



Sarah Bond

Interviewed by

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13th November 2019

In

London,

Copyright

Archives of IT

(Registered Charity 1164198)

Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology. It's the 13th of November 2019, and we are in London. I am Elisabetta Mori, an interviewer with Archives of IT. Today I'll be talking to Sarah Bond. She is an executive in the technology industry with broad strategy, marketing and business development experience. Sarah started her career at McKinsey and Company, was the Chief of Staff and SVP at T-Mobile, and is currently the Corporate Vice-President of Gaming at Microsoft. Welcome Sarah.

Thank you, I'm looking forward to talking to you today.

[00:40]

So, let's start with, where and when were you born?

I was born in Morristown, New Jersey, on October 27th 1978. I don't remember it, but my parents do, and they told me that when I was born that the doctor said that I was a perfect ten baby. I came out with my eyes open, but not crying, and breathing. And, nurses came from around the hospital to see me. But I think maybe they made that up. [both laugh] You know parents.

Can you describe your parents, and what were their occupations?

My father was a CEO. He was a telco exec for many years, and finished his career as a CEO. My mum also worked in technology, she worked at AT&T. And then she stayed at home for a bit while I was younger, and when she went back to work she went back to work in philanthropy. They were both, well they still are, they're not gone, are extremely hard-working people, who always instilled a sense in me that I should do the same.

[01:57]

Have you got any siblings?

I do. So, depending on how you count it, I'm actually one of seven, and the middle child. But there is a big gap between my older brothers and my younger sisters. So, I am also both the youngest and the oldest child.

OK. And, what about your grandparents?

So, my father's parents, my father's whole family actually... My father was born 20 years after his next brother. So, his mother was in her forties when she had him. So I never met my grandfather, because he passed away long before I was born. My grandmother, I knew quite well, Coloma was my grandmother's name, although I just knew her as Grandma, so it's weird to say Coloma. And, she was a wonderful lady, and I would go visit her in the summers, and stay with her weeks that my parents were away, and play in her garden. And I'm grateful for those weeks to this day, because there are these beautiful clear memories I have of her, even though she died when I was seven. And when she died, we, we went to Ohio to her funeral, and, I was, it was the first person close to me who I had ever had pass away, and I was... I didn't like the idea that she was going to be left alone in the funeral home, on her own, so, I hid underneath her casket. Because I was going to stay with her. And they couldn't find me for quite some time. She was lovely. My, my mother's parents I knew better, because they were, they were a bit younger. My grandfather was in World War II. He worked at the US postal service, he worked in facilities and maintenance. He was born in 1925. My maternal grandmother, Gladys Brown, was, ended her life as a schoolteacher. She worked all of her life really to achieve that goal. She always placed an enormous high value on education. And, she passed away a couple of years ago as well. I miss them all very much.

[04:15]

What were the important influences on you in your early life?

You know, I think now, I realise that, for all of my achievements to date, they are all things that I was only able to achieve because of people who came before me. And the people who came before me really had to fight very hard for basic things that I oftentimes just take for granted today. So it's hard to pick just one. I... I'll share two stories that I think of often. One is, I remember one day I was going to the grocery store with my dad, and we were in the parking lot, and he was talking to me about something, about, that had to do with money, or, so-, something about socioeconomics. And I turned to him and I said, 'Dad, I just want to let you know

that you are never going to have to worry about me, because I'm going to grow up and be a nurse, and I'm going to marry a doctor, and I'm going to be just fine.' And he stopped me in my tracks. And we were in the parking lot, so I remember being very nervous, because you're not supposed to stop in the parking lot, you know. And he said, 'No, that's not right. *You* can do whatever you want, not because of who you marry, but because *you* do it. If you want those things, you can be the doctor. Don't feel like you have to marry a doctor to achieve those things.' And it really stuck with me, this idea that, my gender, my race, was not a limiter, and that I could achieve anything I wanted, even though all of the imagery and everything that I saw as a young girl was that that was the way to succeed, was, who you married.

[06:04]

Another one I'll share with you is about my mother's mother. My mother's mother was... You know some grandmothers are like, super maternal, and they're really into all of that, and they bake, and they sew with you. That was not my mother's mother. You know, my mother's mother was a fashionista, she had a lot of hats, she, you know, she, she was very social. But like, the kid stuff was not so much her thing. And so I didn't know her in that, like, traditional grandmother way growing up. And the day I got into college, she calls me, and my grandmother never called me. And she says, 'Sarah, you know, I understand that you got into Stanford and Yale and Princeton today.' I said, 'Yes I did.' And, she said, 'Well I want to tell you a story. When I was twelve years old, my father had a dry cleaning business, and we were at the top of the hill.' And, her job, she explained to me, was to run down the hill and pick up the dry cleaning when somebody honked their horn at the bottom of the hill. And she said, one day she ran down, and the door swang open, and it was a bunch of men dressed as the Ku Klux Klan. And they said, 'Is your daddy home?' And she lied, and she said, 'No, he isn't home.' And she ran up, and she told her father, and he fled for his life. [pause] And, she's telling me this story, and, at the time I had no understanding of why she chose to tell me that story. It had nothing to do with me getting into college. But when she died I realised that what she was saying to me was that, the granddaughter of that little girl got into college. [pause] And that she was so proud of that. Because she fought to get out of those circumstances, she fought for her education, which meant that the opportunity for me to have an education came into being.

[08:28]

And so, those are just two examples of the things that I keep with me. And I'm proud, I'm proud to be the granddaughter of a woman with that type of grit. And when I encounter something that I think is impossible, I just remember that, she stared down the Ku Klux Klan. So of course I can do this analysis, or get this presentation done.

[laughs]

Thank you.

Yeah.

[08:58]

When and why did you move to the UK?

When I was ten years old, my father got a job running a large part of British Telecom. And, at the time actually, I didn't know this, at the time my parents were going through a divorce, but they didn't explain it that way to me; it was just that my mother was going to stay in Colorado, and my dad was going to go to the UK. And at the time I had gotten really into *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and so I thought the idea of going to an English boarding school was kind of, cool. So, I asked my dad if I could go and try out being in boarding school for three months, just to get the experience. But it was never meant to be permanent. And so, I did, and it became permanent, because I enjoyed it so much. And I ended up, I started just before, the year before first form, and I went all the way through to A Levels.

Which school did you attend in the UK?

So, I attended from 1989 to 1996 a school called Moira House, in Eastbourne, all the way through my GCSEs. And then I moved for A Levels to James Allen's Girls' School, where I got my A Levels in economics, math and history.

[10:16]

What subjects did you most enjoy, and which were your most successful ones?

In general, the more mathematical a subject, the more I liked it and the better I was at it. I love the logic of math. It's somewhat beautiful. While I found history to be a little more slippery, you know, it... [laughs] Depending on your sources, it could be one way, or it could be the other way. And you could write the answer to the same history question with two completely different answers. Versus math, there is an answer. And economics, there is, generally, an answer. So I liked those subjects both way more.

[10:58]

What was your relationship like with your teachers and tutors?

You know, I was always quite studious. They... When I arrived at boarding school, my, my teachers took one look at me and they said that I was going to be sporty. And, I actually even had one teacher who said I was going to become a demon netball player, and they had me in netball, and hockey, and track, and tennis. And all I wanted to do was go back to my room and read a book. Or, do more homework. And so my relationship with my teachers and tutors was great, and in fact I might have been a bit too studious, but, the gym and sports teachers couldn't figure out why I didn't run more, and why I wasn't faster, why I couldn't hit the ball more precisely.

[laughs]

Have you got any special memory you want to share with us, of this time?

You know, there's so many great memories from that time. I think the thing I just loved the most about it was, the sense of camaraderie that you get in boarding school. You know, I lived essentially with the same girls. I mean, they'd change up our rooms every year, but for like, five years, and you really get to know people. And it is in some ways your extended family. And, there's nothing really that can replace that.

[12:23]

What brought you back to US?

So after I completed my A Levels, it was time to go to university. And it was also, it coincided with the time when my father actually had decided to move back to the US.

And I was faced with quite a decision, because, by this point I had lived in the UK for seven years, I sounded British, I felt British, and I realised that if I just went to university in the UK, that I was going to default into becoming British, without making an explicit choice. That I was literally going to leave my birth heritage behind. And that I shouldn't default that type of decision, that I should do it consciously. So I decided to apply to universities in the US, as well as universities in the UK. And I got into Edinburgh and LSE here in the UK, and I got into Yale, Stanford, Princeton and Brown in the US. And I decided that I did want to go back to the US. So I made the choice to go to university in the US over the UK, just so that I was making my decision fully informed about, what nationality I was.

And what is your relationship with the UK now?

I am so grateful for the time I spent in the UK. You know, the reality is, is that, the way that the UK views societal issues, socioeconomics, and racial issues, is very different. And, your ability in the UK to experience and touch and be part of other cultures is so much broader than it is in the US. And I'm so grateful to have had that in the years where my beliefs, my understanding of other people, was being formed. Like, you know, I travel to France, I travel to Spain, Italy, Russia, Hungary, just weekend trips. If you grow up as an American, in the US, you don't have the opportunity to experience all those cultures. The only thing you know is America. It seems like it's where the, the bounds of the Earth begin and end. And, I think it's so important to think of ourselves as part of a global society, and it's helped me, it's a, it's a big part of who I am, and it's been very helpful to me now, because now I have a global job, and I travel all around the world for what I do today, and I don't think I could have just slipstreamed into that as well if I hadn't had the experience that the UK gave.

[15:08]

What are your memories of university?

So university, I had an interesting time at university. So I actually, I went to Princeton, and that's where I accepted, and, I principally did it because, it was super hard for me to tell the difference between all the universities, like, reading online. We

were some of the first people to get Internet. Because my dad worked at BT, so I'd just research online. And they all sounded the same, and all the pictures of the buildings looked kind of the same. But I had an interview for Princeton, and I had met someone who had gone to Princeton, and so that made me feel like I had more affinity to Princeton. And my dad said they were all good. So, I chose Princeton. And I went there for two years, and I, I really, really struggled with it. Because Princeton, of all of the Ivys, is in some ways, the most in a bubble. It's kind of, it's, it's not in a big city, it's this beautiful campus. And I was coming from having lived literally in the centre of London, with every single culture and type of person in the world, to this completely different world. And I wanted to be in a city. I wanted to have this mixture of experience of education, but also just broader things that were happening in society. So, it was the summer in between, you know, four years of school, and it was the summer after my second year, and I was at home in Boston, and, and talking to my step-mum. And she says, 'So honey, we sent the cheque in for Princeton.' And I said, 'I think you ought to cancel it, because I'm not going back.' And they were just mortified, as you can imagine. And, they were like, 'You're dropping out of college?' like, 'We can't believe this is happening.' And I said, 'No, I just want to work for a year.' I had been working in Boston over the summer, I was having a great time, I was loving Boston. I want to work for a year, and I will apply to transfer. So I did, I worked a year. My first year of official working was at a company called Kenan Systems, that actually got acquired by Lucent Technologies during that year. I worked in the marketing department. And, I applied to go to other universities, and I got accepted to Yale, and I got super excited about Yale. And that is where I finished university.

[17:13]

My memories of Yale, well both are great, but the, I, I centre on Yale because that's where I ended. I spent a lot of time singing at Yale, I did a cappella, I was in the Yale Glee Club. And one of the best parts of that experience is, we actually got to travel to Cuba, as part of the Yale Glee Club. We were considered to be a diplomatic delegation. We got permission from President Clinton to go. This was before anybody could go to Cuba. And we went to Cuba, and we sang for the Bishop of Havana. And we got to see this country that was completely, like, insulated from the rest of the world, and literally almost frozen in the 1950s, with cars and everything. And it was the most amazing experience, the most kind and welcoming people. And I

also found out that apparently I look Cuban. Because everybody came up to me and just started speaking to me in Spanish.

[18:05]

What brought you to work for McKinsey in 2001?

At Yale, especially back then, all the banking and consulting companies would kind of, descend onto campus for interviews. And, that's what everybody did. It was like, you've got to work at Lehman Brothers, or Goldman, or McKinsey, or Bain], or BCG, or UBS. And that's what everyone was interviewing for. So I did the same. Surprisingly, I kept getting call-back for all of the interviews. I was really surprised by that. And I ended up narrowing it down to McKinsey and Goldman Sachs. And, I was actually out at my final round interview with McKinsey, and I checked my voicemail, which I had to go to a pay phone for, because no one had cell phones back then. And I had a voicemail saying that I had been officially given an offer at Goldman Sachs, which I just, I couldn't believe it. But, that also kind of helped, because then for the rest of my interviews at McKinsey I was all relaxed, I had an offer, I had a great job. Which was probably why I got the offer from McKinsey, because I was able to do my best work because I wasn't so nervous, and I was giving, you know, I was giving myself a break. In the end, I decided to take the offer with McKinsey, because, while I loved the idea of working at Goldman, I was convinced that McKinsey would give me an opportunity to actually work more with people, and different types of problems, versus the same type of problem over and over again. And I liked the thought that I could travel the world, I could work with all sorts of different companies, and I could have that exposure. So I took the offer to go to McKinsey, and I went to McKinsey in 2001. San Francisco office.

[19:46]

And then, in 2004 you went to Harvard Business School.

Yes. So I had always wanted to go to business school. And, I had a great time at McKinsey. I, I worked in San Francisco. I did six months in Korea, which was a fantastic experience at a young age. I did a third year... I did two years in San Francisco, six months was in Korea, then I did a whole year in Spain, because I

wanted to become fluent in Spanish, and I wanted exposure to Spanish culture. And after that, I decided to go to Harvard Business School. Because I had always planned to go to business school, and round out my education. And I was making a decision, I made a decision between Harvard and Stanford at the time, and I went to Harvard because, it was just so much more international. And, I've always been an international person, and I wanted to have that experience of just, continuing to work with people from around the world.

[20:45]

What did you learn at Harvard?

You know, Harvard was, was an incredible experience, because it... At this point, it's a very quorate set of people, everybody's interested in similar things. People have had either lots of success in their career, or a lot of leadership experience. But you realise that, for all of people's successes, that everybody is just human, And, everybody has something that they're not so proud of, or something that they struggle with. And so, what you really need to focus on is the humanity in people. Which, I didn't expect to learn that from going to business school. But, that's actually the thing I've always kept with me. And even in the way, in how they choose the curriculum. Like, Harvard is all case method. So essentially, you are learning business through reading stories of other people's experiences in business. And often other people's mistakes, not just their successes. And so, even the method of teaching isn't about a textbook of, oh, here's the macroeconomic equation. Instead, you'll read something about, what the president of Nigeria did in a certain situation, right? Or, what happened when someone, you know, stock was falling, and what the decisions were that they made with the company. And some of those were right, and some of them were wrong.

[22:11]

And in March 2011 you joined T-Mobile.

Mhm.

What were your roles?

Yes. So what happened was actually, is, I, after business school, I went back to McKinsey, and I went back to the Seattle office of McKinsey. Because at the time, my then boyfriend, now husband, had gotten a great job at Microsoft, and so we decided to move back to Seattle. And I had always wanted to live in Seattle, I had always heard it was a great city, a very balanced city. I became a manager, and then I became a senior manager, and then I became an associate partner. And I was doing a ton of consulting work at T-Mobile. And, I got pregnant with my first child, my daughter, and I was letting people know at T-Mobile that I was pregnant, because I was doing a ton of work with them. And so I'd go into the CEO of T-Mobile's office, and I'm like, 'Hey, I just want to let you know, I'm pregnant.' And we had this whole discussion about it. And at the end of it, he said, 'Do you think you would leave T-Mobile and come and be my Chief of Staff?' And I was kind of, surprised. I mean, I couldn't believe it. And, then I went home, and I thought about it. And they had offered me a couple of roles there over the years, because I had done a lot of consulting work. I did work in, like, costs and operations, I did work in marketing, I did work in strategy, pricing. And I thought, you know, that's a pretty amazing opportunity, to... You know, I was in my early thirties at the time. To be the chief of staff of a Fortune 100 company, to a CEO, to get to see an entire management team, and everything that it took to actually run a whole company. Consulting, you get to see really senior level big problems, but you just see one slice of the problem, when really there are like, many many facets that you have to bring together as a leader, to get to a solution. Which includes HR, PR, legal, finance, strategy, and bringing them all together. And so, I took it, because I thought that it would be a great opportunity to join. And actually, the week after I joined, it was announced that T-Mobile was going to be acquired by AT&T. And, the CEO walks in my office, and he's like, 'I'm so sorry.' Like, 'When I first made the offer to you, I didn't know this was going to happen. And if you just want to go back to McKinsey, you can.' And I said, 'No. I told you I would come and do it. You still need a chief of staff, right?' And he said, 'Yes I do.' And so I stayed.

[24:44]

What would you say was your proudest achievement during your time at T-Mobile?

Oh gosh. Well I had a ton of different roles at T-Mobile. So, I started out as the CEO's Chief of Staff. I had my daughter during that time, because I was pregnant when I joined. And then about a year and a half in, I get this call one morning, and he says, 'Sarah, I have accepted a job at Vodafone. And, because Vodafone is a competitor of Deutsche Telekom's, and because Deutsche Telekom own the majority of T-Mobile, they have asked me to leave immediately. And so you won't see me again.' And I was like, oh my gosh, I'm this guy's chief of staff, and, he's gone. [laughs] And so, Jim Allen, who was the CEO at the time, became the interim CEO, and I became his Chief of Staff. We used to joke that I would be interim chief of staff to the interim CEO. Also at the time the CMO left, so then we said we were like, interim Co. I mean it was, it was actually a pretty unstable time. And then, a new CEO came, John Legere, who's the CEO of T-Mobile to this day, and I became his Chief of Staff. And that was just a great ride. I, I was his Chief of Staff. We acquitted MetroPCS, which was another wireless company; we IPO'd the company. We completely turned around the company with a strategy that we launched called the Un-carrier strategy. And I got to be part of the leadership team where we made all those decisions to actually completely turn around the company. We got... We went from losing a half a million subscribers every quarter to gaining a million subscribers every quarter, in a flat market. It was incredible.

[26:29]

And, then, after, by this time, I had been a chief of staff for two and a half years, across three CEOs, and it was time for me to go on and do something else. And so, I went to lead the strategy and business development group. And, this was a cool opportunity, because, I basically, come in, and it's a strategy group that was a strategy group for a private company, that had become a public company. So I had to completely build that function to be a public company strategy group to, handle what we do at board meetings, to be able to do assessments on M&A, and all of those other things. It was an awesome ride. And then I got promoted to be the Senior Vice-President of Emerging Businesses. And what that was about was, by that time the T-Mobile brand had really come to stand for something, and we wanted to extend that brand into video, into banking, into data monetisation services. And so I had all of those different teams and groups reporting up to me, because, when it was in the marketing department, people were doing great work there, but they were really

focused on the near-term opportunity, and they wanted these new businesses to be focused on the longer opportunity.

[27:39]

I also had my son during this time too. I nursed both of my kids to twelve months, which is one of my greatest achievements, was being able to nurse two kids to twelve months while working full-time.

[27:50]

But I would say from a, a product perspective, like a business perspective, the thing I'm most proud of is a product that I helped lead the creation of, which is called Binge On. And, what Binge On essentially is, to this day, is, it was a product innovation that enabled people to truly have unlimited data. And so, what we did is, we figured out that, the biggest thing that consumes data on your phone is video. And what was happening was, is that the resolutions of video that were being pushed out by, like, YouTube and Netflix and Hulu, were going up. It used to be 360p, then it was going to 480p, and then it was going to 1080p. And every time there was a resolution leap, the amount of data consumption per hour also went up, substantively. So like, the difference between 480p and 1080p was 3x on data consumption for one hour of watching. And so what was happening to us is, it was not sustainable for our wireless network to have unlimited data plans. Even though people were watching the same amount of time, the data consumption was just going through the roof. And we didn't know what to do. We were having congestion problems, the network was really under a lot of stress. And then we sat there, and we said, 'Wait a second. This is video that somebody's watching on their phone. Like, this is a tiny little screen. You can't tell the difference between 1080p and 480p on your phone. And so, I created a product by which people would opt in to having their video at 480p, and in exchange they could keep unlimited. And, it was very contentious, because, no one really knew what was going to happen. And I worked with my team, and we built this entire economic model of the current state of the business, and what would happen by rate plan, by user, when we put this into effect. And, the model said that the network load was going to go down, like, 9.8 per cent. So even though you were going to give people unlimited, if they had, if they took advantage of this option at 480p, it would actually take the network load down. And I remember really clearly, I was driving into, driving into the office on a weekend to sit down with the team to go through all of our calculations and how we had put everything, laid everything out. And I was on

the phone with my boss, and he goes, ‘Sarah, you are gambling with the entire business right now. I think I’m going to come in and look at it with you.’ [laughs] And the day we switched it on, we predicted it would go down by 9.8 per cent, and it went down by 10.3. And so today, having your video over mobile phones at 480p is pretty much the industry standard, and it’s because of, of what we created there.

[30:55]

So what brought you to join Microsoft in April 2017?

So, I got to this point at T-Mobile where I was like, wow, I’ve had a great run. Like, it’s been six years, I’ve had two babies, I’ve gotten promoted, I’ve had different jobs, I was able to launch a product. Like, this was, like, this incredible experience. But, then I thought about the next six years, and I just couldn’t imagine having that much growth again, and I wanted to keep growing. I wanted to keep doing more, and learning new things. And so I sat down, and I made a list for myself of things that I was looking for. I decided I wanted to work at a, kind of a core technology company. You know, wireless is tech, but you’re transferring someone’s bits. I wanted to go work in a company that made, made the bits. I wanted to work for a global company. And, and I wanted to learn new leadership styles. Because I had been working with the same group of leaders for some time. And literally, after I made that list, I got a note on LinkedIn that an executive at Microsoft was interested in talking to me. Peggy Johnson, who was the EVP of business development at Microsoft. And I was like, wow, that’s amazing. It’s like, I just, put out into the world that I wanted to do something, and it came back. And so I went in, and I interviewed with her, and I interviewed with members of her team. And they created a role for me, as the General Manager of Business Development for disruptive technologies. So, that was focusing on things like quantum computing, you know, block chain, you know, the, the intersection between like, biology and computing. All these new technologies that we know are going to be really big, but were quite nascent. And I was thrilled to, to go and take that role.

[32:45]

So what would you say is your proudest achievement during your time in Microsoft?

Well, so what happened was, is, I, I did the disruptive technologies role for a bit, and then, there was another team that reported up to Peggy that ran all of business development for gaming. And, the guy who led that team decided that he was retiring. And, they asked... And, you know, Peggy was talking to the guy who runs the Gaming Division, a guy named Phil Spencer, and he said, 'I really think we need to get someone in this role who knows consumer businesses, and knows wireless.' And she said, 'Well then you should talk to Sarah, she's already here.' So I interviewed for the role, and I ultimately decided that I really wanted to do it, because, everything I had done in my career before then had always been about the intersection between consumer and tech. And so, as much as I was loving what I was doing in disruptive technologies, it felt like it was a job that was calling to me.

[33:41]

There's a lot of great things that I've had a chance to do as part of Microsoft. I think the thing that was biggest for me is, every year we have a show at this global video game conference called E3. It's basically, like, a love letter to our fans. We come out, and we, we share, like, new news, games we're bringing, products that we're bringing to them. And it's a massive show, and it's watched by 100 million people every year. And this year I was asked to go out on stage and be part of the show. And so just that in itself was an honour. I was asked, basically to announce a new product that my team helped create called PC Game Pass, which is effectively a subscription, and you get 100 games for \$10 a month, and it's PC games. We had a version of it for console; this was the PC version.

[34:37]

That in itself was amazing, but what was really special about it was that, they had never before had an African American Microsoft executive present, let alone an African American woman present. And, I, I knew that cognitively, but, I tried not to let that psyche me out. And, then as we were running up to the show, people backstage, who had worked the show for years, you know, they would stop by my dressing room and they would just say, 'I never thought I would see the day. Thank you for representing us. Thank you for what you are doing.' And, you know, I started to get a little scared. And then I realised that, fear was an individual luxury, that, it wasn't Sarah Bond who was going to go out on that stage; it was, my grandmother, it was my daughter, it was, gamers who had never seen anybody look like them; it was every single person who said something to me. And that that person,

that compilation of people, was not afraid. And, you know, I went out, and I did it. And you know when I watch the video of it, it's not... Like, I know it's me, but it's almost like a distant body in it for me. Because I felt no nerves when I went out, like it was just gone, I was like, that's just, that's a selfish emotion that I should be... That's so self-centred, that I'm nervous right now, and I don't, it's not about you. And when I walked off the stage, and I realised that I hadn't fluffed a line, or tripped [laughs], and that it went really well, and they went to take my mic off of me backstage, and I just collapsed into tears. And someone said, 'Why are you crying?' And I said, 'Because I did it.' [laughs] And then I could be me again, and then I could feel that emotion.

[36:37]

This is another question, like, very personal. So, why do you work in video games?

See, video games... It often gets a bit of a bad rap. People think it's frivolous. People associate it with violence. They talk about it as something that is very, male-dominated, and very, white. And, that's not what I see at all. You know, in today's world, in our digital world, video games are the only media form where you can connect with someone who you have never met, you do not know their language, you don't need to even be in the same room as them, and you can achieve and share something together. There is nothing else like that. I believe, video games done right can break down a lot of the barriers and the walls that we see coming up in our society. We see people from completely different walks of life form friendships. We see people meet their husbands and wives. You know, you can be playing with someone and they could be in a wheelchair and you would never know. Like you can truly be yourself there, if you choose. And, I have a lot of fond memories of gaming. You know, I, I played with my dad growing up. The first game I ever played was a game called King's Quest II. And I was learning to read at the time, and, I don't know if any of you know who are listening about King's Quest II, but there was no audio at King's Quest II, it was literally, like, type would come on the screen, and you had to read it out, and he would have me read it out. And you, you know, you would take this, you know your character around, and you have to unlock three keys to get the princess. And all of these things. And, it just was this great moment. It was like, this time that I did something with him. And so I've always held that with me. And

now, in the world of online games and numerous experiences we have, the power of video games to connect people is even greater. And so I know that in participating in that industry, I have an opportunity to shape what it is like. And especially participating working for Xbox, which has a platform, so games ride on top of it, I have this amazing opportunity to influence that media form, which I believe will be the largest media form of the next generation.

[39:07]

You recently wrote, 'In the tech industry, I am not only viewed as different because I'm a woman, but because I'm African American. That means fewer than one in 30 people in my industry are like me.' How does that impact you?

You know, when I was growing up, my dad would say, 'If people are staring at you, they're staring at you because you're so great.' And he said that because, when he was growing up and people were staring at him, I think he, it was happening because of his race. And he didn't want me to feel self-conscious. He didn't want me to feel less because of other people's perception of me. And so he always said, 'Turn it on its head. It's because you're so beautiful, it's because you're so brilliant. Don't feel self-conscious about that. Feel proud of it, that you are unique.' Last summer... There's this thing that happens on the, on NPR, where they'll, they'll tell you the day of the year when a woman, or a Hispanic woman, or an African American woman, will have earned the same amount as a white man for the same job. And it is some time in the summer for African American women. It's about, on average, the data says today, African American women earned 60 per cent of white males for the same job. I remember at first feeling really angry and upset by that, and hurt, and you feel imposter syndrome, and you feel like you stick out. And then I was like, no, I've got to turn that on its head. I can't think of it that way. Because there's a bunch of other data that shows that, for a woman to advance, it's actually much harder, and you're less likely to get mentorship, you get less opportunities to fail, or to make mistakes. It's harder to get in, in conversations. It's more likely that your ideas will not be viewed favourably. Like it's been, there's a body of research around this, and you can see the data cut every which way. So my logic is, so if you're a woman, and you get to the same place as a man, you must have had to work so much harder. So instead, if you took that same data and you said, it's not that an African American woman earns

60 per cent as a white man for the same job. What it is, is that if you are in the same job as someone who hasn't had to overcome those challenges, you must be 67 per cent better. That's the math. And so, I think I kind of, learnt to use it as a mental trick, like it's an experience to be unique, but if you don't, if you view it positively, you can view it as an opportunity to do something for others, and to carve a path for others who will come after you, and to make it easier for them to get to that same place. Which is really why I work. Like I look at my children's faces, and I, I realise, like, I could, I could make a decision to stay at home, I could not be getting on a plane to Japan or China or London, or Kenya. But I get on that plane, because, if I don't get on that plane, then that's like, a missed opportunity for me to shape the world and make the world a more inclusive world for the people who will come after me.

[42:37]

The video game industry has the reputation of being an industry that is very white and male-dominated. So, we also discussed this now. What do you think has to happen for that to change?

Yeah, you know, the reputation is there, and, like all reputations, there is some truth to it, and some of it is exaggerated. You know, if you look at gaming, all-inclusive gaming, it is actually pretty diverse. Like there are more women who play games than men 18 to 35, if you include online games and all, and mobile games, and everything. But when you look at core gaming, and console gaming in particular, you're absolutely right, that those are, the demographics are that there are more white males than any other group playing. And I think that there is a lot that we can do, and that we are doing, to change that. The first is to ensure that the community around gaming is a place where everybody can play and have fun. Where, toxicity is managed, where you can have control over the experience that you have. Right? That there are parental controls, that if someone says something to you that makes you feel uncomfortable, you can do a setting so that you don't need to hear that any more. Right? And so that it can be a place where everybody could show off and be themselves as they want to be, as they want to. And we do a lot of investment in that area, for that specific reason.

[44:05]

The second is, is like, games, kind of like all technology, are, are a product of their creators. Right? They are, they are an art expression of life. But they are not expression based off of the experiences of the people who are creating them. And so, having a diversity of creators, and also the diversity, will lead to a diversity of content and ensuring that that happens. And one of the things we invest a lot in in my team, because my team is responsible actually for curating the content that you see on Xbox today, is ensuring that we create space for new types of games for diversity of creativity to flourish on the platform. Like we specifically try and seek out stories and creators that are unique. We've had some amazing games come to us that way. You know, stories about historical events, stories about war, stories about overcoming depression, fighting cancer. And, we have a role to play as a, as a platform on creating room for those creators to flourish and have success, for people to play those games, and for anybody to feel like, that they can be on our platform and enjoy what they are doing.

[45:27]

Lastly, you were part of the delegation to open Microsoft's first development centre on the continent of Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. On that occasion, you met with the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta. Can you tell us more about this experience?

It was an incredible experience. So, the trip, to give you context, was that, Microsoft opened engineering centres in Africa. And, this was huge, this was a breakthrough moment for Africa. We were the first major technology centre to make this type of investment in Africa. 500 jobs. But importantly, every one of those jobs was going to create another five jobs in the region. Because these were high paid, high skill jobs that we were bringing to the region. And, for most people, for Africans, who wanted to go work in tech, their options were, to either to leave their country or go work, you know, in the IT department of a bank. And so this opened up so much opportunity. People dreamed of working, you know, at Microsoft, at Google, at Facebook, but they have to sacrifice being with their family and in their own culture. And we were offering this opportunity to people right there. We opened a development centre in Kenya, and one in Nigeria, and we travelled across both. So just the experience of bringing that to the country was incredible for me, which is part of why I went with the delegation. In terms of meeting the President, I have to say, he's a really nice guy.

He's really friendly. And he was quite informal. [laughs] You know, we, we shared with him our vision. He was thrilled to support. And it was just this incredible experience, to see his enthusiasm for what we're doing, and what we were bringing to his country. And I was amazed at just how lovely and friendly he was

[47:21]

What were the key decisions, positive and negative, you made, and what difference did they make?

You know, it's interesting. I... I rarely remember things that are negative. I think it's because, I just let 'em go. So, it's hard for me to think of a... And oftentimes, a decision you make, like in the moment you might think, oh that was really, that did not work out, but then, like, sometimes years later, I'll realise that because I made that decision, something else amazing happened. I'll give an example. When I came back after maternity after having my son, I was offered a job at T-Mobile running a set of call centres around the country. And I said no. Because, I had just had a baby. I was really committed to making sure that I could nurse him to twelve months, because that's very very important for brain development, and I was concerned about having a job that required me to travel to four different locations, none of which there was a direct flight to, around the country, with a three-month old. And so I said no. And, for a while I really regretted that decision. Because I thought, well, I could have gotten operational experience, that could have led to a bigger role. You know, like, maybe I would have a completely different job now if I had done that, and I let that go. I should have grabbed that with both horns, and figured out a way to make it work. And I felt that way for a long time. But now I realise that if I had done that, maybe I would have gone down that path, but then I wouldn't have had the opportunity that I have at Microsoft right now, right? Which has this like, where I'm able to work on a global scale, versus before I was working on a national scale, right? Where we're building products that people touch and use around, around the world, and have so much impact there. So, that's one where I thought it was negative, but it turns out it was positive.

[49:18]

I would say generally the thing I've done is, I've learnt that you should follow your intuition. That, sometimes you have a feeling deep in the base of your spine. Every

time I've had that feeling, I've been right. But sometimes, you're like, oh, I'm just imagining that. There's no data to back that up. I'm telling you, if the feeling doesn't go away, you're not imagining it. Like, you should follow and seek out environments where you feel comfortable, where you feel supported, and where you can do your best work. And so, every time I made a decision where I've leaned in to that sense, in the long run it's been positive.

[50:06]

What would you do differently if you had your time again, and why?

I would be more forgiving of myself and others. I held myself to such a high bar. I've held many of the people around me to such a high bar. And now, like, as a mother, as someone who's seen so many experiences around the world, I realise that, it's OK to not be perfect or have the right answer. It's OK to falter a little bit. It's actually good. Like, there is no other way to get better than to truly... Like, if you are always getting it perfectly right, you weren't putting yourself out there enough. And so I think if I would do it anything differently, I would have taken more risks, I would have been OK with falling down a little more.

[51:09]

What advice would you give to someone entering the IT industry today?

So many things. Well first, it's a great industry, you should totally go into this industry. It's fast-paced. Your ability to have impact on the planet is unparalleled. You know, you... This is the only industry you could change a line of code, and at the speed of light your decision can go around the entire globe, and it can impact billions of people on the planet. The speed with which you can enact change is unlike anything else. So my first advice would be, yes, enter it. If you want to change things, you should enter this industry. The second is, is, don't be scared of coding. Don't be scared of it. It's just another language. It's a useful tool. I think it's been kind of propped up as something that's so impossibly hard that people think they can't do it. But you can do anything that you put your mind to. And the third would be, you know, find the part of the industry that speaks to your heart. It's not just about dollars and cents, it's not just about leadership, it's not just about managing people.

It's about, you having clarity of the mark that you want to leave on the world, and how you're going to do it. And ask yourself, hey, is this representative of how I want to leave the world? Is the work I'm doing contributing to others in a way that, I am proud of? And find that thing in the industry that allows you to do that and to make that contribution. Because then you're actually going to have real sustainable happiness.

[52:54]

Any special advice to women?

You know, there's a lot of barriers associated with being a woman in the world today. I... It's ironic. I mean, women are effectively the majority, or close to the majority of the planet, yet we're treated like a minority. It's like an anathema. Literally every person on the planet came from a woman, yet we're still treated as a minority, and we earn less, and there are so many more barriers. And so, I'd love to be able to sit here and say, no, my advice is for everyone, I have no special advice for women, because you see, I want the world to be like that. And I don't want to, and I don't want to come across as, bitter, or any of those things. But the thing is that the world is *not* like that. It's not yet. So, my advice to women would be, to never let somebody tell you what you cannot do, to not listen to those voices. To turn up as your best self. And, to find others who support you in that, and not, and, not be surprised when not everybody does. But find the group and the pod that will let you just, do your best work. And my advice to men is, to watch out for those moments where you see women treated differently, and to be a good ally, and to give a helping hand. Because that will make everybody's world better, for women and men.

Thank you Sarah, it's been a real pleasure talking to you today.

Thank you. I really enjoyed it, thank you.

[End of Interview]