**Jack Sylvester:**

**Date: 16AUG**

**Participant #233:**

**Length of the Interview: 17:23**

Interviewer (Code in Blue):

Participant (Code in black):

Is it okay if I record?

Yes

okay great. And if you could tell me your participant ID number?

233

awesome. When did you start your BUD/S class?

Oh 339 originally.

So youre the OG?

Yes

And is this your first BUD/S experience?

Yes

Can I ask you about your family? Are you an only child? Do you have siblings?

I have a younger sister.

You're the oldest and then you have

I’m the oldest and then a younger sister.

And how much younger is she?

She's 20, so she's 3 years younger.

And your parents are married, divorced, separated.?

They’re married.

How long have they been married?

They've been dating since they were in sixth grade. And I think they have been married 30-something years….married at 21, both around 58 now. Whatever that is.

And then how’s your relationship with them?

Good.

And then with your sister?

It's good, too.

Talk to them often?

Um, I mean not all the time but milestones from Nicole text my sister every now and then.

And then are they’re any life-changing events that happened to you prior to BUD/S?

Nothing that like really stands out. No.

Did you go to college?

I did go to college. I went to NC State University.

All four years you graduated.

All four years graduated.Um...yeah really enjoyed it. And then came out here right after.

Any, any....we’re just looking for, it could be a positive experience like graduated college and could be, did you do a gap year? A mission year?

I didn’t do a gap year or anything, I packed Europe twice by myself. That was a something.

Two different…

Two different times. Yeah. First time was in...high school. After my junior year. I had a neighbor that worked for United, who got me on their fit list. Just went over there by myself. Worked on a farm in Scotland. Found em on Craigs List. Worked in Scotland, made enough money to buy a plane ticket to Germany. And like traveled all over there. And then went again. Um in college.

So thats an impeccable experience.

Yeah, I guess thats impeccable.

Yeah, how did those experiences factor into your experience at BUD/S?

Um I think mainly, uh, just like independence probably. Um. No, expectations and figuring stuff out on my own. Uh. Never planned out anything when I was traveling on the show up to a country, find a place to sleep, figure out how to get to the bathroom. Yeah. Yeah get out of the train station. Um….yeah, just...Never really like had like long plans just kind of day to day. And day to day is pretty important to BUID/S.

Were there any disasters? Did you have any traumatic events?

I don't really get that worked up about stuff maybe would have been traumatic for other people. I mean like that stranded like in Germany one time...missed a train and I had to sleep on like the platform. Yeah stuff like that. Nothing crazy traumatic.

How do you think your personality contributed to your progression throughout BUD/S?

I think I’m pretty relaxed? Uh uh I don't get too riled up too easily. I think um...Just staying level headed through BUD/S is pretty important for me. Um instructors can get to some people and nothing really ever bothered me.

Describe your background that led you to pursue becoming part of the SEAL Community. Did you have any SEALs as family or friends?

No um...growing up I don't know SEALs...I don’t really remember how I like discovered them. But when I was in High School I pretty much knew thats what I wanted to do. Um I wanted to enlist out of High School, but my dad was like no you need to go to college. Cause he was enlisted. Um...

So you can’t remember what sparked your original interest but you just always had this High School goal.

My parents always said like when I was younger like they like what let me have like toy guns or anything. So I would just make my own and they're eventually just like all right, we'll give in. I was...I always wanted to be an army man. And that just kind of evolved to be discovered this and being like that’s what I want to do.

And your dad said why don't you hold off?

I actually came and went to like a commissioning Source. He was enlisted and just he didn't like I was like the first male my family or college. He wanted me to be that guy that that went to college and did that. I guess he wasn't treated very well on the enlisted side so he wanted me to go O. I wanted to enlist and so he made a bet with he was like alright if...you apply for this scholarship, and if you get it you gotta go, if you don’t you can enlist. I got the damn thing. Yeah, I got...did ROTC which in hindsight, I'm very glad that where I'm at now. But…

So tell me a little bit more about your childhood and their parents parenting style. So were you spanked as a kid?

Yeah.

Free range parenting?

Yeah yeah, I got spanked for sure. My dad was pretty…

Was there a belt or a paddle?

Yeah. Yeah, every time my dad would spank me and then he’d like give me a hug after. It was interesting. Be all scary do the spanking and then after give me a hug and be like its settled, you paid your dues or whatever.

Did you feel like there was a why behind it?

Oh, yeah anytime I got spanked it was, definitely a why behind it. Definitely deserved it. I guess...

And then as you got older was there restriction of privileges. Did they take away your video games, your phone, your car?

No well actually grew up with no TV or anything.... So we're um...forced to be outdoors for entertainment. Um. Got like a flip phone in High School. And uh…

So minimal tech?

Yeah...um...yeah there's really nothing like this taking stuff or whatever. Um they wanted me to be pretty independent once I got into high school. Um.

Yeah, and did you move around a lot during childhood or teenagers years?

No. I was born in Anchorage, Alaska and then we when I was five we moved to Virginia and I stayed there until I was out of school.

So Alaska til 5 and then…

Stayed in Virginia, and I went on Texas State. My whole family is from North Carolina and in college my parents moved back to North Carolina. But…

So they were close while you were in college.

Well four, four hours away in Nashville but yeah. It ended up, it ended up being like the same distance. Driving to Virginia compared to where they lived in North Carolina.

So I guess we're trying to get at here is did you feel like you were uprooted and moved around in schools and social groups? You felt like there's a pretty consistent pretty consistent…

Pretty consistent.

So tell me about your teenagers years, did you participate in a team sport or an activity with the tight-knit community? So like band or theater.

I, I wrestled my whole life...and played football...wrestling is definitely my favorite sport.

Anything?

I was in band in Middle School just cause it was required.

So what did you do with the last five years prior to BUD/S? So you commissioned right out of ROTC.

Came straight here.

Okay, you didn’t take a gap year or anything after high school? It was high school into college.

High school right into college.

And would you consider yourself impulse?

Uh yeah, I guess so. I mean…

I mean like do you have any tattoos? I don't know…

Yeah, I've got a tattoo on my ass that I got. Um…it's just like a wolf holding a beer...um not. I told somebody that I would do it when I was drinking and then man of my word so woke up and had to go do it.

Okay. Like speeding tickets or?

Never gotten a speeding ticket.

Big purchases or anything? How do you make your decisions? Do you typically think about them and plan them out now or do research or you just more like go with my gut?

Yeah I just, day to day. Um... I was like, yes, I think you guys will like this. I wrote about this for my SOAS application...like as a turning point in my life. Um...I think I was in like 8th grade or ninth grade. And I'd like...I was like pretty like straight arrow in school. I didn't do anything...like crazy, I don't know crazy, but like just walk the line. My dad like brought me one day and was like you need to get in trouble this week at school. Like you need to go to the principal's office and do something. Yeah, I did, and so I did and it was really weird and from then on I just kind of live my life as like not scared to get in trouble kind of thing. And...and its definitely changed the way I do stuff. And he wasn’t like go and do something so bad that like you know...But I knew what he was saying. It...It was cool.

He wanted you to push your comfort zone.

So I went and like played a prank on a teacher...and I got sent to the principal's office. It was completely harmless and funny but...yeah.

What was the most challenging component of BUD/S? This is kind of a holistic question. So it could a particular event, or a certain day, it could be something as broad as water or logs.

I think the most difficult part about BUD/S is the first 15 minutes waking up everyday. Other than that nothing is too challenging.

What do you mean?

Cause BUD/S is just such a grind of day to day. Getting up and…having another day of BUD/S I think...that...once you get out of bed, and those first 15 minutes are over...You’re with the boys and...nothing is that bad. Everything is doable. And then getting up in the morning is the hardest part.

Ok so what motivated you to get up and...actually get dressed and…?

I mean for me this is what I want to do. And I had to get up and get dressed and do that. And um...just I dont really know. But I know those first 15 minutes in the morning when that alarm is going off is the hardest part. You know its like...here we go. Another day.

So is it like a self talk that you have with yourself?

Yeah. yeah definitely. Just like come on we gotta do this. And as like an officer, you gotta be an example. I’d be in the room with a bunch of other guys and they like see that you’re getting up um first one out of bed….But I think that..that getting up is the hardest part.

So do you have any practices physical, mental, or spiritual that you use to push through those 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 do.

Um... I pray but I don’t pray like every, everyday...but for like big events I’ll send up a prayer. Um I do more like meditation. Just like really...like mental reps. Tons of test gates at BUD/S. And I’ll somehow I’ll just dream about doing like OC-8 or pool comp or something just over and over.

You call it mental reps?

Yeah just like mental reps

Like a visualization?

Yeah visualization.

And did you, were you taught that here.

I’ve just always. Anytime its something like that, like a big event coming up...I’d always just do mental reps of whatever it was just over and over in my head just to make sure it was good to go.

Did you ever make a difficult decision during training at BUD/S? And what went through your mind with that decision? And can you give me an example of a difficult decision?

Difficult decision in BUD/S?

So for example running a classmate out or turning in a cheating classmate or maybe a decision to go to medical. You know and risk getting rolled.

Fortunately I’ve never ever stepped into medical here. Um, but running guys out of boats...I never really thought that was a [inaudible] decision. Um...that almost comes down to these guys are hurting my boat crew these guys are hurting my boys...you need to leave. Um...Its always about what’s best for the group.

Why do you think you were successful in completing BUD/S?

Um...I think I just wanted to do it. Every, everyone that I’ve seen...not make it, they didn’t...they didn’t really...you have to just want to be here. No...not get stuck with...the little day to day tasks can eat away at you and just have a sight of the big picture.

The next question is did you notice anything about those who dropped, who didn’t make it?

Yeah. I have, I actually had a workout group at NC State and uh 7 of us have gotten through and pretty good success rate and this last class we had a guy DOR for the first time out of our whole group. And he’s like oh yeah I’ll just got EOD. And like the second you have any other option besides completing this training, you are not going to complete it. So I think that’s…

So they allowed themselves to entertain a plan B.

Right. Whereas for me it's like, yeah theyre are theoretically i guess plan Bs but... they were never really an option.

How did this experience change you as a person? Has it changed you as a person?

I dont think that it really has changed me a person. I think that I have like new experiences that maybe provide me different perspective on...other people, I’ve learned a lot about other people just by observing people go through BUD/S but...I don’t think I’m any tougher or any different after going to through BUD/S...I might even be a little bit softer.

You are the second person to say that. Interesting. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you think would be helpful in our search to understand this idea of grit and resilience and hardiness and mindfulness in what would make a successful candidate in the future?

Yeah...um...I don’t know I think its just...its all mindset. I have seen some guys that are animals like just physically...studs that quit. And then I’ve seen guys that are not, and they make it through with no problem. I think it just literally comes down to your mental attitude and desire to want to be here….I was never an amazing athlete, um, and then they’re are guys in here that are D1 athletes and they’re guys in here that have never played a sport before. And they all have a similar desire to want to be here. And I think that's what it is.