**Jack Sylvester:**

**Date: 16AUG**

**Participant #228:**

**Length of the Interview: 19:59**

Interviewer (Code in Blue):

Participant (Code in black):

And I'll ask again. Is it okay if I record?

Yes, it is okay to record.

Would you state your participant ID number.

ID number 228

When did you start your BUD/S class?

Uhh 339, I was here originally yeah. The OG crew. Only 18 of us or something.

And is this your first BUD/S experience?

Yes.

Ok, can I ask about your family? Are you an only child do you have siblings?

I'm the youngest of four. I have one older brother and two older sisters.

So who...can you tell me birth order?

Yes uh....older sister, six years older, and a brother, four years older, then a sister two years older. So...very organized family. Then me.

Your parents married, separated, divorced?

Parents are married, never divorced.

How long have they been married?

Uhh...30 years I think this year.

Wow and how is your relationship with them?

Great. yeah ...yeah.

And relationship with your siblings?

Yeah. Yeah. I mean other than like bickering is we have really...really close family I'd say, immediate family.

Have there been any life changing events that have happened in your life prior to BUD/S?

I mean I ...I guess just going to college and everything like that. [inaudible]

It seems like you got a 4 year degree?

Yes...yeah.

That was challenging or?

Uhm...yeah. Yeah. I was at the Naval Academy. So

Oh you went to the academy?

Yeah...I mean it was...yeah that was challenging I mean first few years obviously are...weren’t super fun. But you know, that's why I wanted to go there and that's why I enjoyed being there and because it was a little bit of a different challenge than I think I would have had a civilian school. So uh yeah, I'm not sure that I'd be here without it probably wouldn't be here without going there.

So you thought it was like a crucible experience?

Yeah, yeah I’d say so.

And any other sort of singular events? Like anyone close to you or an accident?

Uhh, no, there wasn't, I can't really think of any singular..

No major trauma?

No, nothing like...too traumatic or anything.

So do you think that the experience at the Academy factored into your experience or success at BUD/S?

Yeah. Like I said, I'm not even sure if I would have decided to come here...without having gone to the academy first. Just, you know, all I knew about the SEAL teams before college was what you get from pop culture, movies and books and stuff. Which I’ve come to learn doesn't necessarily tell you what the actual careers like, but um, I was able to learn more about that the Academy. I think...I don’t know...that's...it kinda gave me a more indepth for being, or for wanting to be, than for just wanting to have a cool job. So yes.

So beyond the Hollywood mystique. Okay, how do you think your personality attributed to your progression through BUD/S?

I mean, I've just always been…like very competitive obviously and uh...I guess I'm just always...slept better at night knowing I've like just gave my maximum effort on whatever I was doing. Like, uh, I've run long distance my whole life. Uh, I was never good at sports, but I was always just good at...putting out I guess. Like just like working hard to get better at something important.

So work ethic?

Yeah. So yeah...I guess that obviously contributed….Um yeah...BUD/S just definitely I think it fit my personality very well…. Like I said about the academy, I enjoy like having new challenges every day and BUD/S definitely gives you that so.

So what led you into SEAL community for service selection. Did you have friends or family or?

Yeah. I mean I always thought it'd be cool. Like I said to be a SEAL but um...I’d say I had uh older teammates. I was on the Triathlon team at school. Um a lot of them came here what are SEALs now and uh...they kind of taught me more about the...pipeline I guess as they were going through after graduating um keep in touch with them.

So you think they were role models and mentors also?

Yeah.

Helped you prepare?

Yeah, I mean just the team in general definitely helped me prepare cause uh...team has a very competitive like...hard-working culture too. Uh...I guess that's why this ends up being such a common choice for us. But yeah...yeah role models.

So tell me about your childhood? So you had this great relationship uh uh four...four kids. How were...describe your parent’s parenting style? So were you spanked as a kid?

No, that's…

Free range parenting?

So...I guess one important factor is I grew up on a dairy farm. It's pretty rural. Uh...but so my dad is a dairy farmer and my mom was a teacher. Um...neither of them...believed in like spanking or anything like that. The only time I think I was spanked was if I did something that was...that was if they thought was like very dangerous. So if I would cross the road without looking both ways, she said they would spank me because they wanted to emphasize something like that. But...no yeah my mom's never

So how did they discipline? Did they...like restrict privileges, take away video games.

Um...I really don't remember them doing that very often. Honestly, the one, the one thing that we always have to do as kids is uh like if we were arguing with each other we have to sit on the steps and hold hands until like whatever you were in at it with but um...yeah, I...I don’t like remember getting like grounded.

So that left an impact. So that's, you remember that. What did that instill in you?

Uh...I guess...I don't know, I guess maybe it taught me uh that most arguments you have with other people are pretty, pretty fickle...and uh... It's usually not worth the energy to just let your ego take over to get mad at someone else, and you know cause problems because in the end, you're all just going to be you're all just going to be holding hands on the same playing field, anyway. maybe...maybe that's what it is instilled in me.

For example, uh, did you move around through your childhood or teenage years?

No, I grew up in the same house.

Same same dairy farm? Um same school system?

Yeah same town and everything. Parents still live there today.

So tell me about your teenage years? Did you do team sports or an activity close to the Community like band or theater.

Yeah. I did a lot of stuff growing up throughout high school and everything. It's another thing especially about my mom. Cause she knew...being on a dairy farm. We were kind of...like she wanted to make sure we experience more than just...being on a farm and going to school I guess. So we did a lot of clubs growing up. I did um Boy Scouts. 4-H, lots of different sports.

What kind of sports?

Well, I did...you know...everything growing up and then I really got into cross country and track uh throughout High School. I wrestled for a little.I guess it's probably important um I wrestled but I stopped after my freshman year because I just wasn't enjoying it. Um...

That was one year that you did it?

I did it for three years. Uh so Junior High and first-year high school...and then I got injured so I just made the decision to stop that.

But you stayed with cross-country and track through graduation?

Yeah through graduation.I also, uh, did club cycling. [inaudible]

And so in the last five years before starting buds. What did you do? Straight out of the academy?

Yeah, so...finished high school in 2015, went straight to the academy.

So no gap year?

No.

Would you consider yourself impulsive? So do you have any tattoos?

Oh, no, I'm not impulsive with life-changing decisions like that.

Speeding tickets, uh purchases?

No, I don't have any speeding tickets...no.

So you said yes originally?

Because like I don't stop myself from like getting candy at the checkout of a grocery store. Not impulsive in that sense, but no not with life changing decisions like that. It's a uh...I definitely think I think about the long-term quite a lot. Uh…

So you’re thoughtful?

Yeah.

Analytical in your decision-making.

Usually, yeah. But then like I said, I also just, I like to do spontaneous things too. But...I feel like I'm pretty good at discerning things that will affect my future and things that yeah.

Was was the most challenging component of BUD/S? This is a holistic questions so you can think about the hardest day, hardest event. Is there a theme throughout that really…?

Yeah...well…

Some guys are like the water. Some guys are like logs. Some guys are like the runs.

Yeah...well...I’m trying to think. Well, I'll give like...I'll say diving. I really just didn't like that was that was as the pretty a pretty challenging…

What about it that made it so hard.

Uh...just the not...There's so many variables like things that could go wrong. I thought... Plus I just like the first dive that I did with uh or first night dive,I guess. I screwed up really bad. So it kind of made me fear for the rest of them that I would you know make the same mistakes. So I think maybe that, maybe that contributed to it. I would just get really nervous.

So what motivated you to push through that fear?

I mean just, just like anything here. Like just gotta get over it. Uh...you know get comfortable. It's cliche, but get comfortable being uncomfortable. Yeah, and I, I also knew that the more I...just force myself to like get through the dive and the better more comfortable and confident I would be. Which is true, you know because I was fine with diving by the end. I was just kind of tired of being cold and wet but...but in terms of actually knowing how to dive, I think I got much better by the end.

So that sounds like self talk like an internal…

Yeah

...position you found. Did you also feel supported by the team with external factors?

Oh, yeah. I mean...I mean, I guess that's another common theme, I think. When everyone else is doing the same thing. It's like well if all my friends can do it, I can do too.

Solidarity?

Yeah, solidarity.

So do you have any practices physical, mental, or spiritual that you use to push through the challenges? So some guys say they have prayer, or meditation, or mantra, or visualization exercise? Some athletes will have a warm up routine that they...

Uh...No, I can't really think of any routine things I do like that. Um...I guess I...I guess I kind of have a mantra that...uh I’m trying to think. I dont know how I word it but... basically like everything like this will end. I guess I say this will end. Because...I've learned I learned pretty quickly I guess in first phase. No matter how bad something sucks. If you're in Surf torture or doing logs or whatever like it's not going to go on forever. You're going to get out of the water and you’ll warm up pretty quick because you'll run, you’ll run around somewhere or you're going to be done with logs and be fine. You’ll go to lunch or whatever [inaudible]. Just got to get through it, everything ends. Like now BUD/S will end. It's all finite, so.

So think about when you made the decision during training at BUD/S, but what went through your mind as you made that decision and it could be example of a decision that you really struggled with.

A decision during BUD/S.

Yeah like, running classmates out or turning in a cheating classmate.

Hmm.

Or deciding to go to medical?

I’ve never been to medical. I'll go with running classmates out. It was a long time ago i guess. Trying to freshen that in my mind. Yeah. I mean you kind of under the, under the boats, it gets pretty intense. Kind of let your animal brain take over again. So I think uh that's something you have to think about before an evolution like that starts. Using uh...your human brain. Uh, I knew going into it that the...whole point of BUD/S is like...to be able to support your team like being able to sacrifice your for teammates something to prove that you want to be here. So I wasn't afraid like if I knew there was a guy who...wasn't willing to like...feel a little pain, or sacrifice a little to help the rest of the boat crew that I wasn't didn't really have any problem running him out.

Did you feel like you had this awareness of your animal brain having that take over and you were able to then..sort of suppress it and tap back into that cognitive reasoning.

Yeah, I think so. I mean, I wouldn't say I'm an expert.

It’s a super power.

Okay, maybe I don't yeah. Yeah, it's great. Yeah. I mean,

I just it's called mindfulness.

Yeah, I think about that stuff a lot. Okay, so I'm not yeah, I'm no expert at it. But yeah, I'd say aware of it.

Okay. Then why do you think that you were successful completing BUD/S.

Honestly, I just think...I mean for me there wasn't really any question of whether I'd make it from the very beginning. Uh, to think it's just like...not that I knew it would be challenging but I knew like all my friends have gone through this before and I know they're not superhuman know lots of guys have done [inaudible] superhuman and I knew it like it's not like I had any other back-up plan. So this is just what I was going to do. I don't...I never really I still to this day don't understand why guys make the conscious decision to quit. But... I don't know. For me that was never really like what I was worried about so...I guess, is that a good answer.

My next question is then what about those guys that dropped? What is it that they didn't have that they…

Like I said, I really don't honestly don't understand it because to me like going back to, so that Mantra like I don't like one of my friends quit during surf torture of hell week shaking because it was cold or whatever. But to me, it's like why don't you just put up with ten minutes of shivering like literally for a career that will change...that will be your life for the next 10 years or more. So I guess maybe that…

They don't have that perspective...

Yeah, having a broad perspective I guess. Yes.

Has this experience changed you as a person.

Yeah, probably. I mean...I mean just the just going through it. You learn about a lot about different weaknesses you have whether like they're specific skills uh...or competencies that, that they try to test here. Like for me I realized I wasn’t great with like the diving at first, like I said...in first phase I went to the third try of life-saving which I wouldn't...wouldn’t have thought to mess something like that up.

So it exposed your weaknesses to you. Do you feel any more confident?

Oh, yeah, but then it also shows like even though I was anxious about those things at first now I could do them without batting an eye. Like uh...yeah just shows. You're capable of a lot more than you think I think you are. Like I think I was pretty confident before coming here like that kind of stuff. I always like to challenge myself. But...yeah this really solidifies that point that...just you or anyone else can do, stay awake for five days or put up with a lot more pressure than you thought you could so...makes me a lot more confident.

Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you think would be any questions we should be asking.

Uh...no. Seems like a pretty thorough interview.

Okay, great. So I'm going to stop.