

Interview: Lillian Warner Green, February 12th, 2021

Interviewers: Sylviane Greensword and Marcellis Perkins

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

This is Sylviane Greensword I'm with Lillian Warner Green. Today's February the 12th, the year 2021 and we are in the Kelly Center. So, let's start with you telling us a little bit about yourself. Can you tell about where you're from, how you grew up, where you grew up, and if you have any specific childhood memories that you would like to share with us?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes. I am from Austin, Texas. And I grew up in a household where my mother was the one that raised us because my father passed away when he was when he was thirty-one and I was five. So, basically she did all the raising. Of course, we were very fortunate because we had our grandparents that live two houses down. We had a great aunt that lived three houses down, and then we had our great grandparents, who lived two blocks away, so it actually took the village to raise us.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

How many siblings?

Lillian Warner Green:

I have, I had an older brother and I have a younger sister so I'm the middle child, (laughs) which is interesting... (laughs)

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Yes.

Lillian Warner Green:

Position to be in.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

I can attest to that.

Lillian Warner Green:

Yeah.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

So, tell me, how did you get acquainted with TCU?

Lillian Warner Green:

When I was looking at colleges to attend, I knew that I did not want to attend the University of Texas in Austin because when I was in junior high school, I attended a gifted and talented program and the college was just too large for me. I wanted a more intimate type of college atmosphere and so... Plus, I wanted a Christian school. My great grandfather was a minister, so they emphasized, you know, Christianity to us and so as I was looking at the schools I looked at, of course university of Texas, where I didn't wanna go. My cousin went there but I didn't wanna go and then I looked at Tuskegee. I wanted to go there because I want to be a veterinarian originally, and my grandparents did not want me to leave. (laughs) So you always have to have a backup plan, (laughs) and so I looked into TCU and it was a Christian school, it was smaller then, so I felt like that would be the best atmosphere for me.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

So, your expectations were a small, intimate atmosphere. How did you expect Christianity to be practiced on campus?

Lillian Warner Green:

Basically we had to go to Chapel and then we had to study the Bible, the Old and the New Testament, which was you know, very interesting to me. So Christianity on campus, the people, the students, the teachers, the staff, they were all very welcoming to us as being African American. Of course, the neighborhood and the neighborhood in the city, that's where I ran into more of racism. One incident I had to ride the bus to come to school 'cause I did not stay on campus, and I got on the bus, I sat the front of the bus, and so (laughs) there were two Caucasian women that got on the bus. And one of them asks the other one, and I could hear, "Since when can they sit at the front of the bus?" And the other lady told her, "Oh, they've been sitting at the front of the bus for a long time." So I thought that was really ugh (shaking head). It was unnerving because you have to be in the community, and so that was my first experience with that. I did not have that experience in Austin. Pretty much, I could sit on the bus anywhere I wanted to, I could go to any store. What was- umm, I'm trying to think of the place, but there was a (tsk)- there was a restaurant downtown that we couldn't sit, you know, at the bar, but that was OK. (laughs)

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

And we're talking year, 1964, 19-

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes, we're talking years 1964, 63, around there. I don't, when I talk to my sister about the incidents- because in our neighborhood at the drugstore they had, you know, a counter where they sold their food and soft drinks and stuff. We could sit at the counter there, and my sister told me she said, "you have to realize, that our great grandfather, he was a business owner. He owned a billiards station, he owned a rug cleaning business, so he was an entrepreneur."

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Right.

Lillian Warner Green:

And everyone in the neighborhood knew that we were his great grandchildren. So maybe that was the reason why we didn't have a problem. I don't know (laughs).

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Kind of like a status?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yeah (laughing).

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

(laughs)

Speaking back of your childhood, how did your peers in high school or junior high, what was their attitudes towards you attending TCU? Cause I assume that they found out that you were going to go to TCU before graduation. Were they supportive? Were they doubtful? What do you think was their reaction?

Lillian Warner Green:

Well, when Austin decided to integrate their schools, it was voluntary, so my parents decided that we, you know, should go to the school in our neighborhood. So, we were both in junior high school, my sister and I, so we went to university junior high, and from there we went to Steven F. Austin High School. So basically, we came from an integrated school system, and so we didn't have anybody that we dealt with that did not support whatever school we decided to go to so.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

So you are, you were familiar with integration with being the minority in the whole institution?

Lillian Warner Green:

Right.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Now I'd like for you to walk us through your first day at TCU, if you can to the best of what you can recollect from beginning to end, don't spare any details.

Lillian Warner Green:

(laughing)

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Just imagine that we just close our eyes and we can just see what's going on.

Lillian Warner Green:

To begin with we had orientation. So, we get to meet, you know, our classmates that we possibly may have in class. So my first day of class was not really, scary it was very easy to go to your classes, listen to your professors, meet your fellow students, and try to develop friendships. So, the first day of school (pause) I made some new friends, especially in the areas that, that I decided I wanted to major in, which was math and music at that time-

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Okay.

Lillian Warner Green:

And so, I didn't run into anybody not welcoming us on campus. So, it was very uneventful. You know nothing special happened. Of course, I met the other African American students and we gathered together and decided that since it was just us on campus that we would always stick together and help each other out and tutor each other in the subjects that we have problems in, and that made it easier, I guess on campus. Some of my- some of the other African Americans stayed on campus, which they did run into some problems, not major problems but some problems.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

So, what do you think, did they also feel that it was relatively uneventful, where they surprised by the fact that it was uneventful?

Lillian Warner Green:

They felt like it was uneventful. Yes, they did (laughs). They were surprised. One of my classmates Mildred Sims, she did run into some problems. Through the years, when was a sophomore, she wanted to become a I think they called them dorm managers?

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Right.

Lillian Warner Green:

And she wanted to become one because she felt like, you know, she felt like she was one of them. (Hand clasp) But the dean called her in, told her "no, you can't do that. We don't want to cause any problems because the parents would not want you disciplining their child" or adult child (scoff). That was one thing that she ran into but she didn't- she just let it go.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

She just let it go?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yeah, because the main reason we were on this campus was to get an education. (pause)
Later, during our college years, the sororities and fraternities were not open to us so we reached out to the community and were able to join a sorority.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

So, speaking of Mildred Sims, back in 2001 I read that she said that she didn't encounter any major bias except for Greek life, which you just mentioned, and we were gonna cover that a little bit later. So tell us since everybody was so welcoming, why do you think it took so long for TCU to integrate? We are one of the last schools to actually integrate. Others, as far as one decade earlier, chose to integrate African American students. Why did we wait so long since clearly everybody was in favor?

Lillian Warner Green:

Probably because of the clientele, the Caucasians. Probably the school felt like they weren't ready yet. And that would be the only reason I can think of that they didn't integrate sooner. I know UT, North Texas that they already integrated. So. And you would think that they would have integrated early because it was a Christian School, (laughs) that we know from history when you say Christian, it means different things to different people that they can tolerate some things and some things they cannot.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

That is true. I have a couple of questions before we take our break. So, in an article that I read, both Ms. Sims and you stated that you didn't realize that you were making history, and said it "oh it was just a regular day-"

Lillian Warner Green:

(laughs)

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Just going to school.

Lillian Warner Green:

Right! (laughs)

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

How does it feel now to know that you've been such a trailblazer?

Lillian Warner Green:

I've thought about that (laughs). Right now, it's an honor. At the time, I didn't feel like it was stressful at the time but over the years I have found that we did we experience stress because we were one of the first. So- but to us we just wanted an education. It didn't matter where.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

That's most important.

Lillian Warner Green:

You know that was the main thing for us.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

And you all seem to have gone to quite successful careers afterwards. Can you tell us a little bit about your achievements after TCU?

Lillian Warner Green:

Um... let's see. After TCU I became a teacher for Fort Worth ISD, and then later I became an administrator in charge of one of the magnet programs in Fort Worth, and then my last two years I served as a grant coordinator for Fort Worth ISD for the grant programs, the magnet, the magnet middle schools, I was over there. So, I did move along (laughs). Recently I just wanted to stay in the classroom, but Mildred Sims asked me if I would apply for the job because it was at her campus. And I thought about it, I talked to my mom about it, and I decided to go on and apply and I got the job. So, we helped each other.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

So, you have remained connected long after TCU?

Lillian Warner Green:

Right.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

With the others too?

Lillian Warner Green:

With most of them, we've lost contact with some, but with most of them.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

So, what was it like to be in the same class as James Cash?

Lillian Warner Green:

I was in the same class as James Cash (laughs) I was in a math class with him. He was just a regular student.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Not thinking he was making history.

Lillian Warner Green:

Not thinking about it at all. Now he knew he was making history because of the basketball thing.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

Right.

Lillian Warner Green:

But it really didn't bother him 'cause he just wanted to play basketball and get a good, good education.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword

That's amazing.

BREAK

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Alright, now the students who enrolled in 1965, which is the group that you were a part of, is actually the second wave of students, there were a group of students who enrolled in 1964 and decided not to stay. To your knowledge, why did they leave?

Lillian Warner Green:

I've actually never met any of those students so I have no idea why they left. If they came from a predominantly black school, then they may have had a hard time adjusting to the campus, being the only one in class, otherwise we didn't experience any visual racism.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Can you elaborate a little bit about that, what would make it so hard for someone from a predominantly black institution to come to TCU? Because it is still the case today, we still have students who came from a predominantly black high school and they come here and they do experience a little bit of a culture shock. So, what can you tell them in terms of how to adapt and what kind of problem can you anticipate?

Lillian Warner Green:

I actually think that you know once you have the students, you've recruited the students, you've brought my campus, you need to provide support for them to help them bridge the gap. Because otherwise they're just left out there, they don't know how to deal with whatever they feel is a problem, so they need to be mentored. Especially I would say the first two years because the third year is when you really have to make a decision that you are going to continue on because it can become frustrating sometimes. For example, I took Spanish in high school, I actually started in junior high, and I came to campus and so I was going to continue the Spanish. I got very, very frustrated so I actually failed that course, so I decided to take another language and that was French, and I had no problem with it. So, had I been mentored by someone, someone could've help me to see, and help me get up that hump so could've passed that Spanish class. But you know we didn't have that, except we had each other. You know, so...

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

So, you seem to have a very positive testimony in terms of experience here, what do you think that could have made it better?

Lillian Warner Green:

If everything was open to us. (laughs) Everything was not open, I mean that was at the very beginning so it was like an experiment I think (laugh) to see if we would survive. But if more things, more resources were available to us, I think that would have helped us more. You know we created our own mentorship, mentorships for each other but it would have been better to have a junior or senior that could've mentored us, helped us.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

I know you have a little bit of Greek in you. Were you aware of any of the activities that were taking place in Greek life, the life that you were excluded from?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes, you couldn't help but see everything they were doing, you know they were very involved. In fact (hand clap) I did join a service sorority and that was interesting because we did a lot of things together, we went out and did projects together, helped on campus, and it was an integrated group.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

What is the name of that group?

Lillian Warner Green:

I cannot remember, it was Gamma Sigma Sigma? I'd have to look back at some papers that I have, but I participated in that during my senior year because I wanted to do service projects, and it was available, but the other Greek organizations were not. So that was my first experience with an organization like that.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Were you aware of the slave auction fundraising that they were having?

Lillian Warner Green:

No, I was not aware of that.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Because they advertised this in *The Skiff*, as if it was common practice or common business.

Lillian Warner Green:

But then you know a lot of the times, since we were on campus to get an education, a lot of the times I think we just blocked that out. We just totally ignored it because it was about them, not about us. That was their problem, not ours. As long as they didn't bother us then we were OK.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

And do you think that, not necessarily the racism, but the tendency to get closer to your own racial group at the expense of the other, do you think that it was just one sided or do you think that they were people among the group of African American students who also kind of shunned the white students?

Lillian Warner Green:

I didn't see that among us we were all participating you know with the other race. We knew what campus we were on, we knew it was predominantly Caucasian, so yeah.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Were there any other racial minorities?

Lillian Warner Green:

During that time? No.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

So, it was either Black or White?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Now TCU's reputation has been smudged. There were reports on racism coverage in the media, scandals. Do you think that these stories are bringing a transparent display of what's really going on at TCU, or would you say that this distorts what reality's really

like? Because the media has a lot of power, they can either bring things to light or they can taint an institution's reputation against the truth. What is your personal take on that?

Lillian Warner Green:

I think the media can blow up the situation. It's OK to report an incident that happened but give both sides of it, you know, not just give one side, you have to give the other side too. When I read about the latest problems on campus I was I was shocked, I was totally shocked, but then we know that we live in a different world now. We know that we live in a world where if someone has a problem with your race, that they're more verbal I think with it, they don't hide anything, they just say what they want to. And they just say what they want to and myself I have to deal with that, and I decide how we want to deal with that. I think that TCU, with the investigation that they have going on, I think that that will help the institution and hopefully all this information will be put out. So that everyone will understand what's really happening on this campus, and not just the one side. It's a new day (laugh), it is a new day. People show more of the hatred than they showed before, which may be a good thing because you know where they're coming from.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

So, where does reconciliation begin?

Lillian Warner Green:

It would actually begin with the school and (pause) the racists on campus. That everybody needs to be treated equal and hear each other's views on different things, and that's the only way it would work. You can't just close your ears to what someone is saying. You have to listen, research, and come up with your own answer.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Well thank you. Before we go, I want to hear a little bit more, I want to take us back

Lillian Warner Green:

Oh-

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

And I know it's not in order, but some very, very interesting things were said during the break and I think that they just they just need to be heard by more than just us. So, can you tell us more about how your family supported you, and your entourage, and how that could help someone else who's going through a similar situation because when we're talking about suffering from discrimination, we often narrow the situation down to the victim and the aggressor but there are other parties involved, and their intervention can help appease the situation, can help with reconciliation. It can help with healing. So tell us about your mother, and your sister, and how the village helped you.

Lillian Warner Green:

So, when I was accepted at TCU, mother decided that they would move to Fort Worth too. So, I didn't come to Fort Worth by myself. I came with them, which was a great support for me. Therefore, I did not stay on campus so I didn't have the campus experience, which was not important to me because I knew that I was a type of student who needed to have absolute quiet (laugh) when I was studying. So, at home I had that quiet, but I also had, you know, my I sister and my mom there to support me with whatever I wanted to do.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

And how did your sister fare with her own academics?

Lillian Warner Green:

That is interesting (laughing). My sister came from an integrated school to Fort Worth. Fort Worth was not integrated, their school system was not integrated. They did not integrate the schools until my second year of teaching in Fort Worth, so that was in the 70's, and at that point they basically integrated the teachers first and then the students. But my sister, the experience from coming from an integrated school to an all-Black school, was a challenge for her because (sigh) they had this, I don't want to call it, they had this rule. When, you know, when you're a senior and they have to decide the valedictorian and the salutatorian, my sister was actually valedictorian but because she was out here X number of years, then she did not get that recognition. She was able, I guess this would be appeasing us (laughs), she did get a full scholarship to Wiley college. So that was good because remember mother is the one that's supporting us, and so that helped with her college education.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

And did you come from a background where your family members had high education levels?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes, I did. My mom did not go to college. My dad did, but he went to Prairie View, but his I think it was his second year of college that he developed rheumatic fever and then he developed rheumatic heart problems. So, he did not finish, but his brother did, his older brother did. My great grandmother on my father's side, she had a degree in home economics and then all of her siblings had college education. So of course, you know from the very beginning it was emphasized that you are going to college. That's the way that you can make it.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Right.

Lillian Warner Green:

So, there was no doubt, no doubt about it. My sister started out at Wiley, she got married, and then she finished in California at Loyola Marymount with a business degree. My brother, he graduated in 1962, he went into the service, he was in Vietnam, when he got out of the service, he used his GI bill to go to college and he was able to get his Master's degree. My sister has hers too. Yeah so, we had support, we were not the first generation to go to college.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Oh, and tell me a little bit about your career in education, after TCU.

Lillian Warner Green:

OK after TCU, I became an instructor, teacher for Fort Worth ISD

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

That's a big change from wanting to be a veterinarian.

Lillian Warner Green:

I know (laugh) I couldn't go to Tuskegee, so I came to TCU, I majored in math and majored in music. My junior year, I started having visual problems. We found out that I had, I had a lazy eye. So, I had to take visual therapy and all that. So concentrating on numbers and on notes, it was a struggle. So, I talked to my dean and we decided that I would major in English and minor in history, and actually it was a double major. So that's how that changed. I still wish I would've been able to become a vet.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Do you have any children?

Lillian Warner Green:

I have one son. He didn't finish college. He had a learning disability but he has a very excellent job (laugh). His father, I married him after I finished college. But we divorced later, and then I married again in 2000- no, no 1989. And my husband passed away from a brain tumor in 2012. It's the worst one you can have. It's called a glioblastoma multiform, and by the time they diagnosed that... because this tumor is so smart there was only one chemo pill that they could give him in radiation, but the tumor's so smart that it can invade everything. So, in the end what you end up doing is having brain surgery, radiation chemo, tumor comes back, brain surgery, radiation, chemo. And I met several people in the support group that I attended that did do that, but my husband opted not to do that. So he donated his body to science, so they could find out, you know, how did it come about because he was, he was never sick. He was never sick at all, so we don't know, you know was it exposure to something or what. So yeah.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

So, it seems like you and your family, everyone is just committed to knowledge. Up until, up until his passing.

Lillian Warner Green:

Yeah.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

That's phenomenal. How does your background in education help support your son? That you say has a-

Lillian Warner Green:

(pause) When I found out that he had the problem, I was able to send him to a special school that taught him techniques, how to deal with his disability. And he did go to college, he went to college for three years but I think he became very frustrated 'cause he did, you know fairly well the first and second year, but that third year he just couldn't deal with it anymore. So yeah.

Marcellis Perkins:

I do have a question. You mentioned that when you were a student here, you joined a sorority in the community. Can you speak a little more about that sorority? It that the same sorority-

Lillian Warner Green:

It was actually on campus.

Marcellis Perkins:

It was on campus?

Lillian Warner Green:

Uh huh.

Marcellis Perkins:

Okay, it was the same service, service sorority your senior year, or was it a different sorority?

Lillian Warner Green:

It was the same one from my senior year. I didn't join the Deltas until later, much later.

Marcellis Perkins:

Mm, okay-

Lillian Warner Green:

As a graduate, you know a graduate chapter.

Marcellis Perkins:

Okay.

Lillian Warner Green:

Yeah.

Marcellis Perkins:

Cause I had mentioned- I heard you mention, red is your color.

Lillian Warner Green:

Right.

Marcellis Perkins:

And I saw you were wearing the pink; I was thinking AKA.

Lillian Warner Green:

(Laughs) no, red is my color, (laughing).

Marcellis Perkins:

Red is your color, I caught that. I do have one more question, being that your family come from a long line of educated people. And I find that really interesting, being that it's the South, that time period as well, you said that your, was it your grandmother and all of her siblings went to college?

Lillian Warner Green:

Uh huh.

Marcellis Perkins:

Where, where did that spark or who, who pushed that in your family? 'Cause what time period are we talking about when your grandmother and her siblings all went to college?

Lillian Warner Green:

Ohh wow... it would be the early 19- 1920s, 1930.

Marcellis Perkins:

Wow so, so that means that they're going to college in 1920, they were born in the late 1800s.

Lillian Warner Green:

Mhm.

Marcellis Perkins:

Who pushed that? Like where did, where did that- I don't know if you have stories passed down to you, but where did that drive come from, that couple years after emancipation? Like we're looking at thirty years after emancipation that these siblings were born, all would go to college, the highest level of education. So that means that their grandparents did not have that opportunity, their parents probably did not have that opportunity. So where did that drive come from within, which was obviously passed down to you?

Lillian Warner Green:

I would say my great-grandfather, he emphasized education all the time. And from that, the siblings got their education, and then his grandchildren got an education. And then it was left to us. So... that was the spark.

Marcellis Perkins:

Do you think that spark motivated you to TCU? That while you were at TCU at times, did you revert back to that village that you come from, knowing what those people went through, knowing what those people accomplished, kind of help push you as well?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes, I think so. There was no doubt (laughs) I mean you knew that from the beginning, there was no doubt that you were going to get a college education. And there was nothing that was going to stand in the way, in fact I did not, I did not get married until after I graduated from college. I mean that was determined (laughs). Now my sister being the baby, she got married before that (laughs) but anyway. She did go complete her degree, so yes ... it's important to have that support.

Marcellis Perkins:

One last question. I know that you mentioned that your father attended Prairie View, and given that time period I'm assuming that your grandmother and her siblings also went to HBCUs?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes.

Marcellis Perkins:

Okay. So, would you be the first from the family to go to a predominantly white institution, that attended college?

Lillian Warner Green:

My cousin, my great aunt's son, he went to UT Austin. So, I would say he was the first one, and I was second.

Marcellis Perkins:

How was your family receptive to you going to a predominantly white institution, in that you had a long legacy of HBCU students and grads?

Lillian Warner Green:

They didn't have a problem with it. You know main person I had to look at is my, (laughing) is my grandmother. She didn't have a problem with it. As long as she didn't have a problem with it, I was good to go. That's why I didn't go to Tuskegee because of her (laughs).

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Do you have a special standing in the community or was it particularly prestigious for you to have attended TCU compared to other situations?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes, it was.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

So, people looked up to you?

Lillian Warner Green:

Yes, they did. But you know, it was not important to me. That wasn't what it was about. That was just side bar. You were asking me about my career, after I left Fort Worth ISD, I decided to substitute at the schools where my church members, their children, attended, and so I did that for a year. And then I was asked to teach at Tarrant County College, which was something that I had always wanted to do, was on my bucket list before bucket list was a thing to talk about. And I had applied two years before I retired, and the way that I got the job at TCC was one of the professors became ill, had surgery, and she was still in pain. And they called me on a Thursday and wanted to start work on the Monday, and so I said yes, and I've been at TCC since that time. So, I really enjoy teaching, I like to see that spark in a student's eyes when they really truly understand, so needless to say because of the pandemic, I don't see my students face to face (laughs). I don't like that (laughs) but we have to do the things that are safe, so I will deal with that, (laughs) but yeah.

Marcellis Perkins:

This is the last one, I promise.

Lillian Warner Green:

(Laughs)

Marcellis Perkins:

(Laughs) but when you said that you enjoy seeing the sparks on students' faces when they understand; what would be some advice you would give current Black students, for them to understand the legacy that they are a part of, being a Black student here at TCU? Maybe some words of encouragement or advice that you would want to bestow upon them.

Lillian Warner Green:

I guess my encouragement would be to take advantage of everything that TCU offers you. If you need help, ask for help, there's nothing wrong with asking for help, that will help you go along your career path. And be proud of attending TCU because you have a legacy that you need to carry on that we started, so we want to continue to be a force at TCU.

Dr. Sylviane Greensword:

Well thank you, Mrs. Lillian Warner Green.