Ed.: I found and enjoyed your blog—csdoctorsister.blogspot.com. What is the motivation for the blog and who is your audience?

BHM: A main reason for my blog is to break down some STEM stereotypes, even if it’s one reader at a time :-) I hope that these posts are helpful not only to URM STEM faculty but also to any URM in the academy, especially those in the “ivory tower.” Broadly, the URM in the academy are not exclusive to the faculty ranks but also graduate and undergraduate students.

Ed.: How has your life changed since you received tenure at Purdue?

BHM: Since obtaining promotion and tenure, I am more outspoken. I have a sense of clarity about my role as an instructor, scholar, and steward of computing. The significance of this accomplishment I wrote about in a blog post: http://csdoctorsister.blogspot.com/2014/04/tenured-bwic.html. In short, I made history again (#ThisIsEpic #TenuredBWIC). I was the first Black woman to earn a PhD @ RPI (I asked when I graduated, but no one could name another), and I am the first Black woman to earn promotion and tenure in Purdue’s CoT.

Ed.: Did you have role models for this journey? Are you hoping to be a role model as well? What do you think are the most important functions of a role model?

BHM: Yes, this journey is full of role models from keynote presenters, instructors, and research scholars to peers. I believe that I am a role model to those currently in the pipeline pursuing their BS, MS, and PhD in STEM disciplines. Role models should be present and thoughtful, as your words can help someone reassess his or her situation (and hopefully decide to persevere).

Ed.: You are leaving Purdue and beginning a new career at Spelman College, a historically black women’s college. From a big school to a small school—big faculty, small faculty. Tell us about your decision to move, the campus dynamics, and what you hope to accomplish at Spelman.

BHM: Spelman has charted a strategic path for each of our constituencies: students, faculty, staff/administrators, alumnus, trustees, and community partners. In particular, one of the student-centric initiatives is providing access to opportunities for undergraduate research and career-related internships. A key element in my own journey has been the invaluable research and internship experiences. Couple this with Spelman’s sustained effort in building strong STEM programs, and it is an exciting future ahead for Spelmanites. It’s such a great forward-thinking plan. I look forward to contributing to its growth and success by delivering curricula and conducting research in information retrieval, data mining, data security, and social media.

Ed.: What challenges have you faced and at what part of your life were they the most significant? Since you were successful at overcoming them, could you explain your successes and how you found ways to deal with the challenges?

BHM: Trust in competency; being liked versus respected; guidance in navigating the unwritten rules: grants, students, research, teaching, and service. Truthfully, I’m a bit uncomfortable with calling this “my success”! These accomplishments are obtained through exposure to several summer internships and with the assistance of a lot of people, hard work, and perseverance.

Ed.: What advice would you give to students interested in STEM disciplines that would help them be successful? How about women and women of color specifically?

BHM: • Have at least one co-op/internship experience.
• Maintain a 3.0+ GPA.
• Attend at least one Tapia Conference.
• Attend at least one Grace Hopper Conference.
• Maintain a 3.0+ GPA.
• Have at least one co-op/internship experience.
• Build your professional network: have three to five letters of reference from former profs and employers.

Ed.: What do you do outside of work for fun?

BHM: I enjoy listening to music, watching basketball, cooking/baking, and dancing.

Ed.: Do you have a favorite historical figure, and why is this person your favorite?

BHM: I don’t have a favorite historical figure. However, if I was to host a dinner party inviting any celebrity, I would invite the following: Anita Borg, Warren Buffett, Jesus Christ, Whoopi Goldberg, Barack and Michelle Obama, Will and Jada Smith, Oprah Winfrey.

These men and women are a diverse group of impactful and purposeful agents of change. How each views (or viewed) and navigates (or navigated) through the world would be fascinating to hear.