Interviewer: How would you describe your personality and how do you think your personality contributes to getting through BUD/S?

#145: Um, I think, I think I try to keep a good sense of humor alway, um, which was probably my best my best tool in terms of resilience. Uh, and it also got me in trouble a couple of times. Uh

Interviewer: Here?

#145: Yeah, uh here with instructors.

Interviewer: Just trying to make light of

#145: Yeah, just pissed pissed instructors off

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: Um, so that’s I think I think that's pretty central. Uh, I think that I’m more comfortable, um, I’m more comfortable when I’m thinking about other people rather than thinking about myself so being being an officer really helped in in that regard because I didn’t really get sucked into my own head ever, like I always had other guys that I could be worrying about, um, which was really good. Uh, and I think I’m a good, I think I have good presence like in a public setting like I think I can speak well and um uh I’m not afraid of having eyes on me.

Interviewer: Right, keep going, I’m just jotting this down.

#145: It’s okay

Interviewer: so I have a backup. Um,

#145: So that again that again, it helped with it helped with instructors scrutiny cause everyone gets that and it didn’t it didn’t phase me as much as it phased other people and also like being in a in a leadership role that that felt pretty natural to me.

Interviewer: Uh, would you consider yourself a calm person?

#145: Yeah, I would. I think so.

Interviewer: Have you always been that way?

#145: No

Interviewer: When did you kind of switch from not being as calm to being more calm?

#145: Um, probably pre pretty early like the beginning of middle school, like early high school. Um, yeah I’m told that I was a terrible child.

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: Like a really like a really bad temper and, um, yeah I just didn’t I had a lot of energy and emotion and didn’t really know how to deal with it. Um, but probably once once I started getting involved in stuff outside of school and my house like I had outlets for that that energy so.

Interviewer: What about your background made you want to become a part of the Seal Community?

#145: Uh, so I decided I decided on, the order was the Navy then being an officer then the Seal Community um

Interviewer: So it was after you got the Academy?

#145: Yeah, I was, so I was probably leaning towards this when I went in, um, but I was also really intentional about trying to explore every every option and talk to all different kinds of officers and um so I narrowed down what exactly being a leader, being an officer meant to me and then I tried to find the community that aligned best with that and uh it ended up it ended up being the Seals um and then like specifically the I wanted like the best, the really really really high quality people, officer, and enlisted to work with and I wanted like autonomy like I wanted a lot of responsibility as a as a junior officer, as a young guy. Um, and I thought after doing my research over four years in Annapolis this is this is where I found would be the best.

Interviewer: Um, did you come from a military family?

#145: No.

Interviewer: Now, talk to me a little about your early childhood, so pre-high school. What was that like?

#145: So, like I like I said I was a uh like really bad as a young child like a terrible temper, um, destructive. Like my uh, I guess I have bipolar disorder in my family

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: so my my parents took me to a child psychologist

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: thinking I had that um and then the story goes that once I got to school, uh, once I had outlets for all that all that energy and had like tests to engage me, uh, I mellowed out a lot and uh I was like I was pretty good at school all the way through like I picked it like I learned quickly and um so I just needed something and um something to direct all that all that energy at.

Interviewer: What about your parents parenting style? What was that like?

#145: Um, neither neither of them were really yellers.

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: My (pause) probably like my mom was the main disciplinarian like my dad is a pretty gentle guy uh and uh but there was never really like they weren’t stern or uh strict really um

Interviewer: What was their discipline style: timeouts, taking toys?

#145: Yeah, when I was really little it was spanking. Um, as I as I got older it was enough for them just to like have a serious talk.

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: Like let me know if I screwed up like let me know they’re disappointed and that was good enough to, um, get the message across.

Interviewer: What about your teenage years? Um, well I guess the other question, did you move around at all during your childhood?

#145: Yeah (indiscernible)

Interviewer: (indiscernible)

#145: Yeah, pretty much

Interviewer: Now what, now tell me a little bit about your teenage years. Did you play team sports? What sports did you play?

#145: Uh, so I played I played sports like all all year round up until high school. Um, so I played soccer and basketball and baseball and swim team and then

Interviewer: So that was in high school too?

#145: So that was up until high school and then high school I dropped I did soccer and swimming in high school. Uh, and then I did theater too. I sung in a choir and did did drama, uh, and musicals. Um, but the thing the dynamic that changed my teenage years was like the divorce, uh, and figuring out how to just figuring out the new normal. That took most of high school for me. There’s a lotta, I really resented my mom and (indiscernible) between her and I when I was in high school and um figuring out how to switch houses like dealing with my siblings and all that so. That would be the defining.

Interviewer: So during that, I mean, did you move houses or were you just splitting your time?

#145: Yes, yeah, splitting time, yup. And my dad moved like really close to my mom, uh, in the in the same neighborhood. But we were we were all trying to figure out. My mom was a night shift nurse so at first we were just like moving every couple days

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: um, and then regularly like every week, but that was that was a constant a constant battle.

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: Yeah, at the beginning of high school. Just trying to figure out what that looked like.

Interviewer: What about the last 5 years? I know you said you went to the Naval Academy to here.

#145: Yes, yup. Um, just uh I found I I I love the Naval Academy.

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: I just, uh, feel like I was surrounded by like-minded people all the time like smart, motivated, physically fit. Uh, like most of my best friends are are were my Naval Academy classmates. My fiance is my Naval Academy classmate. Just, uh, I thought that group of people I was with I just synched with really, really well. Um, and it was always, I knew that this was probably the this was going to be really challenging to get picked for even, much less to get through. Um, so the whole time I was going around, talking to all these different members of different communities, uh, but I had it in the back of my head that if if I chose to do something else other than this I would want it to be by choice.

Interviewer: Yeah.

#145: and and I didn’t want I didn’t want to be like prohibited by my fitness or my grades or whatever. I wanted this to be an option at the end of the day, um, so I trained really hard and and was working with this in mind even when I wasn’t a hundred percent sure that this was where I was going to end up.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself impulsive at all?

#145: Yeah.

Interviewer: So can you describe some of the these impulsive behaviors?

#145: Yes, um, uh I’m impulsive with money sometimes. I’m not, uh, I’m a bad spender sometimes. Uh, sometimes like, um, once in a while I get like an idea in my head that that like sticks and I work really hard to make it happen even if it wasn’t like a super well thought out move. Um, for example, so uh I’m engaged and my I knew I was going to propose to my fiance, but um I was going to get to see her um like earlier in the night and I had a plan of when I was going to propose to her when she came out here to see me after Hell Week and that was when I was going to do it, but I knew I was going to get to see her before then and I thought so why don’t I just propose then. So it was like three weeks uh and I sorta decided to do that in like five minutes and then I worked I worked for three weeks to to make it all come together. Um, so that sorta impulsiveness. Definitely.

Interviewer: What about any, um, tattoos or...?

#145: No

Interviewer: Um, any driving violations like speeding tickets that sorta thing?

#145: Yeah, a couple speeding tickets, um, yeah.

Interviewer: Nothing crazy?

#145: Nothing crazy, no.

Interviewer: What motivates you on a daily basis?

#145: Um, on, during during BUD/S or or just in general?

Interviewer: Just in general.

#145: So um, the peop the people around me. Both physically around me, like the guys that I spend my day to day life with and then also my family that I know is thinking about me. I know on a daily basis. They just like I’m motivated by by other people.

Interviewer: Yeah.

#145: Um, and then my, uh. I don’t know, my reputation, my own reputation, but then also the reputation of like like the reputation, um, like in in BUD/S Naval Academy guys do well. Um, that’s the reputation that the Naval Academy has established and so I wasn’t going to be the Naval Academy guy that ruined that. Um, that kind of thing.

Interviewer: What about, what do you think was the most challenging (indiscernible) BUD/S, whether overall or single day or event?

#145: Um, I I did I was the, when I felt like I was disliked was really hard for me, uh, by by other students, by instructors, um, whatever. When when I felt like, yeah, going back to the reputation piece. When when I felt like my reputation, uh, was declining. That was really, really hard for me to deal with and like it came in two: some sometimes I felt like it was deserved, like I underperformed or like I did something wrong or whatever and then I was ashamed or sometimes I felt like it was undeserved and I was being targeted and and that pissed me off. So like even in this scenario, I wasn’t good uh with letting what other people thought about me kind of bounce off.

Interviewer: Yeah.

#145: Like it really got to me.

Interviewer: So, um, how were you able to get through that? What motivated you to push through that…?

#145: Through that?

Interviewer: Through that kind of experience.

#145: Um, people around me, uh, who know that. You know, would reassure me. People people who know me well would would you know would talk to me. Um and then the-the sense of humor bit I think like being able to make fun of it -

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: -really helped and laugh with other guys.

Interviewer: Now did you feel like you were supported by the group?

#145: Yes

Interviewer: Your class?

#145: Yes.

Interviewer: Were there any specific practices whether they were physical mental spiritual that you utilized to progress through BUD/s?

#145: Yeah. Uh, I would - I tried to journal every day at the end of the day uh that was a really good release uh and I tried to be reading something even if I couldn't get to it every night I would try to like have something that I was working through like a book

Interviewer: What types of things were you reading? Like were they fun things or were they like-

#145: Yeah, I read I can tell you the books, I read Man’s Search for Meaning in first phase, by Victor Frankl. Um I read-I was working through a Bill Bryson book about 1927 and that was just likea fun read. Uh I read starship troopers in third phase and then at the end I was working through Legacy.

Interviewer: Okay

#145: So non-fiction mostly

Interviewer: Yeah

#145: Um just yeah just something to wind down with

Interviewer: Yeah, interesting. So um, wha-when you made a difficult decision during training at BUD/s , what went through your mind? That could be like an ethical decision, a moral decision...

#145: Yeah um uh so we uh as officers we found out that a guy this was in first phase after hell week, a class favorite a guy who was like universally well regarded um we found out he cheated on an obstacle course ran around the obstacles. Um and we had this meeting with just the officers um a lot of people had seen him uh other people had failed that obstacle course and were looking to maybe get rolled um in order to- because of it. And guys had come up to officers like what are you going to do about this? This is-this is not right. Um so we ended up and-and we knew this guy had been to BUD/s before like I said he was a leader in the class, he was a class favorite. We knew that if he was turned in he’d be kicked out for his career uh and we uh we came to the decision collectively that he had to turn himself in and that he had to get kicked out of training. Uh and that was - that was really hard for all of us because we thought like theres this reputation at BUD/s where you take care of the guys around you and especially after hell week like thats your crew you're in it as a team at that point and um you know no matter what you've got your guys back um but we had to there was-there was like only one right decision, we couldn’t - because if he had swept it under the rug there were so many guys that saw it, someone would’ve mentioned it, they would’ve found out we all would've been in trouble anyway uh and then we would’ve got kicked out. Uh but then also the it just wouldn't there would've been no way to spin that as the right the right decision to let him cheat his way through an event that other people failed and were facing the repercussions uh you know with honor um so yeah that was that was really tough and it was right at the beginning like we had jus- we were on such a high after finishing hell week um so that was yeah that was tough.

Interviewer: Uh, why do you think you were successful at BUD/s?

#145: Um, the two- the two reasons - I keep going back to this but the two reasons that I came to BUD/s in the first place like the awesome awesome guys and the low level of autonomy like I had no idea what level of autonomy Im gonna have um if I make it the SEAL teams um but the awesome awesome guys just spot on um spot on and the guys around me we were successful as a-as a class because of each other and then also when I took a step back and observed like what was going on around like I realized how lucky I am and how awesome this this community is you know versus others that I could be in um just based on the other guys that were out there trying out with me so

Interviewer: Um, did you notice anything different about people who made it versus those who didn’t make it?

#145: Some. I think that the people that are still around just want to be like I really think that the only thing that determines whether you'll make it to the end or not is whether you want to. Um yeah if I could be it into a sentence that’d be it. But then it seems like the guys who- seemed like the guys who took themselves less seriously did better um the guys that talked a big game usually weren’t around after hell week um the guys that were lifting other people up rather than uh y’know pushing others down, that was big one too; being a team player even when it seemed like we were competing the whole time.

Interviewer: How’d this experience change you as a person?

#145: Um, I mean I want to- I want to say that it didn't. Um maybe if -if you revealed a few weakness to me that I didn’t know before I’d be really sensitive to others opinions of me like I think I knew that before but I don’t think I’ve been in a situation before this where there were so many obvious negative opinions um so that so (indiscernible). Again the ability to keep a good sense of humor and not take things too seriously but I like to think I had that before too um yeah.

Interviewer: Great, I’m finished with you. Congratulations.

#145: Thank you.

Interviewer: Good luck on the next step

#145: Thanks a lot. Good luck on this uh study.

Interviewer: It’s great. We appreciate you guys taking (indiscernible). It's great stuff.