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Christina "Mobile" Burrell '11-Tonisha Haendiges '12

Christina Burrell

Tonisha Haendiges

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Christina Mobile Burrell: This is Christina Mobile Burrell, class year 2011 and I will be interviewing ... will you say your name and class year for the record?

Tonisha Haendiges: My name is Tonisha Haendiges, my maiden name is Tonisha Hunt and my class year is 2012.

CB: Awesome, so my first question to you is why did you decide to come to Connecticut College?

TH: I decided to come to Connecticut College because Professor Zimmer came to my school, Sports and Science Academy -- Sports and Medical Sciences Academy in Hartford, Connecticut and he did a presentation in my science class and he just talked a lot about the Science Leaders program and just really made it seem like a wonderful program, made the College seem like a wonderful place, and encouraged me to apply and so I did that.

CB: That's awesome. And then what, if anything, surprised you about the College during your time here?

TH: I think the lack of diversity was a complete shock for me. Growing up, I wasn't in very diverse schools, in, like, my elementary school years, but then middle school and high school was very, very diverse and so I think I just got used to that and forgot how the rest of the world can kind of be. So, coming to Connecticut College it kind of was a culture shock again and just, like, not having my quote unquote people around me really made me feel isolated, so that -- that was a shock that was surprising.

CB: That's real. And where did you live and what was it like your residential experience or house and what was that community like?

TH: Hmm, so when I first came, my freshman year I was in Burdock -- is it Burdock?

CB: Burdick?

TH: Burdick? Burdick? I was in Burdick, the quiet dorm. I don't know why I chose that, but we were in the basement. It was real sketchy, but it was cool. It was cool. And then I wanted to upgrade my life and so I went to the Plex and I went to Johnson and Johnson was at that time known as the party dorm, and that it was. But it was cool, it was fine. We had AC. I didn't care too much. And then I went over to Morrisson and I stayed my last two years in Morrisson and that was-- that was pretty cool. I really didn't talk to many of my neighbors, honestly. People kind of had their own cliques and so I found my- my people and just kind of stayed connected with them.

CB: Word! And what did you study and do you have any memories of classes or professors that really stand out?

TH: So, originally I came in as a Behavioral Neuroscience major. Not really sure what I wanted to do with that, but was interested and that's how I got into the Science Leaders program. After taking a science class, I can't remember which one, I just felt like science wasn't my thing. I had taken a Psychology 101 course and really liked that, so then I switched my majors to -- I did a double major in Psychology and Human Development. And then I did -- oh my gosh -- Public Policy and Community Action through PICA.

CB: Awesome! And then were you involved with any groups or activities that were important to you?

TH: Yeah! I was a part of Unity House. Yeah! And the Umoja Club and I actually eventually became the president. I don't know why they did that. But, I became the president and really tried. Like, at the time, hindsight being 20/20, I should have and could have done much more but I think at the time we were just trying to get people of color together and trying to fight different racial complexities, which- it was a lot for one small group to take on, but with all that being said, I'm really proud of the stuff that we did accomplish. I remember we did a dinner that was our first big dinner that we were able to put together and just being around, like, like-minded people, was- it was awesome.

CB: That's awesome. And what was the campus climate like while you were here and do you remember any particular events or controversies that stood out?

TH: There were a couple. I think, we were talking about, like, the lobster incident that had occurred. I honestly don't remember that too much. I feel like I'm not- I shouldn't speak on it too much. But, other than that -- this is going to sound crazy, but when I came here it was the time when Rihanna and Chris Brown got into their domestic violence dispute and that was pretty big on campus at the time and I'm a big Rihanna fan, so, you know, it- it created a lot of discussion around, like, domestic violence and equal rights and, you know, relationships and all that type of stuff. So, that was one of them. A lot of the presidential campaign that was going on while I was at Conn. That was the first time that I was able to vote, so that was big. Yeah.

CB: That's awesome. Yeah, everyone remembers the whole Rihanna-Chris Brown situation. So, that's real. And can you talk a little bit about your life after Conn and how your experience may have shaped your life after graduation, if at all?

TH: Yeah, so life after Conn ... I did go to graduate school. I went to, gosh, UConn, the School of Social Work, at the time it was in West Hartford, to become a social worker. Really didn't know what I wanted to do with Psychology, but I remember I did an internship at an alcohol and recovery agency and my supervisor at the time recommended that I do social work. She felt like it was just more broad, could open up a lot of opportunities for me. So that's what I did. So I got

my master's in social work. Worked at a different- a couple of different agencies, doing individual, group therapy and really liked it. Really enjoyed it. kind of worked with the elderly and then adult and then young children and kind of felt my comfort zone working with, like, adolescents or young adults. And that's kind of where I landed.

CB: Awesome. And do you keep in touch with any of your classmates these days?

TH: I do! I do! I keep in touch with a couple of classmates. One classmate in particular that I keep in touch with is Lamar. He was my best friend here and still is. Really is my support system and due to his friendship, he has, like, exposed me to, like, his friendships and his best friends from here and so I'm really appreciative of that.

CB: That's awesome. And then thinking about the College today, if there's something from your own experience that you wish students today could have or if there's something happening on campus now that you wish you could have experienced.

TH: Hmm. One thing that I wish students were able to experience was the real Florialia and Fishbowl. Fishbowl was like ... I remember when I first came here and upperclassmen were talking about Fishbowl and I was just like clutch my pearls, I was like "I am never ... what? I am not running naked! I am not doing that! Mmm-mmm, that shit is crazy, unh-unh!" But I remember my senior year and it coming up, and I'm like, "Hell, yeah. I'm doing that!" And I think it's especially important because, like, you- those three years, like, I kind of learned myself, had different experiences, so when that event came, I was confident in who I was. At least at the time, cause then life, kind of, you know, happens, but I was confident. I was like, "Hell, yeah, I'm doing this!" and it was just really empowering and I felt amazing until this day it was like hands-down the best party that I experienced here at Conn College and just seeing everyone be accepted. It didn't matter what your skin tone was, your background, your economic status, anything, your size. It was just- it was amazing. So I wish, like, the kids were able to experience Fishbowl. That was awesome and it was the perfect segue to, like, real life. So that was awesome. And then just Florialia, the different people, the different performances. Just us coming as a family, the Conn family coming together and just having a good time.

CB: That's awesome. Is there anything else that you want to share about your experience on campus before we wrap up this interview?

TH: I feel like one question that I kind of didn't answer is was there a professor that influenced me and I have to, have to, have to praise Professor Singer. He was, like, so influential to my college experience. He was the first professor that I kind of opened up to, let my guard down, and kind of talked to him about, like, my upbringing, my childhood, traumatic experience that I experienced. At the time I didn't realize it was traumatic, but, you know, through life learning what it was. And he was just really non-judgmental, really taught me so many different things, and encouraged me to do all the things. Like, no matter what it was, he was really, like, an advocate for me, so definitely, I want to say that.

CB: That's awesome. So thank you so much, Tonisha, class of 2012 for this great conversation.

TH: Thank you.

CB: Awesome.