EPISODE 25

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:01.1] NA: Welcome back to La Vie en Code. A podcast dedicated to the self-educated web developer. I'm your host, Nicole Archambault. If this is your first episode? Welcome, I am thrilled to have my podcast reaching more people and to bring you some really valuable insight on the lesser discussed topics of this nuanced industry that we call tech. Sometimes I focus in specifically on web development, but other episodes I like to bring in guests to discuss topics that will ultimately range from technical to softer technical, which are equally important for becoming a great web developer or technologist and today is one of those softer topics surrounding creating communities in celebrating our under represented groups in tech.

Following close in the heels of that, quite frankly pretty badass two-part conversation with Kim Crayton last week on "The Business of Diversity in Technology", we have another amazing guest today that's going to both charm us with his lovely accent and give us some really great insight on his experience launching a community for people of color working in the tech industry. That guest is Michael Berhane, co-founder of People of Color in Tech.

Now, People of Color in Tech is a really supportive community site with stories and interviews from vibrant People of Color who had found their own place in the tech industry and highlighting the work that they do. I've read a lot of these interviews and stories and articles and, oh my god, it gives me chills even thinking about them. Sites highlighting the accomplishments of these amazing folks in the tech industry are pretty feeling far between so I was super delighted to come across People of Color in Tech. Now, I knew that I had to meet the person who curated and created this community and of course he also ended up being a generally awesome person.

So, today Michael and I are going to chat about his own experience with the web development industry as a full-stack JavaScript developer. How he and Ruth came up with the idea for People of Color in Tech and, what they hope to do with it in the future. So, from our conversation you'll learn more about the process of starting up a web development community or a tech community in general and probably hear some pretty relatable invaluable advice from both of us in terms of how to maximize your education and your career transition.

As always, I include all the sites that either of us mentioned in the show notes where there are also some really great tweetable quotes and the transcript for the episode. You can find that at lavieencode.net/25.

Okay, let's jump right into the conversation, enjoy!

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:23.4] NA: So, thank you so much for joining us Michael.

[0:03:24.8] MB: No worries, not at all.

[0:03:27.8] NA: So, start by telling us a little bit more about yourself. Sometimes when I introduce podcast guests, you know, I miss the mark occasionally and people just know themselves best. But who is Michael Berhane? What do you believe in? What are, you know, you here to do? Tell us about yourself?

[0:03:44.1] MB: Deep question. I, yeah, I'm Michael Berhane or Berhane, however you want to pronounce it. I'm the co-founder of Peopleofcolorintech.com and we're media platform as well as a recruitment platform now that talks about diversity in tech and helps People of Color guide and navigate their way through their career. We've got arts close interviews and now drop postings as well. Who am I? I'm also a software engineer by trade and what do I believe in? I guess I want to just help out with justice and equality in the world really. It kind of sounds so broad and overarching, but I guess those are the things that motivate me.

[0:04:26.5] NA: That makes two of us.

[0:04:28.6] MB: Yeah, I know it.

[0:04:29.6] NA: So, and you mentioned you're a developer but actually you're specifically a full-stack JavaScript developer?

[0:04:38.0] MB: Yeah, I am. H ow I got in to that was just a bit random really. I used to be Ruby on Rails developer then I kind of discovered Node.js, which is kind of, it's a framework that lets you write JavaScript on the backend and I'm just a bit lazy at times. So I thought, "Well if I just need to need to know one language it's better than knowing two languages on the frontend and the backend."

So I stuck with JavaScipt and a complete coincidence, everybody was like, "Oh, you know, JavaScript is the language of the future. Whatever can be written in JavaScript will be written in JavaScript," and I kind of stumbled across that really. It wasn't some great grandiose plan of mine to, you know, follow the trend. And, yeah I've stuck with it.

I've had a few jobs where I went to the full-stack JavaScript developer and, yeah, I'm just kind of used to it now. I'm trying to broaden out into other languages but it's hard to find time juggling a business and writing code and learning new languages.

[0:05:31.7] NA: Oh, I completely identify with that too. Since I've pivoted I was just actually, kind of, lamenting the fact the other night that, you know, days had gone by and I had not gotten the chance to work on TreeHouse even kind of keep myself engaged there. So I understand the struggle and I still deeply love it too. I assume you like JavaScript, you're working with it. What do you really like about it and what do you dislike?

[0:05:58.9] MB: I like the freedom that gives you, really. It's not particularly, it's not particularly a fussy language. It's not going to stop you from, I guess people do, kind of, [inaudible 00:06:10] and say it's like spaghetti code. You can kind of just do whatever you want and what I have want alongside people that use like Java and other traditional languages, they do kind of give me the old elbow digs and say stuff like that, but I like it for its freedom and its flexibility really and I like that you can use it to write so many things. Like now you can even write iPhone apps and Android apps using React Native. So like, -

[0:06:26.8] NA: Right.

[0:06:26.8] MB: It's, I'm just all about efficiency and a sense of like, "Well, if I can know one language and I can do so many things with it then why, why move ahead and learn something

else?" Although I do just from an intellectual curiosity point of view, which is actually one of the – I don't know if it's a downside of being a developer but it depends what kind of personality you have. But you constantly always having to learn new things and you constantly having to set some time aside to kind of, "Okay I want to learn this language or trends are going this way or there's this new framework so it's, it's interesting.

[0:07:02.7] NA: This industry moves so fast.

[0:07:05.6] MB: So quick, you will get left behind. I'm relatively a new developer in the sense that I only started programming like three or four years ago and half the stuff that I've learned that I was doing in the beginning is not relevant anymore. To be completely honest, it's not. Like I used to be like, "Oh jQuery, I love jQuery," and I haven't written jQuery in like two years.

[0:07:26.4] NA: Right.

[0:07:26.4] MB: I'm about to use it and at that time it was, that's what you needed to know if you want to do anything remotely interesting on the frontend and I went to React and I was at a job and someone asked me to learn it and I learned it and now it's the hot on trend thing, but I'm sure in 18 months time, it's going to be passé, no one's going to want to use React. It's going to be some next JavaScript framework. It depends on your temperament really. I do enjoy learning new things but it's quite exhausting like keeping up.

[0:07:57.9] NA: That's so real. I think that a lot of listeners will really be able to identify with that. Even just starting out in the beginning you're getting pulled in a million different directions and I have tried to help students to navigate that and figure out what they need to know, what they don't need to know, what the baseline is, what is going to make their life easier versus what's, kind of, superfluous and it just takes exposure. It just takes kind of being here and reading the opinions, you know, someone talking about why they ditch the framework on Medium and kind of taking their opinion, not at face value but weighing it against what you think and if there are some languages they are just going to want to stay with because you really enjoy them. For me PHP has been that one. I say it kind of shamefully and I don't know why I stayed with that one.

[0:08:48.1] MB: Well, that's the thing that we got such like an elitist view in the industry. Like if someone says, "Oh, I'm doing this program it's written in PHP." Automatically it means that it's not interesting, what your doing is uninteresting or it's old, yeah, it's rubbish, or whatever. I don't prescribe to that I mean especially as I become more like self-employed and working on my own projects, sometimes whatever you can do to get the project done, just do it. If you're going to want to write something in PHP get your minimum viable product out, then just do that. Don't bother sitting there thinking, "Oh, I need something that this has got to be in the new sexy language." No, it doesn't have to be. That is something that I've had to kind of force myself to, kind of, just drown out the noise a bit from following people on Twitter and just Medium articles telling you.

Anyways, but yeah it's something that you have to be mindful of really that don't get sucked into the hype in terms of what you need to know and then also the skill that you need to learn really is that skill of learning, it's not necessarily as in when people come to me and say, "I'm learning to code," they ask me what language to learn I do, kind of, say, "Well in the beginning just broaden our horizons and learn as much as you can because you never going to really stop learning."

[0:09:58.4] NA: Right.

[0:10:00.3] MB: You know what I mean?

[0:10:02.2] NA: Oh, absolutely. I have not stopped learning and that's one of the things that I tell students right off the bat. I had the pleasure actually this holiday week of meeting a group of new developers and that I mean they had just started on their journey. So I mean like maybe less than a week I think that they have been working through it kind of reading tutorials, watching YouTube videos and meeting with them gave me this new perspective that I really hadn't even I thought that I have a lot of great perspective on what students were going through from my own, from talking to people every week.

But that brand new they had started, they kind of decided that they wanted to take the leap. They weren't sure which resources, they thought that some of them were kind of aggressive. They thought that others missed a lot of the ability to make a connection with people and, I was

like, you guys should be really focusing first on how you're learning this. I think that you're kind of running around from resource to resource and you just need somebody and say, "Okay first off how do you learn? Okay, I'm familiar with the resources that match up with that in that sense," and they were like, "There are people that I can do that?"

[0:11:23.3] MB: Yeah.

[0:11:21.0] NA: I told them about CodeNewbie and I would tell them to get involved so I mean if they're listening and, able to, kind of identify. It's funny because I remember being there but it's not very fresh, it's definitely not.

[0:11:41.3] MB: Yeah I actually say that I was a better teacher in terms of learning to code while I was more of a fresh student because now at that time you're more able to empathize with how a student thinks like what is new and what is a hard to wrap your head around. And now, I'm – sometimes I do mentoring and tutoring sometimes and some things that becomes self-evident to you after doing it for a while, it's not self-evidence to a beginner. But, it's really difficult really I mean there's so many ways of learning and courses, and websites. I wouldn't really know where to begin that somebody said to me where should I go to stop, it's difficult.

Bootcamps as well and it's like you don't want these people to get extorted because a lot of these prices are like really extortionate for bootcamps and that's a whole another topic. Yeah, for another day. I don't want to send the sponsors packing — joking. Or if you just want to, I don't know, take it back.

[0:12:40.3] NA: It's funny that is actually a conversation that I have had with myself lately thinking about, "Okay where is the podcast headed? Where's my brain going?" And I'm not, really my approach does not include bootcamps. I just don't include them in my general approach to web development because I mean I've had the calls with folks and they really do an amazing job, I will give them this, of hyping you. They do an amazing job of making you feel confident and competent like your future is very crystal clear and they're going to help you bring it, you know, bring yourself to it with their help and you need – it's like a drug when you're new. To feel confident and competent I wish that they could put it in a little vial that we could take while we're learning to code because it just I feel like it's up, down, up, down. But they do an

amazing job, but the tradeoff is four, five typically figures to get that started and I just can't — I know that people can instil that within themselves. But that is a confusing time when you're first starting out, you made an excellent point about us being able to empathize more when we are brand new.

I go through so much doubt in a totally different way. I don't know, writing about newbie issues? It's like I kind of do need to be talking to people every week because otherwise the amount of stuff that I assume that other people know is ridiculous and they don't know it. I probably didn't know it two years ago. So yeah that's a really important point and thank you for bringing that up. We've kind of gone down the rabbit hole here since we're talking about bootcamps though, kind of to pivot, talking about the different ways that students can learn web development. I focus in specifically on web development because mobile and other territories aren't really my jam right now at least. But, what was your path to becoming a full-stack developer in terms of your education? What kinds of resources would you use?

[0:14:55.0] MB: That's a good question actually. Thinking back to it, I went to university and I had a business degree. So I never was involved and in shape to form with technology or tech or anything like that. I didn't foresee myself doing so, I just was someone who is quite entrepreneurial and I wanted to start a business and everything at that time was it's got to be a website like it's the only way that a young person can really get anywhere then start a business.

Or so I thought. This is going back to like in 2010 and so I was hiring some developers online and I had a friend of mine who's giving some guidance. But, when you're student your budget is tight and it was adding up. So I thought, "You know what? Let me just learn this myself. How difficult it can be?" Which is like the arrogance of youth. I kind of just thought, "Oh, you know, I'll pick up a book and I'll just bang the out," and all of a sudden I have a website.

[0:15:50.2] NA: Be a pro in no time.

[0:15:51.2] MB: Yeah, give me a couple of weeks max. So, I got like an HTML, CSS, PHP for Dummies book and I just digged in and I can't even remember what my first website looked like it was so horrendous. But I got this slowly but surely and it was kind of like an ecommerce

business and it didn't really amount to much unfortunately. It isn't make me a millionaire or anything like that.

So, the business shutdown but I still kind of had the skills. Like I had picked up something and I was like, "Oh you know I kind of enjoyed this. This is like, it's creative and it's logical at the same time." I used to be good at math as a kid and I kind of fell off it as I get a bit older, and it kind of reminded me to a certain extent then it also kind of reminded me of art as well in terms of frontend. So I kind of just really enjoyed it and then after that after the whole business capitulated I was looking around on what to do and I wanted to get a job as a developer.

I always still wanted to run my own business but I thought let me in, in the interim, let me get a job as a developer or at least try and I was kind of getting rebuffed by everyone. Like, "You don't really have any experience, you haven't got a CS degree." So, and I'm ashamed to say, I coughed up and went and did a Masters in Computer Science and the reason why I say I'm ashamed is because it wasn't really necessary. It was kind of just a bit of imposter syndrome and a few — a bit negative feedback here and there and I just thought, "You to know what? I've got to go and do this master's degree otherwise no one is going to take me seriously," and I was lucky to find a degree that was kind of like a conversion.

So, it was a masters but I could do one year and I would have Computer Science masters and I thought, "You know what this is going to look really good. People are going to, A) when you have a masters people must assume that you've got massive in-depth experience and be like, "This is what I need, this is the bridge," and then the course, it was okay, it was alright, it wasn't too bad, and I didn't drain myself and I did learn a lot but I hesitated to mention it because I don't want to recommend to people that you have to do what I did, you don't kind of thing.

I picked up more going on, Codeacademy and Treehouse and all those websites that I did in my CS degree and I ended up just being a lot more, it's obviously very theoretical and it's not necessarily something that you end up implementing in your day job. So, after the masters was finished I got a job in a startup in London. Did that for a while and during that startup I became a JavaScript developer. Yeah, most of what I learned I learned right out of Treehouse and Codeacademy and websites such as, but and I guess I could say the CS degree did give me

credibility. Like unfortunately there are some people that it doesn't matter too. Like I wish I could say it doesn't matter in that sense but it kind of does, unfortunately.

To wrap it up I guess I don't know if it's necessarily know what I would recommend to somebody if they were in my position all the way back then, it's difficult. I think there are enough, there's enough out there for you to do on your own and especially if you haven't got the budget. Going back to education is expensive in the UK, I don't know how it was in US but in UK doing masters degrees is quite expensive and it's comparable to — it was probably a bit more doing a bootcamp for example. But, I don't have the answers to be brutally honest. But I would say is just be careful before you do anything crazy and spend that kind of money and there are tools out there that can get you skills with the right guidance and that's the problem a lot of us don't have guidance. I never had any real guidance. I didn't have somebody who is in the industry that could just be like, "Oh just come on I'll teach you this, we'll do this project, we'll get you an internship," and I didn't have that.

So I felt like I had to go the whole hog and just skip the whole steps and be, "Okay I've got to spend all this money." So, but yeah that's the story really. I kind of came into technology quite accidentally. It was a by product of what I wanted to do, which is actually stop projects and make businesses and do things that could actually impact people and I've got the vital energy because it was the tool that was the best way to do so.

I never grew up as a thirteen year old, as the stereotypical thirteen year old hacker doing all kinds of things and whatever and there's nothing wrong with that, it just wasn't me and it's crazy to think at 22 I thought I was too old and I hear it all the time like as I don't know if you relate to this but I thought I was. I'm like, "I'm too old to learn how to code. That's it I'm 22 I'm never going to yeah," I said, "I'll do the masters…"

[0:20:21.7] NA: You felt that way at 22.

[0:20:22.7] MB: Yeah, I was like –

[0:20:23.7] NA: I felt that way at 29 when I started.

[0:20:25.5] MB: There you go, you see. I don't know what people like — I guess we put this perception back I was like, "If I do the masters I'll be 25 by the time I finish and that's too old, that's ancient. I can't be an entry level then," and I'm glad I didn't listen to myself. I'm glad I didn't listen to myself and I just thought why not just keep going?

[0:20:44.5]NA: I'm glad you didn't too, Michael. I'm glad you didn't listen yourself. Sometimes we — I've learned somewhat is weird and disconcerting to not be able to trust sometimes your own internal compass. But it's just your initial response, I find, is, "No, there's some reason I can't do this." Now society in the masters are much more expensive probably over here than the US. Education, higher education in general really is way more expensive than it needs to be and much more prohibitive for that reason. I thought about going back for a Masters in Computer Science and unless somebody's willing to pay for it, that would — no it's not going to happen.

Also you had mentioned the mentorship and just having somebody to be able to provide that guidance. That's been one of the number one things that I've been mentioning in the — I started doing a weekly talk with students that they can sign up for and I'll be providing details about that at the end of the podcast. Because, I wanted to really get boots on the ground and start talking to – I'd been talking to people, but I wanted to extend that really to the people that were around me, that were following me that, new people that I knew but just didn't exactly know who I was and what I was doing and that actually has worked out incredibly well and one of the biggest things that I've seen is that people don't have any guidance, at all.

[0:22:19.3] MB: Yeah, real talk, they don't. Like and –

[0:22:21.6] NA: I didn't.

[0:22:23.2] MB: Yeah, that's it. I had the only guidance I had was somebody who's probably maybe six months ahead of me in the learning curve. Legit, he was six — he'd started to learn to code six months ahead and he was able to give me some practical tips and I'm grateful that he was there because it definitely sped up what I was doing. But, beyond that, yeah, there was nobody. I don't know where to go and it's, yeah, what can you do really? I think a lot of us are coming from communities where we don't have necessary people that are — who have achieved what we necessarily strive to achieve. The kind of people that have uncles and aunties

that work in finance and they want to work at finance, they just talked to their uncle and auntie and it's like, "Okay, do this XY and Zed and you're in," and for me that wasn't that especially in the tech game.

So, how it's evolved, which I mean I guess what People of Color in Tech we try to kind of — it's a poor substitute for a mentor, obviously. You always want someone that's there with you on a case by case basis. But at the very least and you can see the stories and be like, "Okay this is how they did it, and maybe I can try to navigate it the way they did." But, it's a poor substitution really, there should be more of an infrastructure of mentorship of people that you can reach out too but, I don't know if I have the answers for that one either, to be honest. You're going to hear me say that a lot. I haven't got the answers to a lot of questions.

[0:23:47.1] NA: Some of these the questions that I asked are really complex questions. They just don't have a concrete answer. But some of those questions are the best questions to ask on a podcasts.

[0:23:59.8] MB: One hundred percent.

[0:24:00.1] NA: So, you know, because it leads to some good discussion and we have different perspectives.

[0:24:06.2] MB: Yeah.

[BREAK]

[00:24:13] NA:

[0:25:28.5] NA: I actually want to take us down the road a bit because you've talked about your community really, your site. It's just so many different things People of Color in Tech and so let's really start from the beginning and tell us how you met Ruth, who is your co-founder and joined forces to create People of Color in Tech and I hope I got that right because everything I saw it was kind of a joining and melding of minds and I love to know if like People of Color in Tech was originally both of your vision together and how that came together and really manifested itself.

[0:26:05.5] MB: So, I was in a trip to New York and I met Ruth through a friend. So there was no like, massively long history between the two of us actually. I was out in New York for about two weeks and came back to London and I can't remember whose idea it was, but it was a very small idea. It was literally like, "Well, why don't we do a site where we interview the People of Color in Tech and it could be weekly or it could be monthly and we'll just take it from there," and that was it. There wasn't nothing to it or whatsoever, nothing beyond that.

There was no grandiose vision or any idea that people would pay attention, that people would care. It was just like, "Oh, this will be cool," and I guess I'll take that as a lesson in the sense that sometimes that's all you need. Like don't sit there and think I need some gigantic idea that's going to be the next Facebook or it's going to be the next Google, not that I'm holding us up to any benchmark of success but it's gone way bigger than I thought I would and I mean there's a lesson in that. Sometimes you just start things that you think are interesting and that you want to see out there.

So yeah, we took it from there and we've just kept going really and we keep doing interviews, we added articles not too long afterwards and then we started posting job postings and then we split off into pocketjobs.com, which is like a slightly separate brand but they both interrelated and yeah we're just keeping going really with we're just enjoying what we are doing and we are just happy people agreed with them. So I think, because honestly the last thing you can do is you can be afraid that people will hate your project but the last thing is when is this indifference some people don't necessarily resonate with what you're doing on any scale even if, love or hate and we have a lot of people that to have supported us.

So, we appreciate it so much that is I didn't think I would never have or work on anything where this many people are rooting for you to succeed. And, I guess that's what happens when you working on something that's kind of like an intersection of good and enterprise or business or whatever you want to call it.

[0:28:15.5] NA: That's so inspiring, seriously. I'm in a position with La Vie en Code, my own brand literally. I said La Vie en Code, La Vie en Code, but whenever I say that people think that's O, N, because it's French but I with La Vie en Code and my own branding creating my

own products I had faced so much fear of putting myself out there initially that I'm just now getting over and it's a smaller commu – I don't even know if I can call it a community yet? Because I'm going to be adding some of those community features in the very near future. Kind of coming out alongside with my first prep course for web developments students, self-taught students. But, I found that identifying those smaller communities can be really tough.

I had found People of Color in Tech actually, As I was looking for folks to interview funny enough, and I hadn't seen it in some of the stories. When I find a couple or few stories in particular on the site that are just that dang good and I'm going to take a look at the site and so I come across you and it was just like when you see someone facilitating great stories you know that it's going through your filter, not through your filter per se, but your facilitation and that's something that I want to pay attention to the type of people that can curate and really identify the value in that, kind of content. I have trouble driving people to my community since its small. When you first started, how did new members to your community usually even find you and has it changed today?

[0:29:53.7] MB: To be brutally honest, it was a lot of luck. I'm not going to sit here and say that we had some genius strategy. It was just a lot of luck. I thing we just caught the wind at the right time. I mean that could be the best conversation had existed way before us. But, I think it was just starting to kind of bubble up a bit more and we just – I guess we had, we didn't sit there and think too hard about what we should call ourselves and the fact that we stumbled and just came out with People of Color in Tech. We are what we said on the tin so I think people just found out to switch the handle and just thought, oh okay, this is interesting, what do you guys do and this is before we had launched we just had the handle and said, "Coming soon" essentially and the response just based of what we were called was much bigger than anything that I had seen for products that I had worked on for years and I was like, "Okay we might be on to something in," and –

[0:30:42.7] NA: Why do you think that is?

[0:30:45.0] MB: Yeah, something in the zeitgeisst. Sometimes it's something completely in the culture site guys and it has nothing to do with you as individual and you just caught small wave and that was it really and I think they had been things like us before. I didn't necessarily pay too

much, I hadn't certainly didn't pay too much attention to them but for some reason people resonate with what we are doing and we just doubled down on what was working once it seem like things are working. We just said, okay people like this will do more of this, people don't like this will stop doing that and just kept its routine on that loop and just kept going really.

But think luck is something that is not necessarily spoken not enough about like, I don't want to sit here and say, oh, we're geniuses and the white which strategy killed it, nothing like that or whatsoever it was a good fortune and just a bit of dedication skit going as well, because and then we got putting tech crunches well that helped and I gave us a bit of spike but people disappear as well like after when you get that big spike that big day we're like, oh my god look at the look at the Google analytics you're seeing some giant thing up, going up, the next day and then half of the week it's kind of, I get so yeah that's no one ever tells you about that. They always tell you like, yo, you know you were featured in this and that was it we went clear it was all about that at all.

People that are starting their own community you just got to persevere really. If it is something that you truly believe in and it's something that you want to see out there then people will resonate with it. You're not alone. Whatever you're interested in there aren't going to be even if it's a small sub-section people will there also otherwise swear but people will also mess with it so yeah, that's it really.

[0:32:32.3] NA: That's great and how do you want people to feel once they find People Color in Tech? However, they find it maybe search, maybe word of mouth, and have what emotions do you want them to have?

[0:32:43.2] MB: Ooh, that's a good question. I guess it depends on who you are. I guess if you're a person of color and you're in tech I guess you're not as alone as you might have thought. Some people are quite active and black tech Twitter form of a better phrase so they not necessarily that isolated but there are others that haven't necessarily spent that much time in that ecosystem so when they do discover as that we're happy to discover that they're not alone and that's kind of what I would want really. And, to feel inspired as well if you're seeing somebody who's out there raising a whole bunch of money or starting a new job or learn to code or whatever we try to interview people across the whole gamut of experiences.

From the junior developer to the VC and whatever is there for you is an inspiration and we have articles too so that although we are thoroughly dedicated to our community, even if you're not necessarily a person of a lot like, we're not here to say, look at us we're People of Color and we're in tech, we also had say that, we can say, insightful dog shit like an listen, kind of, thing. So, there's – is there for anyone to a certain extent?

[0:33:59.1] NA: Yeah, I see People Color in Tech as like a celebration of different identities and of different experiences in tech. It is that kind of how you see it or how you want it to be seen or do you have like particular perception that you want?

[0:34:14.9] MB: You said it better than me I think we should hire you. No yeah, I will double down on everything that you said, I think you said the best to be honest it's a celebration of people's different experiences on what they are doing in their career.

[0:34:31.9] NA: Yeah, I think there's a lot to be celebrated there too. I mean I believe and my experience is very different as a light skin black native American woman here in America it – because again it's going to be very different depending on where you are geographically. What you're background is what you've done with your voice in terms of assimilating or speaking up the identity that you've created for yourself. There's so many different considerations, but do you think or maybe how do you see the People of Color experience tech differently than others?

[0:35:06.6] MB: That's a great question, really. It's something that I always was ask people. So I have thousands of different answers in my head because I've asked that questions so many times myself and it's a difficult one because sometimes you get drawn into the negative because people do have negative experiences. So I don't want to pretend that it's all sunshine and roses and some people would do feel ostracized or I've had to fill that I got caught up and somebody else or I'm not being recognized for I can do and, and yeah so it's a complicated one really. It can lead you to getting a bit down in the dumps, but generally speaking, yeah, I hesitate to summarize the experiences of all the people realized it's –

[0:35:54.1] NA: And I get it.

[0:35:55.3] MB: Yeah, like I can tell you about my personal experience. My personal experience hasn't — I'm overseas, overseas geographic I'm based in the UK so it's going to be different for someone based in States and my one has been one of just like isolation in the sense where you're thinking, "You know, there's not that many about, people a lot of black people like in doing or undoing or in my industry and I guess that is what drew me drew us to, kind of not to curate People of Color Tech but the passive view of it because you were like, this must be of value because we're finding value in it. I did the interviews and I'm like this is, oh when I'm conducting the interviews at the very least. I'm always happy to hear people's successes and what they're doing so I'm thinking hopefully others also find value in it.

[0:36:45.8] NA: That's how I feel now.

[0:36:46.8] MB: You know.

[0:36:47.9] NA: I really enjoy and I know that those stories of those folks that were in it are so important and I feel a little bit like I'm not quite as in it a lot of the time as an entrepreneur as someone who's kind of branched of and made my own path. You know, beaten my own paths so to speak. So, it is really important to have a super close connection with the people, those folks to keep talking and just understand because you set something really important. "Feeling like you're not valued for what you can do or like you're not recognized for what you can do that's a feeling that regardless of your background, your ethnicity, your skin color, that I think a lot of people have felt to some different extent and the reasons for it — yeah, the reasons for the very different and the crazy part is that's one of the big reasons that drove me, the big emotions of not feeling valued and feeling disappointed that drove me to tech in the first place.

Because, I saw and I've heard from others that they saw tech and learning to code, specifically, I don't really like learning the codes is a term but learning programming and computer science principles, web development that it gave them more empowerment, it gave them more control and they envisioned that if they could really work hard at their education that they can become an excellent developer and really have more – I think it's just an impression that in the tech industry you can give yourself more control and more value by having the skill that a lot of folks don't have. So, that's something that we all really have in common. But, it's important to recognize at some groups, a lot of people in color – People of Color in Tech in particular

experience that in a different way in to a different level but that's an empathy entrance for us. You know, I think that we've all been there.

I was working in customer service, so I certainly didn't feel valued for what I could do. I was shunned a lot of the time from trying to ask questions, I didn't get answers to technical questions and any of the engineers wouldn't talk to me, even at a tech company. So, you know, as a woman I kind of felt that my own way and then there's a different lengths of being a black and Native American woman, representing less than point one percent of tech.

[0:39:21.6] MB: Yeah.

[0:39:22.7] NA: It's – yeah, it's crazy but we have, I really focused on the things that we have in common that brings us together and where we can start the conversation. Because we all have our different stories.

[0:39:35.3] MB: Absolutely.

[0:39:36.6] NA: And, People of Color in Tech is really important because of that. You know, you're actually putting a spotlight on the stories we have sort of hesitations to share our voices sometimes, the more marginalized you are sometimes.

So, let's actually, kind of focus is on some of those stories. What are some of the favorite interviews or stories that you've read that you've done that have been facilitated or – I'm sorry, that had been curated on the site or interviews that you've done in particular, what do you remember? What kind of stands out for that?

[0:40:10.1] MB: My favorite? That so difficult. It's like picking a favorite child.

[0:40:16.0] NA: I know, I always hesitate to say favorite just like I couldn't pick a favorite podcast episode.

[0:40:21.0] MB: I think one of my favorites was – still I'm sorry I think you cut off.

[0:40:26.9] NA: Oh yeah I'm here, sorry. I think I pressed the button a little bit.

[0:40:31.6] MB: One of my favorites was Kanyi. He was like a VC based in New York and he was just really insightful, really smart actually and he made you really think about on a solutions basis what can be changed? You know, he talked about changing demographics of the venture capital community and that is necessary to kind of fix the disparities of who gets funding and who doesn't and he talked about his journey from thinking that tech was a very meritocratic system to one realizing that it's not. That people fund things that they understand that people fund people that they know and that whole world is a very insular old boys club, essentially and not necessary for a fault of their own.

You don't necessarily, you reach out to the people that you know that are similar to you and you empathize with that more than a black woman who is trying to get her starter funding unfortunately and he talked about what could be done and I just remember it being like, just he was a very switched on guy and he was very insightful. But there are so many episodes and interviews that I have done. Like it's difficult to even pick anything else out really. There's a hell of a lot of smart and amazing People of Color in Tech and like, I'm just grateful that I've had a chance to speak to some of them and hopefully I can speak to a lot more and yeah that's it really.

[0:42:04.9] NA: Yeah, I found the most engaging interviews lately from me have been ones where, and really they can kind of be going toward anything it could be teaching themselves web development, it could be kind of coming from just starting or entering into tech after overcoming even a really – it doesn't have to be tech-specific. You know, episodes and interviews where people have had to overcome major obstacles I had some really, really, major obstacles in my life, you know, given my circumstances at least. Everyone is different.

But, that has been, and people that still choose to be brave and to use their voice and that can turn pain or, misfortune or maybe a setback even, something smaller into something good for them and for their communities that they're in have been the ones that really resonate with me and it gives you, I think, inspiration is one of the biggest things that we can really garner. Everyone's going to take inspiration in different forms and seeing people, especially women and women of color, who are brave has been a major thing.

Anybody who can facilitate those conversations, I'm starting to facilitate them myself but I've had to rely on other people to provide those to me and I think that those, once I start getting in to those, will be some my favorites. But I completely understand why that's a really difficult question to ask it's like, let's think of everybody that you've talked to that has had completely different stories and unique stuff and try to figure out naming one.

[0:43:49.1] MB: Yeah, I think that information Kanyi is one because there's so many others and I'm like, "Oh shit." I'm afraid to say because they might be like, "No, mind was the best." But so many like so many and we always do ask like, "Tell us about some obstacle that you faced," because it's important people know that people face, everybody faces bullshit, even if somebody thinks, you think this person's at the pinnacle of their career and they had to face something and hopefully it gives you some strength for whatever BS you're facing, too.

So, yeah, it's an important question I think every podcaster should ask that, if you're — or interviewer or whatever in whatever demographic you're talking to because, it's so easy to get caught up in this era of worshiping and everybody's, there's such a proliferation of that kind of, "You know, I wake up at 5 am and I do this and this is how I've raised $60 million in two months," and it's like, "Okay, it's not that easy," and I've got stuck on that rabbit hole on Twitter like on this entrepreneurial – I don't know what's it called? I guess entrepreneurial [inaudible + 00:45:00] were you're like, you know, I —

[0:45:00.6] NA: I call it success porn.

[0:45:02.5] MB: Yeah, success porn.

[0:45:04.9] NA: You know it, I call it success porn and it drives me really crazy. I know exactly what you're talking about a lot of folks in the industry are just hooked on it, you know, and it's completely bond to everybody's unique experience. It's completely bond to the fact that, you know, our — it's a single perspective and there's an out like anything out there. There's an ounce of truth in it.

[0:45:25.4] MB: Yeah, it is.

[0:45:25.7] NA: You know, there is, that's - but they've run with it and it's like, "No, no, no, you were there? Yes, we need to develop a growth mindset," for example. But viciously beating that in to yourself for example, I have bipolar 2 disorder. My days, even medicated, are up and down. I mean, my weeks are up and down. I cannot get up at 5 o' clock in the morning. Every morning I try but my brain will fight me and I will fight it back but it just isn't going to happen every day.

So, to have somebody make you feel like you're weaker for it or like you are not aligned as, you know, you're not going to succeed as an entrepreneur or as a developer unless you're adapting. Yes, you should take care of yourself. Yes, you should, you know, build a routine. You should build good habits into your routine, the best that you can. But I get why it's hard recognize the struggle. I know, I understand the success porn you're talking about so I have feelings about it obviously.

[0:46:24.3] MB: Yeah, absolutely and, you know, it will be like, "Elon Musk works a hundred hours a week," and you're just like, "Okay, why am I reading this? Like, what's it's going to, like come on," and then there'll be, "Tim Ferriss does three hours a week," and you're like, "Okay, I'm checking out." I even had to go on the whole media diet where I just, there's no timeline, no websites for a couple of days. I know it's ironic for somebody who runs a media website but, it had to be done. It was my understanding. I was like, "Okay I'm checking off for a couple of days at least like." And it did me good, to be honest. Like I kind of was more centered and more, "Okay, what do I think makes sense?" And, there's a time and a place to looking at the examples of others. I'm someone that runs outside of that, that looks at the examples of others and but you know that –

[0:47:10.4] NA: I've seen increasingly with myself that — Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off. But I've seen increasing with myself that there, and with others too but especially with myself, that I can have a tendency to over compensate on my discomfort with input and not output and so you start inputting and a lot of it is not all aligned. Like you said, you've got your information conflict, it's going to create conflicts in your logic, in your processing and you get overwhelmed. I hear three hours, I hear a hundred hours, what should my work week be? At the

end of the day it's going to be whatever I can do and the best I can do and the earlier on that people accept that, the better. Do the best that you can do. That's about the best you can do.

[0:47:58.3] MB: A hundred percent and I would add, take a break from the timeline every now and then as well. That's my second followup advice that –

[0:48:07.9] NA: Yup.

[0:48:07.9] MB: Yeah, I'll leave the floor to you for your next question.

[0:48:15.4] NA: No problem. I always want to give people a chance to finish. I am — let's say you also actually write articles yourself for People of Color in Tech though. I know sometimes it's tougher to say what you prefer and in turn or you give preference or favorites to other peoples content but let's talk about yours for a moment. Is there like a particular piece that you wrote out that you think –

[0:48:38.7] MB: Well my articles are the best. Like, all my articles are the best.

[0:48:40.6] NA: All of them. I'm the greatest, you're the Kanye.

[00:48:47] MB: I'm actually not like a writer in any sense of the word and I will contribute every now and then if I feel like I have something to say and yeah it's every now and then. My favorite one, I guess I did write an article about learning how to code and I covered a lot of what I talked about here and the journey and what not. The feedback was nice. People kind of resonated with the kind of accidental nature of how I got to where I go. So and yeah that one it's called — I forgot what it's called actually. Learning to Code? I think. I hope I didn't name it something as vanilla as that. It was something like, anyways, people can search for it. Like Michael Berhane, Learning to Code, People of Color in Tech. You'll find it.

[0:49:34.8] NA: I will absolutely put some links in the show notes and I just sell one even right before we had spoken that I have missed originally. I think the tunnels is a long lines of, *I don't Study Computer Science, What should I do?*

[0:49:49.8] MB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So I had somewhat reach out in Twitter and they were someone a few — they were younger than me and they are based in the UK and they were like, "What do I do?" kind of thing. They said, "Can I send you questions via email?" And so I said, "Yeah sure, fire away." Yeah those were my responses I thought of making it into an article school that sort of if anybody else can get some value from it and also to solicit responses from community really and give different perspectives. You know, like I said, I was out on the answers so I just gave my feedback and then other people joined in and, it's a common insecurity that we all have I'm not, impostor syndrome they call it I'm not going to be able to do it.

I don't have the qualifications and I try to give some step by step tips some actionable tips about what you can do and what you may need to be ready and to be willing to do to get an entry level role really and, yeah, hoping advice ready.

[0:50:51.8] NA: I can tell you that it is and the job postings too. I wanted to make sure that I got back around to that because that's a really big, important part of your site, your community that a lot of another communities have not pulled together for probably a variety of reasons. It's tough, the job boards and communities are constantly changing. It requires building in some cases and the good cases I think, relationships with hiring folks that can, kind of bring them to you. I have no idea what it would even take. So how do you put together these job postings? Where do you get them from? Do you vet them before hand? Let's kind of take a look at how to bring jobs to People of Color in Tech or new coders in general?

[0:51:46.7] MB: Yes so, it started quite simply we just added we got a lot of inbound from employers to add drops to an email newsletter and this what we don't have the separate website and what companies that we, you know, we can vet and we had a previous relationship with and start slowly from there really and yeah we've just built slowly. We've just, kind of initially we had it was just a web page and then eventually now we've added profiles and messaging and all kinds of fun features and, yeah, it's something that — it's a juggling act because obviously you don't want to put forward companies and jobs that probably, companies that are not really inclusive or have no desire to be inclusive.

So it's something that we do struggle with from time to time and it's a balancing act and as much as we want to expose our community to positions we also don't want to lose the trust of the

community by putting positions in that aren't appropriate really. So, it's something that myself and Ruth are constantly always talking about how do we strike that balance really.

[0:53:05.8] NA: Right, that's why I knew I really want to kind of dig in to that more because I knew their had to be more of a process when you're vetting content for people that are new, that are trying to get their first jobs in the industry sometimes and folks of color in particular where there are additional considerations of if they get these job that we facilitated their connection to, how do we know that they're going to want to stay there at that point? And that does require an existing relationship with the company. So I can only imagine that's a pretty, a pretty in-depth process or maybe even tiresome, eventually. It's not easy, that's for sure. I don't think we have too many networks out there that are really putting together jobs that are a good fit at companies that are good fit for people of color, at least I'm not aware.

[0:54:03.7] MB: Again, I mean we want to do more as well. We want to be able to perhaps putting them reviews of companies, and just making the process more transparent really. We're a small organization and it's just the two of us so we are always looking at ways so that we can kind of give people the right information so that people of color are not going into jobs that aren't appropriate for them or are not going to give them the support they deserve. So stay tuned for 2018, really. We've got a lot more features regarding reviews and general career development. It's no longer just going to be "here's a job, apply for it". It's going to be, well hopefully we're going to be able to help manage people throughout their careers, beginning — I don't say to end, but from the beginning to maturation. But yeah.

[0:54:56.0] NA: Yeah, I always say career transition and then, kind of going into tech for your first job and then like career navigation after that. So, kind of helping people to navigate through there. That is huge. I mean, it amazes me the number of people who really aren't new to the industry that just kind of got their first job. Maybe, after getting a CS degree or after teaching themselves to code and I was, kind of in a way I was one of them with my first job that was not quite what I was expecting because it used technologies I wasn't really comfortable with and practices I wasn't really comfortable with and it was — not in a bad way.

So, they are like a reputable company but like lack of version control things like that, that it's a quality of life issue for a developer and sometimes people just decide that they maybe they met

a new friend who's working in data science and they're currently working in backend development and they want to pivot, how do you do that, you know? And so, these are questions that get posted on Stack Overflow or if you're in a position where you can even do that because you have to be careful about getting a new job sometimes when you're already working for a company.

So, to have someone there to really help, introduce those considerations that sometimes we might overlook, you know, that can put us in a tricky position with our existing companies. That is so huge. I think that's really ambitious and I was going to ask too, kind of leading in to my next question and to wrap it up, what do you see as the future of People of Color in Tech and I guess that's a big part of it, it sounds like?

[0:56:42.4] MB: Yeah, we are going to continue with content wise what we've been doing and hopefully expanding maybe into podcasts, we're not sure. In terms of pocketjobs.com yeah, just making – just fleshing out the platform really so it's no longer just, "employer, say hello to candidate" more of something like an employee can kind of manage their career and get insight into what events are happening in the area. What, you know, discounts are there for, whatever online learning platform they're using? Or, what not. So just something more of a total career platform. But it's early days. We are still a small bootstrapped organization so we are taking it step by step. That's where I would love to see it go.

[0:57:37.9] NA: That's wonderful, yeah. Every company should have an ambitious roadmap but you've still got to break that down into smaller steps. But dream big! I would love to see People of Color in Tech be a big resource that brings some good value, great value to peoples careers to their quality of life in this industry, and helps to address some of their concerns, their fears, their questions. It's this is stuff that isn't being really discussed in one place. You mentioned Black Twitter for a tech which I'm – I'm like, "Wait, where?" Maybe I mean I need like a segue into these conversations. But yeah it can feel really lonely and a little bit isolating and just without navigation and guidance.

So you're doing really, really, important work you and Ruth, Michael. I can't say that enough and I'm really glad that you're able to make the time to come on the podcast and tell me and my

audience about People of Color in Tech and more about yourself and speaking of you, where can people find you on social media on the web?

[0:58:53.3] MB: They can find me at on Twitter @michaelberhane on — I almost forgot my Twitter handle. It's michaelberhane_ and my surname is Berhane. Do be warned, I don't always tweet about tech. Sometimes I tweet about politics, things that are bother me and we call it football you call it soccer. So I'm still watching football club, so yeah. So yeah, that's that. Catch me there and then you can follow out People of Color in Tech at @pocintech and that's on Twitter and Instagram and on Facebook and yeah stay in touch. Give me a shout if you've got any questions anybody and yeah I'll try and get back to you.

[0:59:39.8] NA: Beautiful, thank you again so much Michael for coming on and we'll see if we can't catch up with you in the future once People of Color in Tech gotten a change to grow and expand your community and see what kind of work you do.

[0:59:51.3] MB: Hundred percent, yeah, I'd love too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[01:00:00] NA: Isn't Michael great? And, I could listen to him read the phonebook, honestly and if you haven't already go over and checkout People of Color in Tech to read some of the fantastic interviews that they've done with people entering and thriving in the tech industry. Prepare to be inspired seriously; inspired, moved and excited. And again, if you like to check out the show notes, the links, the tweetables, or the transcript, all of that and more is up on the La Vie en Code Podcast episode page up at lavieencode.net/25 and be sure to subscribe to the La Vie en Code Podcast on your favorite podcast players too. So you'll get notifications when new episodes come out and they come out every Tuesday at 9 am eastern.

So, next week join me for a return to do, do, do, do, Self-Taught Student Talks where only chatting with self-taught student [Calolo Cantrell + 1:01:05.6]. Now, [Calolo + 1:01:08.0] made a transition from audio engineer to software engineer. He had actually written a great piece on it, which was up on the freeCodeCamp Medium site and he's in the process of working toward his first job. So, instead of just focusing on industry professionals all the time I like to include some

of the people like a lot of you that reach out to me or I that I reach out to each week that are doing the same things, learning web development, learning programming skills, and these aren't the real problem solving like nitty gritty sessions that I do with some students, but kind of rather an informal conversation about themselves, how they learned to code, the kinds of challenges that they're facing, and how they're getting over them, more importantly.

So, that's going to be really interesting episode. Be sure not to miss it. Thank you so much again for joining me today and until next time my friends, peace, love, and code.

[END]