



1
00:00:08,925 --> 00:00:13,925
I am Shelia Nash-Stevenson and I
am an Integration Engineer for the

2
00:00:13,925 --> 00:00:17,466
Planetary Missions Program Office
here at Marshall Space Flight Center.

3
00:00:27,067 --> 00:00:31,895
I was born in Lawrence County,
Alabama, a little town called

4
00:00:31,900 --> 00:00:36,353
Hillsborough, Alabama, and I
attended Courtland High School

5
00:00:36,353 --> 00:00:43,010
and graduated from Austin High
School. I went on to attend Alabama

6
00:00:43,022 --> 00:00:47,285
A&M University; I did not want to
get too far away from home because

7
00:00:47,285 --> 00:00:53,066
I was only sixteen when I graduated,
so that was kind of my way of

8
00:00:53,066 --> 00:00:57,162
staying close to home. I majored
in electrical electronic engineering

9
00:00:57,162 --> 00:01:02,011
technology at Alabama A&M University.
I had a physics professor who thought

10
00:01:02,011 --> 00:01:05,207
I was a really, really, really good
student and he wanted me to come

11
00:01:05,207 --> 00:01:13,051
back and enter a physics program
that he had started that year I had

12
00:01:13,051 --> 00:01:20,034
graduated. I was one of his first
students to enter into his masters

13
00:01:20,034 --> 00:01:26,022
degree program in physics and the
first person to graduate from that

14
00:01:26,022 --> 00:01:34,286
program. I was hesitating when he
asked me to come into that program

15
00:01:34,286 --> 00:01:40,152
because I took physics in high school
and I took it again in college and it

16
00:01:40,152 --> 00:01:46,160
was not the easiest subject for me.
When he asked me to come back and get

17
00:01:46,160 --> 00:01:55,132
a graduate degree in physics, it was
kind of scary, but I had some folks

18
00:01:55,132 --> 00:01:59,917
that I respected very well and
thought I could do it and I said,

19
00:01:59,917 --> 00:02:03,423
"Okay, I will." And he was going to
get me money. He was getting me money

20
00:02:03,423 --> 00:02:08,045
to come back to school, I was only
nineteen at that time, so I still

21
00:02:08,045 --> 00:02:10,045
did not want to leave home, did not
want to leave mom and dad. I said

22
00:02:10,045 --> 00:02:14,946
this may be a good way to stay close,
so I accepted the fellowship, which

23
00:02:14,946 --> 00:02:22,849
was a NASA fellowship, and for two
years I studied and I got my masters

24
00:02:22,849 --> 00:02:30,121
degree in physics. A couple of years
later after I had gotten married and

25
00:02:30,121 --> 00:02:34,999
had become a fulltime employee, he
started the PhD program in physics at

26
00:02:34,999 --> 00:02:41,991
Alabama A&M University and wanted me
to come back again to maybe take a

27
00:02:41,991 --> 00:02:47,052
course. If we had a program we needed
students, so since he was my mentor

28
00:02:47,180 --> 00:02:52,937
and had helped me along the way, I
felt that I could help the program

29
00:02:52,937 --> 00:03:04,018
out by attending class or two. But
once I started in the program, it was

30
00:03:04,018 --> 00:03:09,915
very hard for me not to complete the
program. I dont necessarily believe

31
00:03:09,915 --> 00:03:21,011
in starting things I don't finish, so
I had to finish. But I was married and

32
00:03:21,029 --> 00:03:28,802
I had to start my family because I was
getting old, and I had a coworker of

33
00:03:28,802 --> 00:03:35,791
mine that was a male that told me I
would never be able to go to school,

34
00:03:35,791 --> 00:03:43,093
have children, work fulltime, and get
a degree in physics, get a PhD in

35
00:03:43,093 --> 00:03:49,033
physics. I thought one thing I don't
like is for someone to tell me what

36
00:03:49,033 --> 00:03:55,017
I can and cannot do, so I will just have
to show you. That was one of the things

37
00:03:55,017 --> 00:04:00,914
that really encouraged me to go ahead
and finish that program. I did get a PhD

38
00:04:00,914 --> 00:04:10,015
in physics; it took me a few years
because I gave birth to two children in

39
00:04:10,015 --> 00:04:16,990
the process. The first child I think I
stayed out maybe a year and the second

40
00:04:16,990 --> 00:04:22,041
child I stayed out maybe a semester,
enough for him to be born and kind of

41
00:04:22,041 --> 00:04:25,995
get used to it. I was still working
fulltime and I was just taking like a

42
00:04:25,995 --> 00:04:35,006
course a semester. Eventually I did
complete that program, so I am very

43
00:04:35,006 --> 00:04:39,551
happy that I did/ It is really opened
a lot of doors for me.

44
00:04:48,086 --> 00:04:55,954
I guess one of the very first mentors
I had was the physics professor; his

45
00:04:55,954 --> 00:05:00,969
name was MC George, Dr. MC George. I
was always impressed with him because

46
00:05:00,969 --> 00:05:08,015
he taught the undergraduate physics
degree programs, physics courses, the

47
00:05:08,015 --> 00:05:15,939
very first two, I believe, that I took.
He would walk in to the classroom with

48
00:05:15,939 --> 00:05:19,707
only a piece of chalk and he would
start writing on the board. He

49
00:05:19,707 --> 00:05:23,934
didn't have a book at all and
everything he wrote on that board

50
00:05:23,934 --> 00:05:27,572
was exactly as it was in the book.
I was always amazed at how he

51
00:05:27,572 --> 00:05:32,068
could remember all that information
without having the book there with

52
00:05:32,068 --> 00:05:36,123
him. He was a good professor, a
really good professor, and he

53
00:05:36,123 --> 00:05:39,570
would notice the potential in
his students and he always

54
00:05:39,570 --> 00:05:44,490
encouraged us to do more. I
always got good grades because he

55
00:05:44,490 --> 00:05:50,580
was a good teacher. When he asked me
to come back to school, I trusted

56
00:05:50,580 --> 00:05:57,056
him, but I still needed a little bit
more reinforcement. I had other

57
00:05:57,056 --> 00:06:02,430
advisors, other teachers that I had
been in their classes, and they

58
00:06:02,430 --> 00:06:09,010
encouraged me to do that also, but
Dr. George was the main person that

59
00:06:09,010 --> 00:06:12,010
really got me involved in doing
things. He was always supportive.

60
00:06:12,028 --> 00:06:22,034
Once I graduated, he knew of a
job opportunity and he said I want

61

00:06:22,035 --> 00:06:26,020

you to go interview for this job.
It was one of the first jobs I got

62

00:06:26,020 --> 00:06:36,855

once I graduated with my masters.
That led to even more opportunities.

63

00:06:36,855 --> 00:06:44,832

He really kept up with what I was
doing. In fact, he is probably about

64

00:06:44,833 --> 00:06:51,981

eighty, he is in his late eighties
now and one day last year, I got a

65

00:06:51,981 --> 00:06:56,927

post on Facebook, which I never
really go to, but I saw that he

66

00:06:56,927 --> 00:07:02,032

put a post out there. He had seen
something about me and he had

67

00:07:02,032 --> 00:07:05,091

commented on it. I did send a
response back, but I am not sure that

68

00:07:05,091 --> 00:07:08,371

he responded. He may have had some of
his grandchildren do it, but I was

69

00:07:08,371 --> 00:07:12,442

really surprised that he still keeps
up with what we are doing.

70

00:07:20,995 --> 00:07:24,948

I had a NASA
research fellowship for my

71

00:07:24,948 --> 00:07:31,961
masters degree program. That
brought me to Marshall the first

72

00:07:31,961 --> 00:07:39,957
time as a graduate student. I
came out during, it was sometime

73

00:07:39,957 --> 00:07:43,295
throughout the year I would come
out a few hours a day or a few

74

00:07:43,295 --> 00:07:50,009
hours a week to work with Dr.
Tom Parnell and Dr. Jerry Fishman.

75

00:07:50,009 --> 00:07:58,775
I think they are both retired, but
we worked with them on BATSE. I

76

00:07:58,775 --> 00:08:02,119
did that for the two years I was
in graduate school working on my

77

00:08:02,119 --> 00:08:06,874
masters degree program. After
that, I went to work for private

78

00:08:06,874 --> 00:08:11,174
industry for a while; I was
working for Hughes Aircraft,

79

00:08:11,229 --> 00:08:16,858
the Huntsville engineering center.
I went to church one Sunday and

80

00:08:16,858 --> 00:08:23,377
there was an announcement that
Marshall was looking for engineers

81

00:08:23,377 --> 00:08:27,080

I am not sure exactly how the process worked, but you filled

82

00:08:27,080 --> 00:08:30,742

out the application. What was happening at Marshall at that

83

00:08:30,742 --> 00:08:35,055

time was that their diversity numbers were not where they wanted

84

00:08:35,055 --> 00:08:38,322

to be so they were looking for some good candidates to more

85

00:08:38,322 --> 00:08:43,657

diversify their population. I filled out the application and I

86

00:08:43,657 --> 00:08:50,829

interviewed, I think with two areas, at least two, maybe three,

87

00:08:50,829 --> 00:08:58,089

and decided to go work with the instrumentations group in the

88

00:08:58,089 --> 00:09:02,931

avionics lab at that time. I stayed there for maybe about,

89

00:09:02,931 --> 00:09:10,011

almost ten years. I started a NASA administrator's fellowship

90

00:09:10,011 --> 00:09:19,065

around 2000, actually, it was 1998 to 2000, and when I completed

91

00:09:19,065 --> 00:09:24,189

that fellowship, I went to be the university affairs officer and

92

00:09:24,189 --> 00:09:29,299

stayed there for about three years. I then went back to engineering

93

00:09:29,299 --> 00:09:32,858

because I started in engineering when I was doing instrumentation.

94

00:09:32,882 --> 00:09:40,054

Went back to engineering as a liaison between

95

00:09:40,054 --> 00:09:42,054

the flight projects directorate and the engineering directorate.

96

00:09:42,054 --> 00:09:47,856

Then we started a series of re-orgs and ended up in spacecraft

97

00:09:47,856 --> 00:09:56,821

and vehicle systems group. After that, I did a Ninth Floor detail

98

00:09:56,821 --> 00:10:02,397

with Robert and Robin, which was a lot of fun, a lot of fun. Then

99

00:10:02,397 --> 00:10:07,466

when I finished that detail, I went on to the planetary

100

00:10:07,502 --> 00:10:10,936

missions group, which used to be Discovery New Frontiers

101

00:10:10,936 --> 00:10:15,513

and Lunar Quest and now it is
the Planetary Missions Program Office.

102

00:10:24,266 --> 00:10:33,875

Okay, I just this weekend finished a
series of interviews relative to the

103

00:10:33,876 --> 00:10:38,256

Hidden Figures movie. They asked us
about what we wanted this movie

104

00:10:38,274 --> 00:10:50,893

to, what message did we want folks
to get out of this movie. And the main

105

00:10:50,937 --> 00:10:55,758

thing I wanted is for our
young girls to see the movie,

106

00:10:55,758 --> 00:10:59,840

especially our young African
American girls, to see this movie

107

00:10:59,840 --> 00:11:06,311

and get inspired to tackle those
hard, and really they are not hard,

108

00:11:06,311 --> 00:11:10,135

but people have said they are hard.
But I want them to be inspired to

109

00:11:10,135 --> 00:11:15,039

go on and take those math and
science courses to realize they

110

00:11:15,057 --> 00:11:20,095

really are fun and realize that
they are really capable of doing

111

00:11:20,095 --> 00:11:24,919

this type of work. Hopefully they will go on and get degrees in the

112

00:11:24,937 --> 00:11:30,586

STEM fields, science, engineering, math fields and then come back to

113

00:11:30,586 --> 00:11:36,811

Marshall and help us on our journey to Mars. So, if that movie can portray

114

00:11:36,811 --> 00:11:42,004

that message to those girls, it would be way more than worth anything

115

00:11:42,004 --> 00:11:46,944

that anybody has invested into the movie because that is what we need.

116

00:11:46,944 --> 00:11:53,928

Our girls see so many things now that takes them in directions that

117

00:11:53,928 --> 00:11:58,877

are not always necessarily positive and sometimes it can cause them to

118

00:11:58,877 --> 00:12:02,046

have a negative image of themselves because they dont look like what

119

00:12:02,101 --> 00:12:08,937

they see. But this movie will help them see that all they need to do

120

00:12:08,937 --> 00:12:13,317

is use their brains and they can go farther than anything else can

121

00:12:13,317 --> 00:12:19,850

take them. Hopefully this is what happens with this movie. And the wa

122

00:12:19,850 --> 00:12:24,932

that we get them and encourage them is to show them that yes, somebody

123

00:12:24,932 --> 00:12:29,171

that looks just like you has gone there, has been there, somebody else

124

00:12:29,171 --> 00:12:32,900

just like you has already done this so it is easy for you to do it also.

125

00:12:32,900 --> 00:12:39,011

Believe in yourself, apply yourself, prepare yourself, and you too can

126

00:12:39,011 --> 00:12:42,119

excel just like they did. That is what we do and we have to reach

127

00:12:42,119 --> 00:12:47,453

them where they are and bring them up to where we want them to be.

128

00:12:56,570 --> 00:13:03,018

One of the things I believe Marshall can do is to find some people that

129

00:13:03,018 --> 00:13:13,967

are really interested in seeing the young folk grow and excel. It is

130

00:13:13,967 --> 00:13:17,003

more to just saying I want to be a mentor, it is really meaning that

131

00:13:17,003 --> 00:13:21,488

and when you are really a good mentor,
you are going to sit there and you're

132

00:13:21,488 --> 00:13:26,866

going to talk to that mentee and
you are going to let them know things

133

00:13:26,884 --> 00:13:31,873

that they need to do to be successful
and you are going to be there for

134

00:13:31,874 --> 00:13:36,281

them when they become discouraged
and you are going to encourage them.

135

00:13:36,281 --> 00:13:42,773

And you will seek out opportunities
for them because you know the

136

00:13:42,773 --> 00:13:48,144

potential that they have, and when
an opportunity comes available, you

137

00:13:48,144 --> 00:13:51,967

make sure that they have everything
they need to take advantage of that

138

00:13:51,967 --> 00:13:58,844

opportunity. You know what they need,
you know the environment, so it is up

139

00:13:58,844 --> 00:14:03,757

to us to get them to where they need
to be and we need to be open-minded

140

00:14:03,757 --> 00:14:08,353

enough to look beyond the color of
their skin or their gender or their

141

00:14:08,353 --> 00:14:13,384

sexual orientation, whatever it may be, and help them to excel.

142

00:14:13,384 --> 00:14:20,059

I remember a time when I had just gotten my PhD and I was given an

143

00:14:20,059 --> 00:14:26,927

assignment that I thought was a little bit less of a challenge than

144

00:14:26,927 --> 00:14:34,911

I wanted it to be and I was a little discouraged. I gave a call to a

145

00:14:34,911 --> 00:14:40,831

person that was mentoring me at that time, and that was Dr. Julian Earls,

146

00:14:40,831 --> 00:14:48,050

he was at the Glenn Research Center. I talked to him and he gave me words

147

00:14:48,050 --> 00:14:55,031

to say, to use, when I talked to my supervisor about that particular

148

00:14:55,031 --> 00:15:02,547

assignment. He had a very good way of saying things and I did not do as

149

00:15:02,547 --> 00:15:07,276

good of a job as he did when he explained it to me, but I did a

150

00:15:07,276 --> 00:15:12,002

good enough job that I did not have to do that particular assignment.

151

00:15:12,002 --> 00:15:18,033

I was very thankful to him for that.

To this day when I see him, he always

152

00:15:18,033 --> 00:15:24,906

remembers that I am still here and he

always checks to see where are you