

Uchechi Cooper  
interviewed by Barrie Cline and Jaime Lopez

Barrie: The other piece of this [00:00:30] has been the desire to have a little bit more than usually ethnographies or archives [inaudible 00:00:44] usually work, whereas we have like an electrician talking to an electrician .

Uchechi: Okay.

Barrie: Because usually it's somebody who's coming from that outside that field who doesn't know much. Here's [00:01:00] your chance to get a deeper story.

Jaime: Okay we're all set. Let's get started.

Uchechi: All right.

Jaime: If anything trumps you or anything like that. There's nothing too crazy on this list. It's pretty simple stuff. We'll just go nice and easy and see how it goes. Can you tell us your name and your job title.

Uchechi: My name is [Uchechi 00:01:25] Cooper and I'm an electrician, fourth year apprentice.

Jaime: Can you tell us a [00:01:30] little bit about yourself? What's your background?

Uchechi: Well, first off, I'm a wife. I'm a mom of three. My background, I graduated high school in 1999. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I kind of was thinking, "All right, let's do what the parents want." Nursing. But I wasn't going to be happy. I kind of dove into that maybe five years later. It didn't pan out for me because I just wasn't happy. I always knew in the back of my mind that I wanted to do work with my hands. [00:02:00] I thought about automotive for a while, but that was kind of like, "Okay, how many women mechanics do you see?" So then, I got an opportunity to go into Local 3. I kind of was hesitant, but I took it.

Jaime: How did that opportunity come about?

Uchechi: I went to a school called NEW. I don't know if you're familiar with it. It's for non-traditional employment for women. I went for a six week pre-apprenticeship. Initially, I was very intimidated about becoming an electrician. They were like, "Oh, I think you should do it." I'm like, "No, you know what, I'll do carpentry." It's less school. I'm tired [00:02:30] of school. They like, "No, we think you're going to be really good." I was like,

"No, I don't want to do that." After a while, I was talked into it. It took a while, though. A couple of months for me to say, "All right, I'll do it." That's how I went there.

Barrie: What made you think you could do it?

Uchechi: What made me think? You know what? I always had challenges with math, so that's what made me think that I couldn't. What made me think that I could do it was when they gave me a pre-math course and they prepped me. I mean, we went all the way back to times tables, which you think, "Okay, who needs to go back there?" But they gave you the steps where they broke everything [00:03:00] down. When you did take the exam to get into the union, you wouldn't have to feel intimidated by, "Okay, I don't know this. I don't know grammar or I don't know old English." That's what made me realize when I was taking the course.

Jaime: A little bit more about your background. Where were you born and where are your parents from?

Uchechi: Okay. Well, I was born in New York City. Yay. My dad is originally from Nigeria. He immigrated here in the 1960s [00:03:30] and my mom is a Jersey girl. My dad came as a refugee. He did pretty well for himself. He went to schooling and he became a chemist. And I am from a family of, there's two boys and five girls. It's nine of us. I came from a pretty big family. Both of my parents are actually still together, over 40 years. I kind of like that. You don't see that anymore.

Jaime: [00:04:00] Are any of your brothers and sisters in the union?

Uchechi: No. Not in Local 3. My youngest brother is trying to get in now as we speak. But he ... sometimes it's not as easy as we would like it to be.

Jaime: Any of your brothers and sisters in other trades?

Uchechi: Not trades, no. Not union trades, no.

Jaime: What kinds of jobs did [00:04:30] you do before you joined the electrical industry?

Uchechi: I did mostly customer service. I did work in a hospital, but that was on the administrative side. I like people, but people sometimes don't like you. They're not always nice. I realized after a while that customer service ... No, I couldn't do it anymore.

Jaime: Did the skills that you learned at customer service [00:05:00] help you throughout your apprenticeship?

Uchechi: Definitely, because when you are in the union trades, especially any union trade, you don't stay at a specific job for a specific time. So you have to move around. You really have to be personable because if you're not, it's going to be hard for you. There's going to be people that you love and then there's going to be people that you dislike a lot, but you can also learn something from all of them. And if you're able to [00:05:30] ... What

would I say? If you're able to be like a chameleon. There's always that older, grumpy journeyman, who all the people be like, "Don't work with him." And we'll get along fine because you got to know how to make yourself adaptable and customer service definitely helps with that.

Jaime: Are you working at the moment?

Uchechi: No. I'm not.

Jaime: How [00:06:00] come?

Uchechi: I got hurt with a work related injury.

Jaime: Okay. What do you like about the electrical industry? What do you like about work?

Uchechi: What I like? I like that I am able to do something that ... When I tell people I'm an electrician, they say, "Wow, isn't that cool?" It makes me feel good. I'm able to do something that the average person, forget about being a woman [00:06:30] or an African American woman, the average person cannot wrap their mind around how does it get done? Sometimes they think an electrician, well, they're opening the back of a radio and doing that. But it has nothing to do with those little minute things. It's bigger than that. That's what I like, that I'm able to do something that you can't do. It makes me feel good about that. You know?

Barrie: Can you tell us about your first [00:07:00] day at work?

Uchechi: My first day? Okay. So first day, I made sure I got there early. They have this saying, "On time is late." Early is on time. I made sure I was there early. I think I got to the job site about 6:20 and it's 7 o'clock start. I was very nervous. Honestly, I was afraid of heights, so I didn't know what I was going to do. I'm like, "Okay, I know that I'm going to have to be [00:07:30] on high things." The job that I was at, most of the work was 30 feet in the air. Now, I'm feeling like, "Okay, you got to do this somehow, someway." The first day I met this journey woman and I told her, "Listen, I'm afraid of heights." She said, "Oh, no problem. I'm going to take you on some ladders and we're going to go up and down and you're going to see." After that I realized, "You know what? This is for me." I couldn't believe it. She was so [00:08:00] thoughtful. I really appreciate that she took the patience and the time to actually work with me on something that I was fearful of. I feel like in this industry, that's why it's called a brotherhood and a sisterhood because we are supposed to look out for each other that way.

Barrie: Can you talk a little bit about your learning process in terms of the actual electrical work?

Uchechi: I mean I learned what things from the [00:08:30] beginning.... I'm like, "Okay, so how does it work? Oh my goodness, I hope I don't get shocked." Everyone thinks they're going to get electrocuted. Oh no, if I touch this. But I learned from the basics to hopefully I'm going to learn more on the getting to the high voltage side. I would like to

do that or maybe the street lights division. I learned how to bend pipe. I learned where electricity comes from. You don't think about that. You don't think about, "How does this light bulb light?" [00:09:00] You just plug it in and you think that's it. But it's a whole science behind it. When you get into the union trades, they really make it their business to teach you and if you're willing to learn, you can surpass all avenues that you were thinking that you can't. I've learned things that I never even thought of before.

Jaime: You mentioned that you were scared [00:09:30] of heights at one time or maybe still a little bit. But at one time you were scared and you overcame it. Is there anything else at work that might have scared you or a tool or a job location that might have scared you?

Uchechi: Okay, so my first job was at a treatment plant and it is nine acres. And when you go down into its underground. And when you go down there, there is these pipes that ... It's a sewage treatment plant. I'm sorry, water treatment. [00:10:00] So the pipes are, I could say, maybe 20 feet wide and it just looks like you're in a scary movie or something. All you see is just these big pipes everywhere and it's dark. You might be in an area no one else is there. You're like, "Okay, how am I going to find my way around back to get my tools?"

There's a tool called the pony. Every electrician is familiar with this pony. [00:10:30] So the pony is a tool where it helps you to thread pipe and if you don't do it properly, it can flip you across the room. I was always afraid of the pony. And always told, "You do not do the pony by yourself." I said, "You know what? I'm not going to ever try to use this pony. I'll figure out a way if I have a hard bend. I'm never going to do this." And then one day I kind of said, "I'm working by myself, let me try to do this. I'm not going to not do it because [00:11:00] they're telling me not to." I became an expert at the pony.

Jaime: The pony became your thing?

Uchechi: Yeah. Yeah.

Jaime: Can you explain a little bit how the pony works and a little more detail?

Uchechi: Okay, so detail. What you have to do is when you're going to thread your pipe, you cut your piece. And you're going to put it onto a vice. You tighten it onto the vice. You have to make sure that it's very tight so it cannot move. The pony, it's ... I can't even [00:11:30] describe the way the tool looks, but it's circle. It's a circular tube that you're going to slide onto the pipe, but it must catch the pipe properly. In order to catch it, you have to hold the pipe with one hand and push the pony onto the pipe. Okay, remember you have a dominant hand. And your dominant hand is holding the pony and the other hand is not so strong, but you have to use that hand to make sure the pony grips onto the pipe. [00:12:00] And if you don't, you can be there for hours trying to get the pony onto the pipe properly. And you have to oil it as well. You're doing a couple of things at one time just to thread a piece of pipe. You also have to make sure you're standing properly because you don't want the pony to jump and then you fly across the room. That's why it's not a tool that everyone ... You have to be kind of skilled to use it.

Jaime: Yeah. You have to be a little [00:12:30] strong too.

Uchechi: Yeah.

Jaime: You got to have some weight over it.

Uchechi: Yeah.

Jaime: Awesome. The pony, you overcame the pony. I'm happy for you. That's not an easy thing to do.

Barrie: Can you tell us a little bit about some of your coworkers? You alluded to it before about a grumpy ...(crosstalk)

Uchechi: Oh okay.

Barrie: ... that you managed to work well with. I wonder if you-

Uchechi: Okay. Being an electrician especially a woman, I can go to that side. You will have some men [00:13:00] who are just not comfortable with working with you. They're just not. Or you have some men who, they're comfortable with you, but they can't see themselves letting a woman do "man's work". They will try to baby you like you're a newborn baby. You have that side. And then you have someone who will work equally with you. There's all different types. I mean, as far as the grumpy old men, I had one where [00:13:30] I didn't care what I did or how good I did it, he was just not a nice person. It was really difficult to work with him. There were days where my stomach would have knots, like, "Oh, I got this guy again. Why me?" But I realized that you just have to push through it. It's nothing ... Sometimes it's nothing personal. People just they have things going on. They're just like that. They [00:14:00] might not be mad at you or taking it out on you, but that's just how they are. You have to not take things personal.

Barrie: Thank you.

Jaime: It's more of a personal thing, you kind of have to adjust to? Is that what you're saying?

Uchechi: You do, but you also have to ... You have to also let people know they cannot, it's not to say they can disrespect you or mistreat you, no. That's not allowed either. But you have to have sort of [00:14:30] what they call the thick skin. You can't be a crybaby. "Oh, well, he said I can't do this." No. You can say whatever you want to. That doesn't define my career. That's not going to define.... you're just one person out of how many thousands.

Barrie: Have you been able to...do you feel over a period of time that you've been able to assert yourself in that [00:15:00] way and get treated fairly?

Uchechi: It's always going to be, there's always going to be a battle for me personally every job site I go to. I don't know if it's because I'm a woman I feel that way or because my experiences thus far. I have to prove myself. Some people will notice that, "Oh, she's a

hard worker. She's always here. She does what she needs to do." And some people will never see how hard you work. They will always find something that [00:15:30] you didn't do or maybe they thought you didn't do. Or they might see you, you've been on the ladder all day and the minute you go down to pick up something that you dropped, they see you off the ladder. They think, "Oh, yup. She doesn't do anything." But you can't make that your stressor.

Jaime: I've had issues on the job with people when I have gone back home and had the [00:16:00] times where I've shared my stresses with my mom as an apprentice. Like, "Mom, this guy is doing this. This guy is doing that or saying this to me." Did you ever have somebody that you leaned on when something was really bugging you in at work?

Uchechi: You know what? Honestly, no, because my family, remember they wanted me to be a nurse or a lawyer or a doctor. In their eyes, there was no room for me to cry to them. [00:16:30] It was my own personal thing that I had to get over. A lot of things I wasn't comfortable that I had to suck up because I knew that, "You know, you're not being fair." There was an experience one time, me and my partner at the time, we were working and he made a mistake. He got upset at me because he made the mistake. And he started treating me nasty from that day on. I had anxiety every single morning that I had to work with [00:17:00] him. After that ... One day, he... actually one of my other coworkers, they heard him talking to me like that and they went and told the foreman. "Do you know how he's treating Tracy, so and so and so?" And the foreman's the one who came to me and said, "Listen, nobody is to treat you that way. And if they do, you let us know." But you don't want to be a rat or a snitch, so we suck up things that in maybe [00:17:30] other fields or other careers you might not. I don't know. But that's what we do.

Jaime: Yeah, we take it. What type of work do you feel most comfortable doing?

Uchechi: Definitely, I am most comfortable, I think with circuitry. Yeah, circuitry. I like to do high hats lighting. I'm not like ... Pipe bending is good, but [00:18:00] there's certain pipes that are like the huge ones. That's not really the thing I like to do. If I have to, hopefully, I'll always have a partner so we can kind of work together. But that's not, that's not what I would choose.

Jaime: When you think about circuitry, do you think about it in a certain way or did somebody ... like when you think about troubleshooting something, do you have a certain type of way that you think about it?

Uchechi: [00:18:30] No....you know what it is with circuitry? What someone taught me, he said, "Learn everything you can learn. And constantly read, read, read. Don't ever think, "Well, I know this, this, and this." Always keep going over it." Like now, I've been out of work for some time. You don't ever want to be rusty. And you want to know what's going on. Sometimes with circuitry, the thing is you get comfortable. One day I was so comfortable, I'm doing [00:19:00] little stuff like outlets. All of a sudden, boom, and I'm like, "Oh, okay. You know what? Let me make sure that I'm not so comfortable that I forget that these things can happen." I think that you need to think of it in that way. Not to be afraid of the electricity, but to respect it like they say. Sometimes when you get

used to doing these things, you're like, "Okay, I got this. I don't need to wear my safety goggles or my gloves. Or I don't need to make sure that this is dead. [00:19:30] I can just work live. I've done this how many times?" Sometimes we get complacent with that. And I think that's what you have to remember to always be safe first.

Jaime: Has your work ever felt creative in nature?

Uchechi: Creative? I think our work is definitely creative, especially ... One thing I think we use our creativity is definitely in pipe bending. And I say that because you [00:20:00] can bend a pipe on where you can see a run and I may see it totally different. And then we may be partners and we come together and like, "You know what? This would work better. Let's do it this way." It's not that, we can look at a blueprint and they can tell us, "Okay, we want this from here to here." But they're not going to tell us we need a 90 here. We do have to definitely use our creativity.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Have you ever passed a tool down to someone or had a tool passed down to you?

Uchechi: Yes. Some channel [00:20:30] locks. Have I passed any down? Not yet. My time will come, though.

Barrie: Can you describe what channel locks are?

Uchechi: Huh?

Barrie: Can you describe what channel locks are?

Uchechi: Okay, channel locks are-

[crosstalk 00:20:40].

Uchechi: Okay. One of the journeymen at my first job named Paul, he gave them to me. And I had a pair that weren't satisfactory. They were some cheap tools. He said, "You know what? You need a good pair so I'm going to give you my old ones and I'm going to fix them up." And he put some like ... Channel locks, what we use them for is to, when we're doing [00:21:00] pipe, we can tighten things or open up. If you needed to open up a jar of spaghetti, you can use a channel lock if it's big enough. But we normally use that to tighten pipes or loosen pipes or whatever. Yeah, he passed those down to me. And I don't use them now. I do have them at home, but I'm going to keep them.

Jaime: Do you remember what it felt like when you received them?

Uchechi: You know what? It's nice. I've also had someone [00:21:30] ... When you first come in as an apprentice, you're not making great money. And one thing that you really need, you need good tools and you need good shoes. And I didn't have good shoes. I mean, the guys that I work with, they have bought me shoes. Things that you wouldn't think that

they would do, but that's what it's about, looking out for each other. I was fortunate enough to get with people who, in the beginning, really looked out for apprentices.

Jaime: [00:22:00] You spoke a little bit about money and being paid or underpaid. Do you feel that electricians are underpaid, fairly paid, or overpaid?

Uchechi: Okay.

Jaime: and why?

Uchechi: Which part of electricians? Are you talking about journey people or apprentices or ...

Jaime: Speak to your own condition or ...

Uchechi: I'll break it down like this. An apprentice, [00:22:30] if you're an 18 year old kid and you're starting. \$11 is what I started, \$11.50 an hour. And you're at home and you have no bills, that's actually phenomenal money. But for me, my situation was different. To have two children at the time and \$11 and to be separated from my husband. I was basically just doing everything. I'm still trying to figure out how I got where I am now. [00:23:00] It's not the worst pay, because at the time I think minimum wage when I started might have been \$7 or maybe \$6.50. I'm not even sure. We're not getting paid minimum wage, but it wasn't, it wasn't what I needed. But you find a way to make it work for what you want because you have to also look at, they're giving us a free education. How many jobs can you go in and be able to work and earn money and [00:23:30] then go to school for free? It's definitely a perk,

Me, when I was going to school to do nursing, I had to take out loans. If I didn't work, I had to live off those loans as well. That just created debt. This job, that doesn't do that. That's a plus side. For me to say it's not enough money, in some aspects no, but if you look at the big picture it does pan out.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Cool. [00:24:00] I'll back track a little bit. You mentioned that union workers look out for each other and that's what we do or something. What does it mean to be a union member?

Uchechi: Well, to me a union member is definitely solidarity. We're supposed to have that. For us to teach each other, even you have some older guys that they might not know things about solar panels. We're younger, we're coming in and then [00:24:30] we're learning different work. We can teach you, you can teach us. Union work means sticking together. It means making sure that conditions are fair for us and not letting things just go. Sometimes you work at places and you know that this wrong and no one's saying anything.

Also, when that person, because it takes one voice, and if that one voice says something that we need to [00:25:00] make sure that that one voice is not lost, that we're all on board. We know that, okay, this is what's supposed to be done and we want to keep that where it is. Also, as a union worker, you will have people who they may take their



union for granted. In that shanty when we're having a coffee break or lunch, you might have to be the voice to say, "Listen, no." There's a lot of things that the union is. We're progressing [00:25:30] and the world has changed. It's not like 40 years ago, where even if I get into homosexuality on the job, it would be okay then to say jokes that are very inappropriate. But now, for me, I took classes on it and I have friends, so if I hear those type of conversations, we can't do that and I'm not okay with that and I don't want to hear that. When I'm in the shanty, that [00:26:00] doesn't happen here. Okay? And I'll look them dead in their eyes and I will be done with that because, you know what? Everyone in this room has a right to feel secure. I think we have to also remember to put ourselves in other people's shoes. That's what part of a union is as well.

Jaime: What's your favorite Local Three tradition?

Uchechi: Favorite tradition? [00:26:30] I really, really, really, really like the union meetings. Some people can't stand them, but I get to see everybody. I love the union meetings. I love the clubs. I love the clubs. We have tons of clubs.

Barrie: What club are you in?

Uchechi: Well, I'm not in any. Well, actually, I am in one. I'm in the Bronx Acorn. And that's in Throg's Neck and we meet every third Tuesday of the month? Do you know Bronx Acorn?

Jaime: Well, yeah, I know [00:27:00] people that are in it.

Uchechi: Okay.

Jaime: I haven't been to one of their meetings yet, though.

Uchechi: Okay, so you have to come.

Jaime: [crosstalk 00:27:07] invite.

Uchechi: And we have events. What happens too is it's a place where sometimes some older journeymen, also retirees, they come to the meeting hall and they're able to catch abreast of what's going on. Say if there's someone who is unemployed and they might be going through some hardships. If you're at the club meeting, [00:27:30] you're a member, they'll make sure we look out for you. Those kinds of things. I do love the club traditions and I think it also gives ... It also gives people a place because Local 3 is now a melting pot. You want to have something where you're comfortable as well. We're all connected, interconnected in some way, but we all have our differences. Say if you're in the Catholic club, but that doesn't mean you have to be Catholic. But you can [00:28:00] say, "Well, you know I have things in common with these people, but we're always opening our arms for others to come in."

Jaime: What are your aspirations as an electrician?

Uchechi: Okay, for me, I am really leaning towards ... I would love, love, love to be a shop steward. And a lot of people say, "Shop steward, that's for lazy people." And it's not that. Shop steward, to me, is the exact opposite. [00:28:30] One of my close friends, she's a shop steward and I came into a job where it was very, they say political job. You would understand what that means. It's like a union job and it's straight union. Everything is going to be, safety is very important and you're encouraged to join clubs or be ... This is what union is. It's not a small job, it's a big scale job. I've gotten to meet some really great people that way.

And the shop stewards at the job, [00:29:00] the shop steward, he was very, very inviting. He made sure the apprentices were good. He made sure that conditions were good. He was always on the job site. He was always keeping us up to date. He was at every single meeting. We have meetings on Fridays. He was there. Each shop has their own meetings, so he has to attend all of those. He has to walk around and look for safety issues. He has to report back to the union hall. We get off at 2:30, 3:30 sometimes. The shop [00:29:30] steward is not off. He has to go to the union hall. He has to meet with Chris Erickson there. There is a bunch of things. They have to know all the rules. They have to read a lot. When we do our collective bargaining, they have to be there.

I think, every shop steward that I have really spoken to, I realize the good ones, it's a 24/7 job. They are beat down tired. But I [00:30:00] respect their job, because without them then who is there to make sure that things are being run properly? Where's the checks and balances going to be? And also to be a shop steward, you have to have integrity. You can't just say, "You know what? I don't want to ruffle any feathers." That's the hardest thing about being a shop steward. You might not be liked because you're doing the right thing.

Barrie: Have you seen that in action?

Uchechi: [00:30:30] Oh definitely and as a shop steward ... One of my friends, she's a woman but she's has the attitude where she doesn't care. She's like, "Look, they're not going to like me and I don't care. But guess what? When they see me, they can talk whatever they want to, but they know, don't do this, this, and this. And I'm not having it." And it's a responsibility that I think is definitely not easy.

Jaime: [00:31:00] If you could change something about your job, what would it be?

Uchechi: What would I change? Well, I can't ... That's not an easy one. Let me think. You know what? When you become an electrician, it's kind of like, I don't know if you feel like it becomes part of you? It's you. My name is Uchechi and I'm an electrician. [00:31:30] That's part of my title. Like I was born to be that way. It kind of feels that way. But I think the thing that I would like to keep, I would say, not change, or maybe make better for lack of a better word, I want us all to be on board for the cause.

I want us all to realize what a gem that we have here. I want us not to take for granted [00:32:00] our jobs. To work hard. To make sure that you're really paying attention to

what you're doing and not just using it as, "Okay, I'm here to make whatever money." But love what you do and do what you do because it's not just your safety, but it's the person who's going to plug that light switch in that outlet safety. To think of it that way. Not to just throw something in the air and not think maybe 20 years from now, [00:32:30] it may not be secure. That's what I want to change. I want to change the attitude of some of my fellow workers because they're so stuck on the things of, "Oh, well, in the eighties we made so much money and now we don't, so F this." And it's not that. What if the doctors felt that way? You know what I'm saying?

They used to make a lot of money in the eighties and the nineties and now they're not making the money that they used to. [00:33:00] I think that's what I would change, our attitudes.

Jaime: Are there times where your work has felt particularly meaningful?

Uchechi: You know what? I think ... I'm laughing because yeah, definitely. Especially when you have a deadline to meet and you have to ... I remember we working at the MTV building and we needed to have everything done. And when you're working, now this is a finished floor, [00:33:30] so it's a finished floor and everything has to be neat and you can't leave any marks on the walls. To me, that was meaningful because, okay, my boss came to me. He's like, "Listen, I need all of this done by this evening." I'm like, "Oh no, I got to get all of this done and it's only me and one other person." And they're stuck trying to do one thing and I had to make it happen and I did. It felt good.

Jaime: [00:34:00] Does your work ever merge with your home or personal life?

Uchechi: Yes, because even though I don't discuss, it is very hard, especially as an apprentice, but even not. In general, we wake up maybe four, four thirty some of us, five if we're lucky. You come in, even if you get off at 2:30, 3:30, you might not be home till four or five o'clock. You're dead tired. [00:34:30] Sometimes you don't have time to spend with family the way you would like to or you can't give your all. Yes, the weekends, having the weekends off is definitely a blessing and I love that. But that's your time to do your errands, so you might not have the social life that you would want to have. That's where it kind of spills over into your home life or your family or your friends. And people don't understand. They don't get like, "Okay, [00:35:00] I make my calls between six and seven o'clock in the morning. And after that you may not hear from me." But that's just what it is. They don't get that.

Speaker 2: In the future, do you think your children or members of your community will be doing the same kind of work?

Uchechi: Well, my son who is 13, he is definitely interested. I'm going to push him towards what he wants to do. And that's kind of exciting to [00:35:30] me, because we'll still be doing it at the same time so I can kind of give him a heads up on everything.

Jaime: She just said she wants to....

Uchechi: Girl, you got a lot of time.

Jaime: Yeah, she's excited about it. What advice would you give somebody starting out in the field?

Uchechi: Okay, so the advice that I would give. Definitely do not take your schooling, the schooling part for granted. Sometimes we, I mean, all [00:36:00] apprentices, we kind of feel like, "Oh, this school thing is just like Why? Why can't I just learn on the job? Why do I have to go to school? I'm tired. It's five o'clock or it's four o'clock. I don't want to be here in this college class and this." We don't like that part. We're tired, obviously. But it is important. You know with the college thing, especially too because it broadens your horizon and makes you think different. Especially when you're in the [00:36:30] BA program, you get to experience a side of labor that you necessarily will never get. Some people do not know the history of labor and that needs to be touched on. These classes, I believe, should even if you're in an associate program, you should be learning this. You shouldn't be doing this work and you don't know the history. They don't know about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fires. They don't know about how women started [00:37:00] picketing and organization. They just know, especially the younger ones that they're just here, now. And that's how we get lost, not knowing our history. The schooling side is something that we kind of hate, but we need it. We need it.

Jaime: What inspires you?

Uchechi: What inspires me? [00:37:30] My children. And I say that because I think everything I do is for them. Everything. I get up at five or 4:30 or sometimes I've gotten up at three for them, for them to see that if you want it, you got to go for it. You can't be the one sitting around at home watching television all day because then it's not going to come to you. And to not [00:38:00] be afraid to fail at it because your failures, you will learn from them all. I kind of like failed at nursing. But you know what? That didn't count me out. That just let me know when you go for something else, you have to go a little bit harder.

Jaime: I think that's all the questions that I have. Great. You want to ask anything else, Barrie?

Barrie: No, I think you did great. Thank you.

Uchechi: Thank you.

Jaime: Do you have anything else [00:38:30] you want to add?

Uchechi: I can't wait for people to listen to this years from now. I'm an African American woman and I'm in the union. And maybe, I'm hoping that the way things are now and we have Donald Trump as the president and I'm hoping that we stick together as union members across the board to make sure that this does not end. And this is just [00:39:00] a little road block in where we have to be and where we're going to go. And that we get across to the corporate side that unions are important for all of our survival, it's not just about us. It's about our children. It's about that woman who's sitting behind the desk who

doesn't realize that we set precedent for how much they get paid. I don't think people see that. I don't [00:39:30] want this to get lost in the shuffle.

Jaime: Cool. We're working for that. Thank you so much.

Uchechi: Thank you.

Jaime: I will shut off the recorder.