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URSULA BURNS INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
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Ursula Burns
CEO, Xerox (2009-2016)
September 30, 2011
Interviewed by Chris Durrance
Total Running Time: minutes and seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

Ursula Burns
CEO, Xerox (2009-2016)

INTERVIEWER:

Let's start with your family and childhood. Why don't you tell me where you grew up?

00:00:10:00

URSULA BURNS:

I grew up in in New York City, actually in the real part of the city, Manhattan. I grew up in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the housing projects on Delancey St. and it was with my mother, my older brother, and my younger sister and myself, in a small apartment. I was born in 1958 and we—we lived our whole life in this, in this area up until my mother died, when she died in 1983. And so it was at the beginning of... it was like in the heart of the civil rights era. It was in the middle of the time when everything was changing. I mean, John Kennedy was killed, Martin Luther King was killed. Robert

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Kennedy was killed all in the time that I was... You know, 10 by the time I was 10 years old.

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URSULA BURNS:

Color TV was just coming in. It's really odd time. You know, we had party line phones and we were moving from party line phones to you can get your own phone number. So it was a lot of change, a lot of change, both social change, economic change, rights of women were being discussed more actively. Obviously rights of Blacks were being discussed and pushed more actively. So it was a time of turbulence, but a lot of opportunity, a lot of opportunity. We were very poor. My mother was a single parent. We were very, very poor. And I mean we weren't wearing rags in the street, but we were struggling to, you know, keep the place that we lived and— to my mother was struggling to to feed us properly and make sure that we got a good education. And you know, I realized that when I, when I was about 16 years old, I realized that but before that it was fine with me. Everything was great. My mother was... Obviously struggling, but she didn't really impart all of that uncertainty, uncertainty to us. So we actually had a pretty good... a pretty good childhood. It was just not one of a lot of material things.

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URSULA BURNS:

The projects then, which I think may be pretty much the way it is now... So, I was born on 2nd street, in Avenue D, not in the projects, in what we call the tenement housing.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Tenement Housing

Lower East Side, New York City

URSULA BURNS:

In those tenement housing— it's pretty famous, there's a whole museum about them now, tenement housing. And when I was about seven or eight, maybe nine, we moved from tenement housing to the projects. And this was an amazing step up. Tenement housings are very old, very like railroad apartments, so you enter the kitchen and then you walk through... you go to... off to the hallway is the bathroom, the next room is the living room. Walk through the living room to the bedroom, walk through the next. To that bedroom to the next. So it's not, it's not like it is now. You literally have to walk through rooms to get to the next room. We lived there for a while. It was entirely too small. It was definitely unsafe and the buildings were very old and needed repair. And when we got accepted into— because you applied to go to the projects, when we got accepted to go into the projects, it was like, I don't know if you know the show to Jefferson's moving on up. We were moving on up from the really bad to the bad.

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URSULA BURNS:

When we moved into the projects, we had a little bit bigger house, a little bit bigger apartment. But it was really difficult because these buildings were built many years before, so maybe 15 years before. And you know, hundreds of people lived in them. Elevators were always broken down, always broken

down. People slept in the stair- in the stairwells, people used the bathroom in the stairwells. It was really... we used to have burn incinerators where you would bring your stuff and throw them and they would burn it. And then they...after a while they had to stop that because people threw everything down those incinerators, and obviously you couldn't burn everything. So it was a, it was a place of just physical disrepair and relatively unsafe because you had these very tall buildings, kind of, they were a way to keep people in and that means good people and bad people. So, you know, so drugs. It was almost like living in an encampment.

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URSULA BURNS:

So drugs were rampant. Gangs were really big when I was growing up. Not as bad as now like the Crips and the Bloods and these guys, but they were like the start of street gangs with guns and knives and this kind of stuff. If you stayed away from them, you were safe. But it was a... it was a place where you needed to get through to get to a safe house. You know, which our place was a safe place. Great place. I mean nicely kept my mother was phenomenal. She was a great cook. It was always clean. We had order. But to get there, you had to kind of walk through all of this stuff and get there. And we learned how to obviously navigate it very well. But so it was, it's physically not the place that— if you went there today, I think it may be a little bit different. But if you went there when I was growing up, this would not be a place that you wanted to hang out at all. You would, you would walk in as a white man and people would say, "Yeah, he's a good mark." A good mark for something. So it was not safe. It was not a safe place, not clean place, didn't smell very good.

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INTERVIEWER:

Was it a family? Was it like a big community in some sense?

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Baruch Houses

Lower East Side, New York City

00:05:13:00

URSULA BURNS:

In this crazy place where when you describe it, it's actually worse than when you lived in it because when you lived in it, you just lived in it. You didn't sit back and say, "Oh my goodness, I'm walking past..." You just lived in it and you figured out your way. You know, you made due with what you... what you had. One of the famous sayings of one of my mentors. You make due with what you had. And so we never really, we were not afraid. You know, we ... Obviously there were scary situations all the time. You know, if you hear if you heard bullets or if you saw a fight, you just didn't get into it. You just moved past it or, you know, got inside and got safe. We didn't play wildly in the streets. It was nothing like that for our family. And by the way, there was a sense of community and family with, um, with close friends of ours. We were—We lived in a bad place, but we were not bad people. So this was just, you know, regular, regular Joes like you know, who lived in the with the picket fences. We just didn't have a picket fence. We just... but we had best friends who were, who had mothers and fathers in the building? Some people who had only fathers and mothers, but these were strong. Very many of the people

who lived in a neighborhood that I lived in and who associated with us, you know, who my mother knew, were just regular strong families.

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URSULA BURNS:

We just happened to have not as much economic means as others. But this was not like, you know, we were sent to run in the, you know, the abandoned lot or to play in the car, nothing like that. We had a regular, pretty standard family, you know, orders, rules, you had to do school work, you had chores, you know, regular stuff like that. You didn't... even in the suburbs you just didn't go out and, you know, run off, but you had to stay close to your family. So we didn't have... it wasn't... I think a lot of people actually think about the physical place and transpose that physical place to the people and say, well this is a crime ridden disorderly, disorganized place, and so these people must be that not at all not at all. I mean we... Most of the people who we knew were just trying hard to make a better life and we had fun. We went, you know, we went places. It was regular life, it wasn't that complicated.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about your parents.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Ursula Burns' Mother

00:07:20:00

URSULA BURNS:

My mother and my father was my mother, and we had a normal set of aunts and uncles and cousins who lived, not in our neighborhood, but around. And most of them lived in a better... better parts of town in Queens, which was like the country back then in Brooklyn. My mother was my entire parent in my whole parent structure, and she was very focused not on my father, because I learned when I was a little bit older, when I was about 16, that he was still alive. I mean, I knew he was alive, but I'm... I mean, I meant that I knew that he was around and that he had... he knew who we were and that he knew— He had sisters and brothers who kept an eye on us, kept an eye on us as a strong word, but knew what we were doing and so knew, you know—And he lived out in California.

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URSULA BURNS:

When I was 16 years old he called. My brother was 18. He called our house to speak to my brother for his 18th birthday. I actually happened to answer the phone. And that was the first time I ever spoke to him. And at that time, when I was 16 years old, I was obviously more lucid and logical and, you know, more reasonable, more adult. And he spoke to my brother, and my mother and I and my brother spoke about this, about what we would do with this call, you know, after the call, because after the call he wanted to meet us. And my mother was very clear and very dispassionate. Her statement was that he's your father and if you want to meet him, you should. And it really doesn't do anything to her or to our relationship. She didn't say it in those words, but it was to calm us and make sure that we knew that this was not something that she would object to.

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URSULA BURNS:

We ended up meeting, him not that day, but you know following that day and he ended up not surprising us in any way. And that's the best way to put it to be to be kind. So we after when I was 16 on, I kind of knew this guy was around and had his phone number. He was living in California. Had his phone number, we could actually reach out to him and we tried to on a couple of occasions. My brother tried more than I did and it was never a sustainable or sustaining intervention. So we just didn't— didn't pursue it, and I really didn't have a huge desire at all. It was... people actually can't believe this. I had no desire really to get to know this guy. I had no real interest in that, and that doesn't— that's not as much about him as it is about me and the relationship that I had with my mother and how complete, how complete of a parent my mother was and how nonjudgmental she was about this whole thing.

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URSULA BURNS:

And even though she had lots of reasons to not be pleasant about it, she was not at all unpleasant. She was... obviously it was emotionally impactful. And as you get older, you realize how much struggle it was a tremendous struggle. So, you know, when I was 16, I was more aware of how much, how much, how easy our life was and how difficult it was for her to make our life easy. And of course, as I knew that more, I became less and less interested in knowing this man because I just realized how much effort she had put in us and how much energy. Even though it seemed as though it was not hard, it was hugely hard for her. And so I just, you know, we, I continued. My mother was, for me and

my sister and my brother, extremely impactful. Most parents are, so this... But my mother was, I think, maybe a little different than most. She just didn't... She was so uninterested in herself. At least that's the way it seemed to us.

00:11:13:00

URSULA BURNS:

She was so interested in us and how we were doing and how we were going to do and lessons. But they weren't like, let's sit down and have a lesson. This was like life lessons, so she was very good. She was very good, very balanced. In hindsight, you know, that when you're when you're with her, it's like who the heck is this? You know she was... She was— when I was growing up she was a regular parent. She was a parent like I am you know I'm she was a pain in the rear end. She got in all your business. You know, all of the stuff that my kids now say I do. Yeah she was regular, and so you know now she seems like whenever I talk about it it's like a Saint. But she wasn't. She was just a regular woman walking down the street. But when— But she knew that her biggest— the biggest impact that she could have on the world, was to create three people who had good impact in the world. So that was her focus.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Ursula Burns' Mother, Olga Raquel Burns

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me more about her. Where is she from?

00:12:02:00

URSULA BURNS:

She was born and raised in Panama. She came to the United States with my father when she was 25 years old and... yeah about 25 years old, and my father served in the army. Panama was a US protectorate. They came from the Canal Zone. So it's actually probably US property at that time or I'm not sure the status, but he could come to the United States if he— People from Panama, men, could come to the United States if they joined and fought in some war for us, which I thought was an interesting way to get us here. And so he did, and he and she came and she finished—She was a High School graduate, she didn't finish college. My mother had an amazing way of saying things that obviously she didn't know that they would be repeated on TV or she would have used better grammar and probably wouldn't have cursed as much as she did. But she would... She would... she was pretty frank. I'm very frank as well. She was very frank. And she— she was forceful in the way that she spoke. And she would yell, obviously, and she would do all the normal things that a parent do, did, does.

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URSULA BURNS:

But she would say things... She would try to... try to tell us— And most of these sayings that she had came out when she was trying to teach us how to live, which was every day, what then, You know, obviously she's trying to teach us how to live every day, but there were examples of like of important moments where she would where she would make statements. One of her famous things that she said over and over and over again to me and to my brother and my sister. But when I was thinking of applying to colleges, I applied to all these like really wild ass colleges. I mean, they were crazy

colleges. You know, I said oh, I'm going to apply to Columbia, I'm going to apply to Yale, I'm going to apply to Polytechnic Institute of New York, I'm going to apply to all these colleges. And I and, you know, I looked in these books and realized that they were all highly competitive, like the most competitive colleges, and they all cost a lot of money. And then I had second thoughts. And I would say to my mother, I said to my mother one day, you know, and I think I messed up because I'm actually applying to all these colleges.

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URSULA BURNS:

It's very unlikely. What happens if I don't get in? And my mother said to me, "All you have to worry about is 1 acceptance." That's all. They'll have to make one acceptance in your favor. Everybody else is not of interest to you, so you have to position yourself well with that one acceptance for that one acceptance. So you have to write essays, very much like today, fill out the application and all through this process she said to me just make sure that you worry about your— it's not about anybody else it's all about your one acceptance. Another time she would always tell me... I said what happens if this happens to me. She says Max, my middle name is Maxine and my family calls me Max. Max or Maxine. That's me. Maxine or Max, things happen to you. You have to worry, but make sure that you happen to things, right. And it was... and she said this all the time. You know, dont—This is not about victim, being a victim or sitting back and worrying about things happening to you.

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URSULA BURNS:

Take the initiative and make sure that you can head things off and so that you happen to things, and make sure when you happen to things that or things— or people, etcetera— that you happen to them in a positive way. And it was... So, you know, obviously when she said these things, I would roll my eyes and go, yeah, yeah, another. But as you know, as you get older, you realize these are very important lessons. You do. You could sit back and let a whole bunch of stuff happen to you. But you can also head things off and take initiative and make sure that you have some say in the kind of things that become a part of your reality and an important part of your life. And she was really, really into that. About us having control and us, my brother, my sister and I making sure that we knew how good we were and this wasn't... Today, I think we've actually gotten crazy on this. Like every kid has to win everything. That wasn't it at all.

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URSULA BURNS:

Every kid has to be, you know, go to the most amazing school and get— it wasn't any of that. It was about assuring that you had the right temperament and approach to life. So that, she would always say to me, you must leave behind more than you take in any situation, leave behind more than you take. And if you can do that, it'll add up to a good life over time. But if you continually go into places and remove stuff and leave voids, then your life will not be successful. You would not be a good person. And that was another one that comes back to... comes back often when I think about just any situation.

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Just make sure that you kind of try to leave, not a trail of dead bodies, a trail of live, you know, enthusiastic people.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Ursula Burns

1960s

INTERVIEWER:

What was your favorite thing to do with her? What's your fun? I mean, your best memory of that?

00:17:03:00

URSULA BURNS:

My mother was a serial bargain hunter. We didn't have a lot of money, so she would go to like flea markets and stuff like that and so walking— I remember and you know the trains and the buses cost like 10 cents, 10 or five cents, so whatever that... whatever it was, it was like either 5 or 10 or went from 5 to 10 when I was growing up and then it went to 20, and now it's \$2.20. It's amazing, but she would... we would have to walk to most places and you know, our world was obviously very small. I lived on 3rd St and Avenue D or Delancey street. I think we could walk as far as 14th St., which is where Maze was, maze and gimballs. And walk—I remember, I hated shopping with her. I hated it. But I loved walking to the places with her, and so that's what we would do. We would walk. When we— when I was younger, five or six or seven, my mother would, she was a daycare worker, so kids would be delivered to our house. Then she would have to— she was certified as a

daycare worker. And these are middle class families' kids who needed after school, or pre school, or before school care or they were young enough to stay in the house all day.

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URSULA BURNS:

She got paid per child by the state. It was good, but it wasn't enough money to to really make due, so she would always clean offices. She would do— So we got our dental care by cleaning the dentist's office, and we got our medical care by cleaning the doctor, Doctor Gerstein, I remember his name. I don't remember the dentist's name, by cleaning Doctor Gerstein's office. And when we went in there, we had to sit. Because she had nobody to take care of us when she was cleaning, you know, she took care of other people's kids and then after they left, she would go clean the office. We would have to go with her and sit in the offices and we could not move. My brother, my sister and I, we have to sit there and she would be doing her thing and we'd be having...she'd be yelling at us to stay still and sit down. And that was a good set of memories. It was really interesting how torturous it was. It was probably for an hour, right? I mean, it's the— But it seemed like it was for all day we were in this damn place just sitting quietly in these chairs because we couldn't mess anything up. And those were things, those are the kind of things that come to mind.

INTERVIEWER:

You talked about going to college.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Ursula Burns

Cathedral High School, New York City, 1976

INTERVIEWER:

Was that a big decision for you? Was that something that was part of your background?

00:19:17:00

URSULA BURNS:

Yeah, going to college for my brother and my sister and I, for our family, was not a big decision at all. It was not optional. It was a normal part of our conversation in our house. It was just you're going to go to high school and you're going to go to college, and what are you going to do when you finish college? It was that type of discussion, very, very standard. Little did I know that, and now I know it because I had to do it with my kids, that there are other things you should contemplate when you're trying to figure out what college you're going to go to, like how far it is away from home, whether you can pay for it. You know, this is a kind of a real thing, right? We never had a conversation about whether you could pay for it. Never. Fortunately not because it would have, I think, clearly limited my choices. I don't know what my mother was thinking. My mother was thinking that we would get a scholarship. I don't know, because we never had conversations like you're going to get a scholarship or you have to get a scholarship to go to this college. It was just a, you know, go to, you do well in school, grade school, high school, and then you go to college.

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URSULA BURNS:

So that's what we did. We did well. You know, we went and I went to college, and it was... I applied and fortunately someone paid for it. But we never really talked about it at all. And I got into a number of colleges and I chose Brooklyn Polytech— It was called Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute at the time. Now it's called Polytechnic Institute of NYU as part of NYU. It's a total engineering college, engineering and science college. You know, they obviously taught English and stuff like that, but this was not what you went to that school for. You went to school to study math, to study the sciences, to study engineering. And I got into the school on what they call a higher education opportunity program scholarship, and it's called HEOP and HEOP is what— it's a program that, I think it still runs, that is for people who are not ready to go to college. So you go to college.

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URSULA BURNS:

I went the first year of Poly, and I had taken... I did well on the SAT's and I had taken like a precalculus class and I had taken a chemistry class, and a biology class, and a physics class in high school. But these were like what my kids take in freshman year really or— or 9th grade, 8th grade. I mean it was to that level of intensity and depth. So when I walked into Poly, you know, they test you before you come in in the HEOP program. We had to go to school in the summer in the HEOP program. When I came in I was definitely well behind the students there. Most of the students came from Bronx Science or Stuyvesant went to my school, which are the two premier science high

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schools in the United—in New York City and probably in the United States. So I... and here I come from Cathedral high school, which is an all girl Catholic school, who had some classes occasionally in sciences, but and I was definitely well behind.

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URSULA BURNS:

I remember coming into college and the guys had in their pocket slide rules and mechanical pencils. I always remember this, and one of the first things that I got as a gift for a summer program, because I would always talk about these slide rules, was a slide rule, and I could only use it for like a day or two because the TI calculator came out after that that only added, you know, the four function calculator came out, and it took me years to get that. I couldn't get a TI calculator for a while. But anyway... But when I went to college, I was clearly behind. And this program had a lot of support for students that were behind and they gave you a stipend and you had to do, you had to work, you do some work with, you know, tutor somebody or whatever. But I quickly caught up and after the first semester of college. I did great in the first semester. I had totally caught up and I was now a tutor. I was a... like a very high level tutor for other HEOP kids, but for other kids in general. I worked really hard in college.

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URSULA BURNS:

I was a very good, very good student and I... and being behind helped me to gain a place. It was interesting. Having a deficiency by the standards of the educational structure there helped me gain a position, a unique position,

because I was just like Wonder Kid, you know, my goodness, this person came in and couldn't read and now she can read. Obviously I could read, but it was one of those things. So I was paraded out often and picked out often. It was good.

INTERVIEWER:

Is this where you found your voice?

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URSULA BURNS:

I found my voice. I became aware of the fact that I had some special things when I was in high school. I went to an all girl Catholic High School and it was a great place to go to school. So we didn't have the worry of boys running around the halls. We, you know, dressing for them. We wore a uniform. So we had a— My high school is still there, I actually just went back to it not too long ago. It's a great place because you can focus on— In your free time, instead of focusing on the boys in the hallway. Obviously we'd focus on other things, but let's— I'm going to use that as an analogy. We focused on issues. We had, you know, we would talk about all kinds of things. I remember we had a project to try to figure out— This was— So this was 72 to 76— The national budget, and we had to make a recommendation. For how we would redo the budget of the United States of America.

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URSULA BURNS:

And at that time, I mean who the heck knew. All we knew— I didn't even know how much it was until they gave us, you know, we did research and so

on and it was obviously huge. It was more money than you can imagine. And I remember we, I had a little team with three of us, three of us doing this work. We were all groups of three, and we decided that we were going to take 50% of the money away from defense because it was the biggest portion of the budget. I remember the nun asking me, we were taught by nuns, why did we do that? And I said, well, because it was so big we would cut it in half. And she said, "Well, it's probably— it may be big because you needed it. Because we need it." And so we should do some research on what does it do exactly. And so we had this kind of work to do. It was... we were... it was a great school and so it actually compelled us to stand up. And you know, it wasn't wild, you know, marches or anything like that. But it was more about just thinking. It was a thinking school.

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URSULA BURNS:

It was a thinking school, not a road school. And it was great. And so we didn't get—We learned how to read, we learned how to write very read critically, how to write very well, how to analyze, how to do basic functions, you know, like math, how to structure a sentence. And it was... we didn't get into all this other fancy stuff. It was before computers. It was before sports, we didn't have sports. We had to play— We had gym and it was in the back. You know, it was a concrete place behind the school. We played dodgeball like for 15— I mean, it was nothing like it is today. And it was very school based and it was basic education. That was where I first learned because I had a lot of supporting girlfriends and it was all of us who were girls. We didn't— That's where I learned to kind of rise up. And then when I went to college I learned

to rise up because I was smart. I was smart. I was smarter than people thought I was. I don't know how smart I was purely but people actually thought I was— couldn't do it.

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URSULA BURNS:

So I was smarter than they thought I was. So I always—I had a voice therefore, because people were surprised, and I learned from my mother that if you have a chance to speak, you should speak. If you have an opinion, you should make it be known. My mother would always say to me that I was wrong and strong 90% of the time. Meaning that I had... I was totally off base but I did it with forcefulness. Right? He says, "You're wrong and strong," and like I should watch out for that. So I did. You know, as I got older and older I watched out for being wrong and strong. You want to be right and strong. And so anyway it was a good time. I learned my voice throughout my life and there's a point where you can't go back. This is all you know. I don't know when that was, but this is all I know. You know, this idea of having less to lose than to gain in an attempt.

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URSULA BURNS:

And so I really did— I tried a lot of things. I tried, you know, there's a lot of things, you know, traveled a lot. As soon as I had a chance to travel, most of it for work, I was all for it. Going— somebody would say do this job, I'd sure, why not try it. More to gain than there is to lose in most endeavors, I think. And so I learned that from my mother.

INTERVIEWER:

And why business? Why do you choose to head towards business?

00:28:19:00

URSULA BURNS:

Well, I actually didn't make a choice. I didn't say Oh, I think I... you know, nowadays this is what they do. These kids actually come in and say, "well, I'm going to do this for a little while and then choose..." When I came into work at Xerox, I just chose to work. So they said, how about this? And I said, "Ok, well I'll go do that in the lab." And how about this? I'd go do that. And somebody said to me, "well, how about this? How about doing some business planning?" You know, pricing and such. Yeah, sure, why not? So I didn't make a— there was not like a conscious choice. I said, well, I think I should now move from this to that. It was... At Xerox, we call it the true diversity, opportunity and hard work, right. So I had just a lot of opportunities to do all kinds of things. Some of those had to do with business, some of those had to do with tech, on the technical side. And I tried both. I did them, some of them both together. When I was managing an engineering program, you had to kind of do both things together. So I didn't, I never made a conscious choice. I said I'm going to flip from here to there.

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URSULA BURNS:

There was a point that my acumen started leaning more towards larger global systems problems in the company and systems problem is the business. It's how do you take the customer, the environment, the technology you have the internal and how do you put that together in a solution that

makes it that's better, the best for your shareholders and for your employees and for your customers? That's a systems problem. So in systems problems, I like that, those types of like challenges, complex challenges, so that's the business and so you get to go to that sort to that end because that was where I excelled, I guess.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Ursula Burns With Xerox Employees

INTERVIEWER:

It seemed like you had a big break. There's this thing on work, life balance, there's a meeting on diversity and you're there with Wayland Hicks. Can you tell me about that?

00:30:11:00

URSULA BURNS:

Yeah, I had a couple of defining moments in my career that people would call big breaks. I called them a little bit more defining moments. The first one was my first job, and that was when I was given a lab, and a guy who worked for me, his name was Dick Schick, he was a phenomenal lab technician. He's one of these... You know, he was older than I was, more experienced than I was, and he was a tech. So that means he was a specialist in making things work. You know, design. You know, I would design an experiment and he would have to kind of figure out a way to build it. Working, having somebody work for me, this guy was smarter than I could ever be about what he did. And I remember walking into work thinking, you know, I remember this big, I'm a

highfalutin engineer and I'm going to, I have a lab. And Dick Schick taught me more about life. This like... To make sure you understand what you really know and how really things get done. That was one big moment for me. The 2nd defining moment was when I met my— This is the time that I had met my husband.

00:31:11:00

URSULA BURNS:

He wasn't my husband and obviously he was— He wasn't even my boyfriend then. We weren't dating. He was— I was walking up and down the halls and I worked in a research lab and in order to get to the cafeteria you had to walk past all these offices, all these labs and offices. I did this for like 2 years up and down the hall. One day this guy walks out and says. You know, you walk up and down the halls all the time and you never stop and engage with— with them, the rest of the people. And so that's why I met my husband. He said kind of step out. There's other stuff that's happening and he's the one who said there's going to be a quality of QWLC, quality of work life council meeting coming up, why don't you come to this meeting? And I had the same kind of approach to these kinds of things I have— not quality of work life. I mean, you got to be joking me. What am I going to? Was this going to be like a prayer meeting or kumbaya session? And anyway, I went. I went with him, I thought he was kind of cute. So I actually went with him because I was flirting a little bit.

00:32:08:00

URSULA BURNS:

And at that meeting there was a man, his name was Wayland Hicks, who ran all of the internal functions of the company, basically development, manufacturing, that kind of those kinds of functions. And he was doing a round table, a big quality of work life session where he was kind of listening to employees and, you know, they were telling him how they felt, their gripes, what was making them happy. And he was then responding and somebody was taking notes, etcetera. We're trying to figure out a way to, you know, they were trying to figure out a way to get people, workers together to make this cafeteria better or whatever. And one of the people who raised their hands asked a question about, quote unquote, bringing in all of these women and minorities to the workplace. And that since these women and minorities didn't have as good an education or as good a background as non-women and minorities, what did he think about the fact that it was lowering the standards of— lowering the performance and the standards and performance of the company.

00:33:10:00

URSULA BURNS:

So it was kind of a not a very good question to actual women and minorities in the room, but this person obviously didn't seem to care a whole lot. Wayland Hicks actually answered the question in a very, like, nonchalant way. Good answer. And I was almost as insulted with him answering the question the way that he answered it as with the person who asked the question. It was so I saw, you know, my I went up to Wayland or maybe in the meeting spoke up and said— it was in the meeting. I spoke up and said, “You know, I'm actually surprised that you answered the question. It is, you know, I'm

actually astonished, astonished that you would give it any time of day.” And you know, so on, so on, so on. We went back and forth for a little while. Meeting is over. My husband, who wasn't my husband then, as I said, comes up to me. He said, did you know who that guy was that you were all over in the meeting? I was all over him, and I said no. He said, “Well, his name is Wayland Hicks and he runs the place.” I said, well, the worst that can happen is I have to look for another job.

00:34:13:00

URSULA BURNS:

And so, you know, I didn't think a whole lot about it. I did worry a little bit about it, but didn't think a whole lot about it. The next day, Wayland Hicks had his admin call me. He found out who I was and had his admin call me to come to his office. I had to come to his office, not that day, but like Friday. Let's say this is Wednesday, and so now I have from Wednesday to Friday to sweat about being fired on Friday. Friday came and I walked into this office and Wayland had this big standup desk, and he did all his work standing up and he had on his wall a big poster about— because we were being attacked by competitors at this time, some of the Japanese competitors. He had a big saying, a very aggressive saying on the wall. I remember walking in here going, oh, this is going to be really a great meeting, and he, it was a great meeting, he said, “I thought about, I've been thinking about what you said, and you were right that I could have approached this answer differently to make it clearer that the question was inappropriate. But the way that you answered, the way that you approached this was probably not the best way to approach it.”

00:35:19:00

URSULA BURNS:

And from there and so we— so from there we had a back and forth and we had a back and forth that lasts to this day. Wayland is still a very good friend of mine, personally, and a friend of my family's as well. And it was— this was a very big moment, not because of that all alone, but because through this time... So I got to know Wayland, he asked me to be his executive assistant a couple of years later, like 8 years later or seven years later, he always was kind of around. He asked me to be his executive assistant. And when I was his executive assistant, I got to know Paul Allaire, who's the chairman. Paul asked me to be his executive assistant and that I got placed on the task force to help redesign the company. I got a job out of. I mean, so that was— This whole encounter with Wayland was the start of a lot of things that came. But the other thing, it was not only that encounter, Wayland and I are like black and white.

00:36:18:00

URSULA BURNS:

We are like night and day. We have very little in common. This is a middle American conservative Republican guy who— and I am a urban New York City liberal as the day comes, Democratic as the day comes, person. Black, very clear set of beliefs about what's good and what's bad and so on, and so is he. And it was interesting that I could form a friendship with somebody who was so different. We argued about everything, about war, about civil, you name it, we argued about it. You know, obviously this man has a good heart and it was not, you know, we have different opinions. We just... So it was a

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good defining, teachable moment for me that you could actually like, respect, more than just work with, somebody who was so different in just about every way that you can imagine. But a lot of commonality. So it was a defining moment not only in work, it was also a defining moment personally for me.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Ursula Burns

WICT Leadership Conference, October 4th, 2011

INTERVIEWER:

When do you think you had it in you to get to the top?

00:37:22:00

URSULA BURNS:

The 1st 20 years of my career, I actually didn't even think about it. It wasn't even a thought. I think in the 1st 10 years, I didn't even know that there was a CEO in the company. I mean, we just came in and we came to work. CEO was so far away. It's very different than it is today. When they're all over, we're all over TV and you can Google us and you know they write out, you know, write everything about us. We are... It wasn't like that then. So you know I had two levels up or three levels up of a boss was like God to us. We didn't have these CEO guys running all over the place, or girls running all over the place. After, you know, I got to be more senior when I became like a chief engineer, when I managed a big product program, I realized I... the levels obviously got higher and I realized that there was a CEO. But even then, I had very little interest in that life. I was really interested in the job I was doing and the next couple of

jobs. After I got into expanding out of engineering and got into pricing and had to do more and more presentations about business value and these types of things, that's when I realized it was a CEO. But even then I said, yeah, you know, odds are— I didn't even think about it that way. It was just, yeah, they're, they're there and I'm and I'm here.

00:38:37:00

URSULA BURNS:

During this transition, when I was working for Paul, when he was the CEO, early in my when I was working for Wayland, and then when I was working for Paul, I realized what they did, what these executives did. I remember saying to Wayland one day, we were flying home from some God awful trip, which we did a lot of on a commercial airline in coach, and I... We're talking about a guy and I said I can do this guy's job with my eyes closed and I make a quarter of what he makes. You should just give me the job. And it was one of my smart aleck remarks about something, and I wasn't trying to be smart aleck. It just came out that way. He said, no, you have to, you don't have credibility. You know, so you have the know how and so on, but you have to have credibility. You have to have people follow you. You have to be able to create followship and you couldn't do that quite yet. That was when I started to realize that, during that time frame, the difference between me and them, whoever they are, were not that big. Not that I was like super smart or anything, but that they were just human beings. They just—With a lot of experience who had good outcomes throughout their career.

00:39:40:00

URSULA BURNS:

I mean they did their job well. And then when I started working for Paul, I met for the first time formally Vernon Jordan, who was on our board and I got to fly with him, our CEO and some other board members, on a plane going to a board meeting in Brussels and on this... So Vernon and I had a conversation on this plane and it was a pretty standard conversation. I was totally and completely intimidated. It was amazing because I kind of knew who this guy was because he's pretty famous. He was pretty famous back then. He's still famous now. But famous back then, he's a Black civil rights leader. This guy was pretty impressive. He's a huge guy, and he was talking to me and he gave me reading a reading assignment, and he wrote me a letter afterwards and asked if I had done my reading assignment and we started to conver— to converse whenever I would go to board meetings or have to be around the board when there was a board meeting. And he reinforced something that I kind of thought, which was that I was pretty good and that yeah there's— He never said, “You can be the CEO.” He said you know just you're pretty good.

00:40:50:00

URSULA BURNS:

It was always like a positive word or positive glimmer. And then about five years into that I realized, yeah, I could probably— I have— because CEO is about accomplishment. You got to do the work. It's a lot about timing. I mean the timing has to be right. If you're in the wrong timing, your age, the current CEO's age, what opens up? You know, it's it just so that it's about things that you can contribute to and then a whole bunch of other things you have no timing luck, you know, whatever the heck it is. So I kind of realized I had the capacity about 10 years ago, and I realized that I had the possibilities about

eight years ago. And then of course, you know. So it worked out well. It could have worked out well from a CEO perspective. It could have just as easily been that I was a senior executive in the company and happy as well. So another senior executive in the company, happy as well.

INTERVIEWER:

And when it finally happened, what did it mean to you?

00:41:46:00

URSULA BURNS:

It was amazing. This is the most amazing thing. First of all, this is the— when I became, when I was told formally that I became CEO, my... I couldn't believe... You know? It's amazing because I kind of knew. By this time, I kind of knew, right? You know, six months before I knew, kind of it was going to happen. It still had to be voted on by the board. But, you know, and it could have screwed up. But the only thing that really could have screwed it up is I blew up a plant or something, right? Or, you know, did something really stupid. So it was kind of a glide path to that and a lot of learning I had to do. But the day that it was announced, I remember saying, "I cannot believe this." This is the best goddamn thing in the world, because it was... It was perfect in that I had worked my... my only job was at Xerox Corporation. I knew so much about this place, not about the running of it. But you know this is part of my 30 years... I was alive 50 years, 30 years of it was in this place.

00:42:46:00

URSULA BURNS:

So I spent more time in this place than I did with my mother because really my mother died when I was 25. Think about this. So and to now be told that all that time culminated in you being able being given the honor to run it. I was to lead it. I was flabbergasted. One of the first things I did was call my house after, you know, after you get out of board and board meeting, etcetera. And I called my house. My daughter answered the phone and I said, "Melissa, you'll never believe that I was made CEO today." She said yeah, right. She said yeah, she didn't say yeah, right. She said, "yeah, you want to talk to dad?" And so she literally hands the phone over to my husband and I said that I made CEO today. Of course he was a lot more excited about it etcetera and it... right at that time there was a huge amount of flurry. This was amazing because... so they announced this in the board, then we publicly announced it on the wire services and they start calling. They the newspapers, you name, it starts calling because it turns out there was a huge uproar, positive uproar, about two things.

00:43:55:00

URSULA BURNS:

One, we kind of expected, but I didn't think it was as big a deal. And the other one literally caught me by surprise. One was the first Black female CEO. Actually, I kind of expected that. I thought it would kind of blow over relatively quickly. It didn't. And the second was the first female to female CEO handoff. And I never thought about that. I said, yeah, I guess that that's true, right? You know, the newspapers called my house and we'd warned my kids to if anybody calls, just, you know, hand the phone over, etcetera. The New York Daily News called my house, my daughter answered the phone and they

asked her a whole bunch of questions and she was, you know, she obviously forgot the don't speak to the reporter thing. And she answered them all well, which was good, "I'm really proud of my mother. She'll be a great leader," and all of the stuff like that. So it was really good. But yeah, there was a lot of uproar. And to an extent that positive uproar still holds because it's because both of these things are still true. First female to female and the first African American or Black female CEO.

00:44:54:00

URSULA BURNS:

But they won't be true for long, I'm sure. I mean, we're moving down this path of significantly more diversity, which is good. And so hopefully there will be another female to female handoff and there'll be another Black female CEO.

INTERVIEWER:

Why is it taking so long? I mean, you know, you talked about your childhood...

00:45:12:00

URSULA BURNS:

It's all about pipeline. It's taking long because it's about pipeline. It does take experiences and time to become the CEO of a company. It does it. It does take it. Unfortunately, you have to, you have to do, you have to become relevant in the company that you're in, relevant in the work that they do, in the culture that they have in the strategy. You know, you have to become relevant. You can't do that by just kind of waking up one day. And the issue is not what

we're doing today as much of as what we did 10 years ago, 15 years ago. So I think this is all about time and timing. So there are other things to do, but in today. So five years from now we'll see even more female CEOs because ten years ago people started to think about this even more than they did 20 years ago and they did 30 years ago. So the women are getting more experiences that make it possible for them to be considered naturally versus just, "Oh my God, we got to get a woman."

00:46:14:00

URSULA BURNS:

Just naturally and we are performing, at all levels in the company, well enough to be considered. So I think that's in the immediate next couple of years. It's all about getting these people through. There are other things we have to do to make sure that the pipeline continues. I mean, you know, we— this is this pipeline thing, for women in particular, but it's for any underrepresented minority, is a challenge because we get them in or we get people in early if we can, if they can live through year 7 to year 17, we got it. But we seem to lose them in this kind of... there's a time when— I'm not talking about Xerox, Xerox actually keeps a lot of their women. But there's this time in life, like the seven-year itch that things happen in women, particularly in women, opt out is for many, many, many different reasons. A lot of them, some of them we are, you know, social reasons. Some of them are physiological reasons. They want to have children, you know. But a lot of them are unfriendly, unyielding environmental reasons that we have to figure out a way to recognize that there are different differences and different needs because there are things that only women can do and we have to figure out a

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structure that's a little bit more acceptable and accepting of that and it's not as easy to do as it sounds.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Ursula Burns' Husband & Daughter

April 13th, 1999

INTERVIEWER:

And how did you balance work and home life?

00:47:39:00

URSULA BURNS:

So how did I balance it? I didn't balance it very well. See, I actually kept redefining what balance meant. I decided that I was failing so miserably and any previous definition that I was going to redefine it. My definition is over your life... Over your life, do you have a balance of work and family? Work and outside work, in any period of time, in a year? In any period of time I fail any of them. You know either of them for sure. So, when my kids were very, very young and my daughter and son were very, very young, I failed the family work life balance because I spent a little bit more time with my family. So I didn't balance it very well. And when my kids got in middle in like 7-8, nine, I failed the balance in family because I was all over the place, traveling all over the world. Then when they got a little bit older, so it it comes and it goes and it's not. It's nothing as graceful as it sounds.

00:48:42:00

URSULA BURNS:

It's not a, you know, it's never balanced at a specific time. If it is, I feel unsettled because I'm missing something on somebody at one side or the other, so.

INTERVIEWER:

What's the most meaningful piece of advice you have received?

00:48:54:00

URSULA BURNS:

The most meaningful piece of advice I've received is to work hard.

INTERVIEWER

And what's the one piece of advice you'd give a woman on either building a career, pursuing their dreams, their work life balance, or raising a family?

00:49:06:00

URSULA BURNS:

So my advice to young women, by the way, young men as well, but young women. Think about your future. Make sure you have a reasonably good idea of what you want it to look like. I mean, most people think about their future from a work perspective only. I say look at the whole story. Make sure you kind of understand you can envision the life that you want to lead and live and find something to do that you love. If you don't love it, just find something else to do.

INTERVIEWER

When you were younger, what did you want to be?

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URSULA BURNS:

A mathematician or scientist. I never thought about engineers. I didn't know what they were. But I knew that I was pretty good at this kind of stuff, and so I didn't know what they got paid or anything. I wanted to be a mathematician or scientist.

INTERVIEWER

And what are you most proud?

00:49:48:00

URSULA BURNS:

Of my kids. I'm most proud of my kids. My husband and I... I love, and my husband, but I didn't have a lot to do with his upbringing. But my husband and I really are trying to raise contributors to the world and I hope like heck, I mean we still have time for both of them to not do this, but I think we're pretty far along the way that these kids are bright, socially aware, global, not timid people.

INTERVIEWER

And your first paying job.

URSULA BURNS:

First paying job was working at Woolworths. Woolworth being a cashier, yeah.

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INTERVIEWER

What 3 adjectives best describe you?

URSULA BURNS:

Fearless. Passionate. And fast.

INTERVIEWER

And the person you've never met who's had the biggest influence on you?

00:50:43:00

URSULA BURNS:

Albert Einstein and Martin Luther King. Albert Einstein because he was just amazingly witty and smart. You know, he was just this wild guy who thought of stuff. He would. He had no, there was not a boundary. "Yeah, yeah, I know that you told me it doesn't work. Totally irrelevant. I'm going to figure it out." And then he had a whole bunch of fun. He was like a crazy guy. I love him. Whenever I read about him, I love him. And Martin Luther King because he was fearless in another way. I mean, this guy, if you think about what he did when he did it, it would have been best to shut up and just stay home. He didn't. He just decided that, yeah, not shutting up. And I'm not staying home.

INTERVIEWER

And you consider yourself a feminist?

00:51:23:00

URSULA BURNS:

Absolutely. Absolutely, I'm a feminist. What do I mean by that? I think that there are a lot of bad words that are associated— bad images that are associated with feminism. But here's my thing about feminism, I think women are different than men, and that's a good thing. And by the way, it's a good thing for the world. It's a good thing for men. It's a damn good thing for women. And the differences between women and men should be celebrated. They are not pointed out. They just celebrated. By the way, the differences between men and women should be celebrated by men. That's good. They can play football better than women can play football or whatever the hell it is. So I'm a feminist in the purest sense. I don't think that there should be equality of things that we do. You know, there is—I don't think that women should play men's basketball. I just don't think it's...I like men's basketball with men playing it.

00:52:19:00

URSULA BURNS:

I think women should have their distinct value added place in the world that they define, that nobody else defines, that they define. So yeah, I'm a big feminist.

INTERVIEWER

Lightning round iPad or?

URSULA BURNS:

IPad.

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INTERVIEWER

Early bird or night owl?

URSULA BURNS:

Both Early bird and Night owl, unfortunately.

INTERVIEWER

Spontaneous or methodical?

URSULA BURNS:

Methodical.

INTERVIEWER

Type A or easygoing?

URSULA BURNS:

Type A.

INTERVIEWER

Diplomatic or direct?

URSULA BURNS:

Direct.

INTERVIEWER

Higher math school, Higher verbal.

URSULA BURNS:

Math.

INTERVIEWER

Patient or impatient?

URSULA BURNS:

Absolutely impatient.

INTERVIEWER

Prada or Gap?

URSULA BURNS:

Gap.

INTERVIEWER

Prepare or cram?

URSULA BURNS:

Prepare and cram.

INTERVIEWER

Domestically skilled or domestically challenged?

00:53:06:00

URSULA BURNS:

Domestically skilled, absolutely.

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INTERVIEWER

10 minutes early or 10 minutes late?

URSULA BURNS:

Definitely not 10 minutes early, never 10 minutes late.

INTERVIEWER

Book smart or street smart?

URSULA BURNS:

Book smart and street smart, No doubt about it.

END TC:00:53:24:00