

## **I Am The I In HII**

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I guess I should tell you up front that I'm from a mixed-race couple. So my mother was an immigrant. She was born in India. She met my father in England. My father was in the Air Force. My father, when he was getting ready to marry my mother, was an E3, and they didn't want him to marry her and so they court-martialed him and took his rank, and he still married my mother.

We moved around a lot. I actually started school in England when I was five years old. We lived in California, then we left California, and we went to Turkey. When we came back from Turkey, I was in the sixth grade. I didn't know that there was anything different about being mixed race or living with other races.

I was born in 1959. Interracial couples were illegal in a lot of states. Like there were southern states we couldn't go to. But when we came back to Ohio, it was the 70's, 1971, and I found out quickly that there was a difference between black and white. I believe that my mom always told us that we always had to be better. We had to always try harder. We always had to be better. We always had to be the best.

And then the 70's were also were part of when we had civil unrest. We were being beat up just for being black. Black men were being stopped for walking. Police brutality was very big in the 70's.

It was a difficult transition to come from thinking that everybody lived together, got along. We were safe. When I came back, I asked my mother, I said, "can I go downtown, ride the bus downtown with my friends", and she said, "No". So she took me downtown and we went to the department store and she said, "Just watch". As the black kids came in, they're going to follow them around, to assume that they're going to steal something. And you don't have to steal anything. But if you're there with them, they're going to associate you with them. And so therefore, I went from being free to do what I wanted to do to having to watch where I go.

So I went in the military at 20. I had a good time in the military. I think the military treated me well. I was in there for 24 years. I started out as a med tech, but at the four-year point I retrained and became a training manager responsible for on-the-job training for the enlisted folks. That's a male-dominated environment and so you're in there and you're trying to tell the men how they're supposed to develop training and of course, you know, being a woman they didn't really necessarily want to understand or listen. You know, like who are you to tell me?

I will tell you that there were those struggles where people didn't want to listen to you because you're black. It wasn't unusual still to go into a room so I would go in there with my big stick and you know try and talk nice, here's where you are. You know, I think a lot of women have to do that too – to adapt. You

know, because you can't be seen as aggressive or that angry black woman and so you have to kind of change how you deliver the message in order to be heard. It's kind of interesting when i came to the shipyard I kind of found myself back in the same room.

I came to Huntington Ingalls Industries in 2003 right after I retired. You know, continuing my service to the country being in CVN 21 and at the shipyard. But it also allowed me to continue teaching training. Then I went to EPL, enhancing personal leadership. Man I loved that job.

I got to Corporate in January and we have been home since March. So I only worked there for a full month and a half in my office at Corporate before COVID.

I would have stayed in the Air Force because I wanted to do that all my life. So even though, there were places I couldn't go, or there were places I chose not to go in the military, I fought for everyone's freedom to have that voice.

One of the things my father taught us growing up was that whatever you do, do to the best of your ability, whether that was cleaning toilets or if that was standing in front of a group. Always be your best. The other thing I was taught was, learn all you can, take what you learned and then use it for good.

So being African-American is just kind of different, even when you think about the difference between now and the 70's, what's different today is that it's everybody and i hope that this time it'll make a difference so that I don't have to continue to teach my grandchildren the lesson that my father learned or the lesson that my grandfather was taught.

Somewhere along this line, because of diversity and inclusion, we're going to get to the point where we don't have to give our kids that talk. I think about now at my age what will be my legacy. I want my kids to be proud. I want them to think, hey my mom helped a lot of people.

When you sit at my funeral, and they have my life going by, you know, and they have those pictures I want it to have meant something. What I tell young girls now is if they invite you to the meeting, sit at the table. Those days of sitting along the peanut gallery, which we used to call it, that back row, if you've been invited to the meeting, you've been invited because you have something to offer and you should take your seat at the table. You have to respect folks, you have to respect yourself, but don't let your voice be silenced.