

ERNEST

Try. Try. Try. Otherwise, you will never know how high you can reach without first trying. My name is Ernest Middleton, and I'm an electrical engineer with South Carolina Electric and Gas. I was born and raised, in Charleston, South Carolina, a small town called James Island. Life was pretty simple. We grew up in a four room house in-- on Grimble Road. And that's where I got my start. We made our own games, and did our own thing in the fields. And we picked tomatoes, and raised on a farm. And grew up with, uh, two sisters, a mother, and a father.

I had a little bit of trouble, um, growing up. I was bullied a lot. I didn't look a certain way. I didn't dress a certain way. So my mom decided to let me stay with my uncle. And he would take me along with him, and showed me how to wire houses, because he was an electrician. It piqued my interest in a lot of ways, um, where I started taking things apart, and put them back together. And, ah, it got to the point where, um, I was a person that kept to myself. So when my sisters always come to my room, and enter unannounced I decided to put a gadget together to get them. I started wiring my door knob, so any time somebody would touch the door knob they would get a little shock.

I came from, uh, a family that really didn't have anything. So I actually worked my way through USC, through were engineering, as a full time student, and worked full-time. Right there at the Russell house cafeteria. The courses was very demanding, so I didn't have the opportunity, like some students, to form a work study group. There was this time where I almost thought I had bitten off more than I can chew. And this little lady professor, she was my thermodynamics teacher. And she told me that if I had any problems, here's my telephone number. You can call me up till 10 o'clock at night. And I will give you enough clues to solve the problem, but you have to do it yourself.

And it was at that moment where I started pushing myself, but she said I have something else for you. There's this group called Partners for Minorities in Engineering & Computer Science that I would like you to be a part of. And she says, would you like to represent the minorities in this group. And I say sure. Partners for Minorities in Engineering and Computer Science is a business partnership between educators and different businesses, such as SCE&G, where we pull in the brightest minority students, and encourage them to go into the field of engineering computer science.

It's nothing like seeing the looks on the students face when they figure out a problem, on their

own. They work as groups, but it's rewarding to see that some of them actually say you know what because of this program I going to stick it out. Engineering is what I want to do. And they actually go through it. They make it through. And you'll be walking somewhere in the state, and they said, hey, Mr. Middleton. Remember me? I was in the program back in such and such time. And you said-- and you will have a conversation with them, and they said, yes, I did go in engineering.

There's nothing more fascinating than electricity. Why does the light come on? What cause the light comes on? Just think about electricity. The flow of current. Energy at a touch of your fingers. Everything you do in life is stemmed from engineering, down to the point of sitting in this chair. It has to be engineered. Somebody had to figure out how much weight it would take to keep the person from falling on the ground. If I can figure it out, and if it's a problem that I have to-- that challenges me, I'm going to stick with it until I find an answer. One thing about engineers is that it separates people who are willing, and are willing to go the extra miles to complete something, versus those who said you know that's too hard. So it's not for me. Challenge. You can do it if you first put your mind to it. All you need is a drive, and believe in yourself.