

L Michelle Smith Transcript

March 23rd, 2022

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

This is Sylviane Greensword. I'm here with L Michelle Smith, and we're here for the Race and Reconciliation Initiative's Oral History Project interview. Today is March the 23rd, the year is 2022, and we are in The Harrison. Ms. Smith, thank you so much for joining us with oral history.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Thank you for having me.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, absolutely. We are so looking forward to hearing your testimonials and hearing you share stories about your time here at TCU and thereafter. So, let's start from the beginning. We're going to go fairly chronological. Can you please tell us a little bit about yourself? Where you're from? Where you grew up? Any cultural or religious influences in your upbringing?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Okay. Well, I grew up in Dallas, Texas in Oak Cliff. Currently, I am an author, a speaker, and an executive coach, and, and also an adjunct professor at TCU. But yes, I grew up in Oak Cliff back in the '70s. I was born on Van Cleave Drive, and this is going to have some significance a little bit later, in 1971, and I guess I'll go on and tell you, I would later learn that the first African American Queen also grew up on Van Cleave Drive on the opposite side of the street, and she was crowned queen in '71, the year I was born, isn't that interesting?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, serendipity.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah. So anyway, small family. One sister, who's older than me, who graduated from Dallas Baptist University, and got her master'ss and PhD from UNT, University of North Texas. Mother and father, father was a government worker, civil servant, worked for the US Department of Labor and US Department of Defense. Retired from the US Department of Labor. My mom is a master teacher, she's retired, and she taught English for most of the time in junior high and high school. I went to private school for most of my formative years K-12, all in one place, Tyler Street Christian Academy, that's where my parents wanted me to go. My sister also finished there. She was the first homecoming queen that was black there.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Runs in the family.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah. You're going to see all the dots connect here in a minute. So anyway, finished from Tyler Street in 1989, and our church was right around the corner. I lived right down from the Cedar Crest Golf Course, and the church, the Good Street Baptist Church, which is historic in Dallas, it was pastored by the Reverend C. A. W. Clark, who was well known and influenced many pastors in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and also around the globe and around the nation too, but many of his mentees, if you will, are running some of the largest churches right now. It was the pulpit where Jesse Jackson would come during his run for presidency, it was the one place where MLK came when he visited in '59, I believe it was because the other churches wouldn't have him. They were afraid. They thought they'd get bombed.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

So, my pastor at the time had a lot of courage, of course I wasn't born during that time, but these are the stories that kind of undergirded the church, and the history that was there, and a lot of leadership lessons that I have practiced today I learned at that church. Ultimately, I would leave Tyler Street, and only had one college application because that's where my parents wanted me to go, just like they wanted me to go to Tyler Street.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

No plan B.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

No plan B. Dallas Baptist University. However, there were some little incidents that happened at Dallas Baptist University with my sister when she was a senior. She was up for Ms. DBU, and she was the favorite. They had never before given it to anybody but a senior, and she did an amazing talent. She played the piano, the music box dancer (and I was actually in the audience), running a little remote-control doll, you know, she did a whole skit, put glitter on the doll, the doll shook, she started to play the piano, and the doll would dance. It was a nice little, you know, ooh, you know it was a nice thing. But she was denied that, and my dad ended up going to the administration to talk to them about what had happened. There was an audible gasp in the auditorium. So, I had no plans to run for anybody's homecoming queen, let's say that, because I've seen it go wrong before. But anyway, my parents still were thinking that's where I should go. I didn't want to go. One because of that, but two it wasn't the place of my choice, and I had

received however a full ride scholarship at that school. So in July we showed up at that campus for registration, and I was met with, there's a mistake. Yeah, and I said no mistake here's the letter says "congratulations, full ride scholarship" what are you talking about? I was there with my mom, this is July of 1989

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

A month before school is in session.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Right. So all of the admissions deadlines had passed.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And this is what we're dealing with, and they're like no, no, no there's some mistake. They go back in the back for 30 minutes or so, come back, and say "well, you know, yeah there's a mistake, we don't have a full ride scholarship for you, but we can piece together something for you. Do you sing? We'll give you a thousand dollars for that. You're a cheerleader? We'll give you a thousand dollars for that. I was like you should have known, because we saw this happened before, you know? We saw the way my sister was treated, just five years before, and so my mom said we got to think of something to do. She said "maybe we could go down the highway to TCU but we're passed admissions?" So that's what we did. She went home, called admissions at TCU, pretty much begged, and said would you just please have an interview with my daughter, she'll fill out the forms, I know it's passed deadlines. What they told her was "bring her in for an interview and she's going to have to write an essay." A week or two later we're here. The Registrar, you know, Admissions, at Sadler Hall, and I went in for the interview, and came out sweating bullets, I mean so much pressure.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right. Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I didn't know if I was going to get into college that year, and they said that I needed to write this essay. So I went home, and I wrote an essay, and the essay was called "the Plight of Chewing Gum." You heard me right, and it was a first person account of a piece of chewing gum that a little boy had pretty much slipped a pack into his mother's basket at the grocery store without her knowing, you know, it slides across the glass, and she's paid for it, and before you know it, the little boy does what a little boys does, he takes it to school in his backpack, and of course you're hearing this from the gum—not the boy—and he slips a slice into his mouth and it happens to be the one that's telling the story. Teacher catches him. Of course what did he do? He takes it out, he sticks it under the desk, which is pretty much the end of the story. They liked it. They liked it

so much, and they told me my essay is the reason why I got into the school. Needless to say that I'm a writer today.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Exactly.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And I'm very blessed that, that was the skill that got me into TCU, and that was the skill that would carry me through my life, and that ride home from TCU after the interview, my mother was not comfortable because they were expecting to pay a certain amount at TCU, which I think at that time was half the admission that was at TCU, which of course now is like a 100% more than it was then.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

But they were going to strain the pay, and my mom was in the car just grilling me, "what are you going to major in?" "I don't know! I'm kind of good at a lot of things, I, I don't know." "You got to figure it out because your daddy and I are about to pay money that we don't have, and we don't qualify for financial," and you know, the whole thing.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And so, at that point, I was like, "English? I guess I'll be an English major."

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Creative writing?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Right, so English, writing emphasis was my major, and I also declared journalism as a double major, and education as a minor because again, my parents were like you're going to get that teaching certificate because you need to fall back on something, that was just their thinking. This is a different generation.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

This is a generation that fought for access.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

They didn't realize how much choice we were going to have.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

They were very pragmatic. Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Very much so, but it's very interesting because later on in life I would start my own business after making Vice-President before the age of 30 at a global agency, and it was just after 9/11 and I went to my dad, and I was like, I think I could make money doing what I do, and he was like "I want to hear what you have to say," which is interesting considering everything that I've just shared with you, and it turns out my great-grandmother was an entrepreneur that ran a grocery store by herself in Tyler, Texas in the '40s

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

With a gun on her hip. And he saw that, so he knew that entrepreneurship was honorable, it was honorable, it was something that you could do, and he never got to do it, so he was ready to back me, so anyway, a little bit more insight about my parents. But I should tell you a bit about me.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, so what was your knowledge of TCU before you enrolled?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Purple and white. That's really it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's all you knew.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

That school down I-30, that's all I knew. I knew it was private. I knew it was less snooty than SMU, is what I was told. I knew that they weren't many black people there. That wasn't going to be too scary, although my little private school that I went to was very diverse, lots of black, brown, and white kids, and we got along like gangbusters, and you know, we used to say that we did diversity before diversity was a word. So to come to TCU was kind of shell shock because I wasn't used to being around *so* many white kids and being outnumbered.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And many of them privileged, I didn't have that kind of money, but my parents still were paying for it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, they were investing knowing that it would yield good results. So, what about your high school peers? You said that you were like very close. What did they think when they heard "Oh, you're coming to TCU?"

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

It's interesting because at that point, I don't really think I had that kind of contact with my high school friends, and it was such a quick turnaround, there's nobody to tell. I just needed to show up and be happy I was here.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Many of my high school friends, I probably had more friends in the class below me than the class with me because many of them went to other schools, and like the 9th and 10th grade so, I mean they were colleagues more than friends, and then I also had friends that were in black classes that were a little bit older than me that I was friends with because my mom taught them and they just kind of saw me as miss little girl. Kind of a little sister, and they all played basketball, and I cheered so I knew them, but I wasn't close enough to be like, "I'm going to TCU! Where are you going?" It wasn't like that at all.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And what about the community, your neighbors? Or your aunties?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah. The only real response that I got, now I went to a historic church Good Street Baptist Church, most of the kids there were either going to the HBCUs the classy ones, Spellman, Howard, all of this, you know, every once in a while you'd have someone got to a state-school, you know, maybe they'd go to UNT, but here I came talking about how I was going to TCU, and you know I was pretty much kind of ostracized for it, you know, you're going to that white school?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, interesting.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

You have to understand, this church was black excellence, and that's what they really expected us to just build a culture, you know, and most of those folks that were more senior, you know, the elders that were there. The elders went to HBCUs before they were called HBCUs since that was the only place they could go. So, they wanted to carry that through. My parents finished Texas College, which is an HBCU.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Mom pledged AKA. I'm a legacy, I pledged here on this campus. My dad pledged Kappa, but it was interesting that my parents weren't pushing me to go to a HBCU. Very interesting. But anyway, there I was the, and I wasn't shocked about it because when Joyce came back to the church and said she was going to DBU, deer in the headlights like why are you doing that, right? Go to Spellman

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Joyce is...

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Joyce is my sister, my older sister. So yeah, it wasn't a big "woo you're going to TCU!" at the hometown.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Did any of the elders in your community ever try to go to TCU?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yes. I did get a response from someone, it was a surprise to me, I. H. Claiborne was his name, he's passed away today. Stalwart in the community. Head of the Masons there in Dallas. Just you know, philanthropist, he'd done all sorts of things, and he was the lead of the Sunday School class that I was assigned to at the age of 13 to teach, and that was one of the things we learned at this church. Once you got to be a teenager, you were assigned an adult class to teach, which is where I got my speaking skills to be honest. So, one day, he learned that I got accepted, that I got accepted, that I had applied and got accepted to TCU, that I was actually going, and he pulled me to the side, and he looked into me and just peered in my eyes and said, "you're going to TCU?" "Yes sir, I am." and he asked it again and said, "you're going to TCU?" "Yes sir, I am." and finally I said, "why do you ask?" he said "I applied many, many years ago and they didn't let me come. I had to go to Jarvis." And I said "wow, that was interesting," that was the first time I began to look back to see the history of schools not just TCU, but others in the Southwest Conference back then. They all had these little "sister schools" if you will, where black students were sent if they applied to. So, Jarvis Christian College, one of my best girlfriends finished

there. She's Miss Jarvis. She's a little bit older than me, also my sorority sister. A lot of my friends went to HBCUs not knowing the history of the TCU, and one of the things that was really interesting to hear was, even though our dorms weren't high-tech at all back then, I mean I remember my dad building a computer for me but there was no broadband, there was no, he had to rig the dial in just so I could, you know, tap into the mainframe at Sid Richardson, so I could get my Pascal homework done because he didn't want me walking in the middle of the night to the, and that's what we had to do because, it's funny you would sit down to this mainframe, there was no delete button, you had to get it right the first time, and if you didn't get it right you had to start all over again, so we had to write it down on a pad, walk over to Sid Richardson and type in and pray it was right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Right, so our dorm rooms didn't have any of that kind of thing, but compared to what Jarvis had, it seemed high-tech, so it was a real stark, it was very interesting fact for me to learn that that was what was going on, but that was my first indication that something was different.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes. Are you aware of the exchange program between TCU and Jarvis back in the 1960s?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yes, that's when I found out about it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So do you know anything about the reasons why? Because the students were supposed to complete that exchange program for a length of a week, so the students from TCU went to Jarvis, and the students from Jarvis came here. So the Jarvis students left TCU for a week, but the TCU students did not last at Jarvis for more than a day.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I didn't know that part. I just knew about the program. Interesting.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So with everything that you're telling me, and that was in the '90s.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, God knows what it looked like back in 1964.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Well, I had two peers that lived in Jarvis Hall, and they were dancers, and that's where a lot of the dancers stayed, and just making that connection was very interesting.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, yes, absolutely. So, when you come here you pledge AKA. Can you tell us about your fellow African American classmates? What was their attitude about being such a minority on campus?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

It was hard. So, the three percent of us that were there, I remember that number very well, and I think it's up two percent now, maybe three. There were maybe three kinds of students. There were students like me, we were in the minority. Parents were paying out of their pockets. We were declared majors, and we were just here as students. Then you had those that were here with the ROTC, and I had two roommates that were in the ROTC. Two of them round up being in my sorors, and they were also roommates. One is a Chief Nursing Office, by the way in Portland Oregon, amazing. The other one is also a corporate nurse, but both of them were tremendously gifted, smart. I don't know any of my friends that weren't, that didn't do well. But the other part of the black student body were athletes. So, they were on the football team, basketball team, you know, rarely swimming or anything like that, so we were separated from the bulk of the black student body, which is the athletes because we were on a totally different schedule, and when we would see them we would see them around the time the time it was for lunch, maybe. Dinner they had off in the training table, that's what they called it, they had their own diets, they had to eat when it was time to eat around practices and stuff like that, I remember them saying to us when we had contact with them, that they really yearned to be a part of the student body.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh they did, huh?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah because it was a different experience. They were on the job, you know?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And we wanted them to participate too in Black Student Caucus and you know and during that time *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*, which shut down this entire campus, I don't care what color you were.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh no.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Thursday night everything shut down. You knew not to have meetings, anything like that, but the football guys had to go on and have practice, so they didn't have that experience like we did. So yeah, attitudes about being here? The dancers seemed to be fine with it because they had really great dance school, and they sought it out. Again, we're talking about a handful of students. One of them was my sorority sister, the other one good friend of mine, she actually just roomed with the other sorority. The rest of us, if you were in ROTC you were probably working your behind off just to be here because on the weekend you were going to bootcamp or whatever you were doing.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I remember one of my sorority sisters came back and quit after her first experience because her nails got dirty, and she's like...

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And I was like, yeah, you probably should have thought of that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

So she dropped out of ROTC, and then there were the athletes, and the athletes were just on a totally different vibe, you know? They just were doing that, hoping that they would get drafted, you know come their senior year, they were on the job. I had this thought not long ago, as I was, I teach senior seminar for TCU right now, and I had a former graduate, that just recently graduated, speak to the class, she was talking about community, and how she was keeping that up, even though she had found this job in Dallas, and she talked about how they have set up a time to eat with her friends every Thursday, even though they're spread out across the metroplex. They call it "family night." They go to somebody's apartment, or somebody's house and they

rotate, and they have this, and it hit me at that point, I was like, “That is so cool! Why didn’t I do that?” Well, when I went to class, I rarely saw my black friends. I was an English major. I was *the one*.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And when I graduated, we just dispersed, and you know before the internet was the internet, before Facebook was Facebook, there was no staying in contact really.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

So there was no real community, we weren’t texting each other.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Nothing like that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

That isn’t to say that I didn’t know where my colleagues were. Fellow graduates or whatever. Once you lost contact, you kind of lost contact. Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah. So what got you into cheerleading then?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Well, I cheered seventh grade all the way through twelfth grade, and my freshman year, I kind of checked out what was going on here, and I thought well maybe, I knew that they had a co-ed squad, but they introduced the idea of an all-girl squad, and I would be one of the first members, we were the all-girl, they called it “cheer-cheer.” It’s kind of like a pom squad if you will, we would dance, not like the show-girls, but we danced but we also stunt, tumble, and we’d cheer, and it was interesting because the show girls try to figure out where we fit, and co-ed was trying to figure out where we fit, and co-ed and cheer 2 had the same coach Holly Roscoe, never will forget her. Yeah I was an all-American cheerleader for NCA, which is the National Cheerleader

Association, got nominated for that twice in high school, so I knew I could compete. So sophomore year, going into sophomore year, I decided to try out, I made it, there were two black students on that first inaugural team, LeAnn Sims, if you haven't spoken to her you need to, she was a Delta, she is a Delta, but LeAnn Sims and I were *the* black cheerleaders on cheer 2, it was the first iteration of that group, and that was an interesting situation because. Okay, she and I tried out without any, any thought, of any kind of discrimination, nothing. We felt like we're going to go in there, do what we had to do, we'd make the squad or we wouldn't, but the scuttle among the black students was, they would let me on because of my skin color.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Ah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And they wouldn't let LeAnn on because she was darker skin, and when it got back to us, we were mad, we were mad. We were like "now, why would they do that?" First of all, they're saying that I don't have the talent, they're just going to let me on because of my skin color. Two, they're just going to write you off because you're dark and not even think about your talent? We decided then we both need to make this squad. And we did. And it was kind of like, "and what?" Now what do you have to say for yourself? So there was this expectation for racism on the campus, and I can't say that it was unfounded because, and while colorism seemed to be at the root of it, it was just good old fashion racism, right?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, it was.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And I ran into situation on the cheerleading squad, and as you know I was a columnist for *The Skiff* that, that column was very popular, so much so that I would get letters from faculty members as well as students, people would write in and I'd get it in my PO box or they'd send it to *The Skiff* and Alfred would give me the letters, and the feedback that I'd get if someone took the time to right me, it was always positive.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Always?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

But here I was, now I was yeah, the written ones were. Here I was, introducing ideas of race in this column, and to my understanding that hadn't happened before, and you know I didn't mince words, I would say things that needed to be said, in one situation, you could go back in the archives and find it, in fact I understand that a few of my columns were brought up in the filing that happened, that class action lawsuit, someone told me "you know your name came up?" I was like "how?" They'd pull my columns. One of them talks about how when I first went to one of the rehearsals or practices for cheerleader, it was springtime, the sun was out, you know people

had just, I say spring – it was fall semester, but the sun was still out, and we'd just come out of the summertime, so people had tans, and I don't know if you'd still call it the beach between Shirley and Colby, but girls used to lay out on "the beach" between those two, you're nodding, maybe they do, so people were working on their tans

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I had a cheerleader come up to me, who was not black, and said "oh my gosh, look!" and she held her arm up to mine and said "I'm almost as dark as you" and she put her arm up to another white cheerleader who was also tanning and she said "oh you're dark, you nigger" and you said the n-word, and LeAnn was standing right there, I was right here, and LeAnn looked at me like "did I hear what?" I said, "oh yeah, you heard it." I was like I can't believe they said that in front of us. I said, "you know that wasn't right," and they said "hahaha," and kind of laughed it off and went on, so I wrote about it in *The Skiff*, so yeah, there were people who didn't like the column, especially the ones who had a problem.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

But in retrospect, the thing that struck me about it that I didn't think about it before, I had faculty writing me because they said they enjoyed the column, but nobody approached me about my experience and said "how are you?"

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Nobody went to LeAnn, and said "who did this to you?" Nothing was done, but I guess it was okay to talk about it in the newspaper.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, to have that distance.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And I guess we had called it "the burden of resilience," this is something I write about now, where you've been through so much, that you bend you don't break, but when these things come around, like just Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, you learn to stand there and be gracious about it. When something probably should be said about it, and done about it. So, you know, we were so

resilient, it was almost like water off of our backs, and we never thought to go to somebody for some help about it, and nobody thought to come to us about it either.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Was there any type of institutional support with these situations at the time?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Not that I know of. I mean I don't know who you would go to? I guess, oh okay, so let me tell you this, we had a minority, director of minority affairs, and her name was Phyllis, I'm trying to remember her last name, but Phyllis was from the islands I don't know if it was Bahamas.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

You know who she is?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

She comes into play in the whole homecoming queen story, but before her Logan Hampton, who is now the president of Laine College, I go to Laine and speak to students all the time, but that was our outlet. If something happened, we're supposed to go to Logan or Phyllis, but that's really all we knew. I was writing about it in the paper, and I just felt like if someone was going to say something they just, I mean my byline was there, right?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

But no, no one said a word.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So if, you know there was some kind of protocol, you would go to them, and so, so Phyllis would listen, and do what?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I don't know 'cause I never did it. I have no clue.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

You're not aware of anybody else who actually filed a complaint?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Mmh. Mmh.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And there could have been a lot to complain about from what I've heard?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

There was a lot to complain about looking back, and you know, I can't believe a lot of the things that we went through, and it was just not addressed.

[End of 29:59 clip]

[Start of 23:31 clip]

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Of its main campus, we were actually one of the last institutions to fully de-segregate. Why do you think it took so long for TCU to get with the program?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Gee, I can only speculate. I, I

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, speculate. Let's speculate!

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

My understanding is the board members have a lot to do with what happens with the campus, and that sounds like okay that's, that's not rocket science, but you had a lot of people who were dug in, and stayed for a very long time, and not until recently did we have people that look like you and me on the board. Two of them I know very well: Ron Parker and Shirley Atkins Green, who is CMO of Mary Kay, but she's a past client of mine when I ran my business, my PR agency, her company that she's working for at the time was my client, and since then we've been friends, and Ron Parker at the time was, I believe just the outgoing President of the Executive Leadership Council, which is the group of African American Fortune 500 leaders. They're all CEOs, C-Suite, and senior executive leaders. Carmen Catrell whose nephew was the boyfriend, he went here too by the way, Joey Catrell, he might talk, Joey was the boyfriend of Myra, Myra was my soror that was a nursing student that, "Ooh my nails got...", she's Philipino by the way, she's not black, but she was my soror who dated Joey, who's also black, but yeah Carmen Catrell was the founder of Proline haircare products, which ended up getting gobbled up by Alberta Covert, that's where Shirley Atkins Green, that's where I met her at Proline, and Alberta Covert gobbled it up, and essentially, yeah, so Shirley's a member of the Executive Leadership Council, that's where they're pulling a lot of their new board members from, in fact I think there's somebody from PepsiCo that just joined recently, outside of LaDainian. All that to be said, we didn't have a black board member back then.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And, I just feel like people were set in their ways and they liked the TCU that was always the TCU, and if there were black students that were coming here you had to be able to blend, assimilate, otherwise you best be on those athletic programs, making money for them, for the school.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see. I see.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

That's just, that's the tone that we felt.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, let's talk about integration in different areas since we recently spoke about cheerleading. Are you familiar with Ron Hurdle and his story? As a cheerleader, were you informed of the challenges that he had to go through in order to be--

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Let me make sure I know who Ron is, Ron was the first cheerleader?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Black cheerleader, yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I don't know anything about that. In fact, I didn't learn that until you guys did the retelling. I think marketing put out a video, and I was like "wow!" didn't even know who he was. Had no clue.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah. Although this was twenty years before your time, some of the stories you're telling me clearly echo, that same...

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah, and my understanding was that LeAnn and I weren't the first and there were at least one or two other female cheerleaders on the co-ed team, but I was not aware of a male cheerleader being the first one. I had no clue.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, let's talk about another first then. In the footsteps of our Dr. Jennifer Giddings Brooks, you also ran for Homecoming Queen, and you know most of those first like Ron Hurdle or Dr. Brooks, they always tell us the same thing. They didn't realize they were making history at the time. They *always* tell us that. Did you know when you were running, for, for Homecoming Queen about Dr. Brooks's trailblazing achievements?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I was told, about Jennifer, and it came up just as I was nominated. I had two nominations. One from the basketball team who had not nominated someone for Homecoming Queen in some years, I was told like twenty years, they hadn't used their ballot or whatever it was called, and Allen Tolid. He might talk. I don't know. He was on the basketball team at that time. Kurt Thomas, who went on to be in the NBA, he was a part of that team. They kind of saw me as a little sister; I didn't date any of them, but we got along great, and they were under the belief because of the column, because I was an RA, and because I was active on campus, there is a whole story around getting MLK as a university holiday, I was instrumental in that. They felt that if I ran, I would win, and they had to talk me into it. I didn't want to, and I told you why. I saw what happened to my sister; I didn't want any part of that, and I also felt like it was a first real indication that maybe it was sexist, the way it was set up, but since it wasn't a pageant per se, maybe you could persuade me, I don't know, do I have to do again?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

So, they went back and talked to their coach about it. In the meantime, the Cheer 2 organization nominated me for queen, and so, at that point I told them "y'all I don't even really know that I want to, let me think about it." So I went back, I had these two nominations just sitting in my lap, and I talked to my roommates about it, and some of my sorors, and they were like "you should do it because you'll win, hands down," and I said "ahh, okay well let me go back and talk to the guys." I talked to them, they convinced me, and I said "okay, I'll do it." I went back to the coach, put in my nomination, and apparently whoever got the nomination got the nomination. Word got back to Cheer 2 before I could go back to Cheer 2 and tell them, and they said so "oh, well you have two," and I said "yeah." And so, one of the girls said, "well coach what do you think we should give the nomination to somebody else since she already has one," and I was kind of stunned, but I guess I was like "is that fair? I don't know. Do I really care about queen, I probably don't, so whatever," so they gave it to this other person who would actually become queen—bookmark there. So, yeah that happened. The two weeks between the time that the nominations went in and the time that they voted, and we actually went in the parade and went on the fifty yard-line—excruciating.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Why?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Completely excruciating. Well, between the fact that because the, the basketball guys they didn't know the rules of engagement, none of us did, none of the black students knew what it was to run for queen.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

They hadn't had a candidate since 1971, so nobody on campus knew what the rules were, and who knows if they changed or not? The guys were hanging out the Moncrief windows when I would walk by "MICHELLE!" I mean they're yelling and going on and come to find out we weren't supposed to campaign. Didn't know that. So, somebody reported the basketball guys and then reported me too, like I could control them yelling from the windows. I didn't ask them to.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

But I got "reported" because I was campaigning, because the basketball guys were yelling my name across campus.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, if that's all it takes to campaign then...

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

It's not like we had banner made, you know?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, right. Commercials.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

It wasn't anything like that. They got chided. I had to go back to the basketball players because nobody was communicating with them, and tell them "hey guys, keep it low, because apparently, I'm risking my nomination if you guys are hollering across campus, who knew? Right?" "Okay cool we'll be quiet about it, but we want everybody to vote for you," I said I appreciate that but "shush." The next thing that went down because my column ran on a Thursday, every day with fail for two years, and it just so happens that voting was going to happen on a Thursday. There were some students that went to *The Skiff* because my column was going to run the same day as voting. Can't do that. Pull her column. Of course, Alfred was not going to do that, and then the adults got involved, and ultimately my column got pulled. So, it didn't run on the Thursday that people were supposed to vote. The other thing that would happen, which is actually something

that Phyllis told me, the morning of the parade. Now, back then, the parade happened the same day as the, well, no, it was the pep rally.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

The pep rally happened the same day as game day. Right before game day. Back where Frog Fountain was in a totally different place in the student center, Brown Lupton was right there, it was a drive right in front. All the cars with the nominees would come though. I was actually in a bright purple drop top Mustang from one of the Homecoming King candidates. Blond, blue-eyed Ken doll, who was so down to earth it turned out. It turned out he, at the time it was Martina Navratilova's girlfriend's son, and she had gifted him that car.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

So, he was already open minded. He was like "yeah!" He didn't mind being in the car with me or anything like that, but we were pulling up and that's when Phyllis walks up to me and said, "you were robbed." Apparently, the night before was when the ballots went in, and she told me, and I got an indication from some of my *Skiff* colleagues too: they would count the ballots that night and they would be up to midnight or whatever. Once it was done, they would let everybody go home. They were sent home, and one of them called me and said, "I can't tell you what happened, but tomorrow is a good day." I was like "really?" and then I got the indication that they were called back. So, everybody was called back, some kind of recount. What Phyllis would shared with me that morning was the black students that voted, voted for queen. They didn't vote a full ballot. They didn't vote for junior, sophomore, whatever, and apparently the rules were you were supposed to vote for a full ballot, but nobody knew that. They showed up and voted for me. So, they threw those ballots out when they did the recount. So, I was greeted with this news on the back of this purple Mustang, and I'm faced with the idea of having to walk out on the fifty-yard line where they call the queen's name.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Now in my estimation, there was somebody else who probably would win. If it wasn't going to be, it's going to be Jamie. I forgot Jamie's last name. Jamie was a showgirl. Cutest thing in the world. I don't know if she's biracial, I don't know what she was. But everybody loved Jamie, and if it wasn't going to be me, it was going to be Jamie, and if it sure wasn't going to be Jamie it's going to be Penny because Penny was an RA and everybody loved Penny. None of these people won. And as it turned out, the girl who won was a member of a *huge* white sorority that

didn't necessarily know her. But the rule was, if you had somebody running, you'd get the block vote. She was also dating a Little Brother. So, they had these Little Brother organization, and the rule there is they're dating somebody who's on the court, everybody votes. So as I'm walking down the fifty-yard line, I look up and see Chancellor Tucker sitting right by her dad, and I was like Phyllis was right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

So the pictures of me that day, I had a smile on my face, but believe me I was not bringing my full self.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I was holding back tears. I was like "I didn't even want to be in this, what are they doing?" But yeah, in the midst of all that, Jennifer Giddings called me, called my dorm room, out of the blue, two days before homecoming. This is how I got to know Jennifer, and she's like "do you know my story?" and I said, "well I know you the first homecoming queen," and that's when she told me she's like "yes, 1971." I was like, "I was born in 1971." She's like "where are you from," I'm like "I'm from Dallas," "what part of Dallas?" "Oak Cliff." "Where in Oak Cliff?" "Cedar Crest." You're kidding me. I lived right across the street from the Cedar Crest golf course she told me. I was like that sounds like Van Cleave Drive. It's either Van Cleave or Southerland. I was like I was born in the house that Jethro Pugh used to own before my dad bought it. Jethro Pugh is a former Dallas Cowboy. But I lived down the hill, and Jennifer lived up the hill. So we automatically had this "oh my goodness" kind of bond and then she went on to tell me, look it up, go to the library, look at the microfiche, and see what my journey was all about, but I will tell you be prepared if you win because winning is about going to country clubs where they don't want to see you, and she said she would go into those country clubs, they'd spit on her. You know, they didn't make her feel welcome at all even though she was the queen.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And she said this is the problem, you may be representing a really great school but you're going to walk into spaces you're not welcome. Just be ready for that. So, that was very sobering, and I took her advice. I went to TCU library, buried myself in microfilm and microfiche to find out Chancellor Tucker didn't kiss her on the cheek, and that was the controversy. It was in *The Skiff* but it was also in the *Star Telegram*. It was in the *Dallas Morning News*. It was everywhere because this was a huge thing. I was like "wow, this is deep," and I got the same Chancellor too.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Twenty years later.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah, could not say that I was shocked, but I was definitely saddened by it because I was like “you know people went to great lengths to make sure this didn’t happen.” So, it hurt me, it hurt me really badly. To this day you can see I’m like... you know? My dad made the same trip to TCU that he made to DBU, but he would do this in a way that was very interesting. He would never tell us that he was coming. He would show up on campus, and he’d go to the administrative building and some student would find us and say “I saw your daddy. Your daddy was in the student center. He’s going in the administrative building, what’s he doing? He was in a three-piece suit you know? If daddy didn’t call me to say he was here, we’re going to let him do whatever he’s doing, but he went to visit Chancellor Tucker, and he waited ‘cause apparently he didn’t have an “appointment.” They told him you know have an appointment and he’s like “does he walk out of that door when he leaves?” “Yes.” “Well, then I’ll sit here.” It was that kind of thing. So, anyway, I quit the cheerleader squad as a result of that. It was very hard because I was actually one of the bases that stunted, and I had to lift her in the next stunt after that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

A pyramid without a base.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And I was like you know, it’s a good thing I’m a Christian because I could be like... there she goes. Right?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oops.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

But no, and the sad thing was it wasn’t anybody I disliked, and you know what I think she was shocked too, to be honest. Besides the fact that her dad was sitting by the Chancellor probably wasn’t that much of a shock, but that she actually had the numbers to make it happen, and it’s debatable that she did, but she did, and you know, Amon Carter, the people in the stadium kind of like was—there was not a big applause because they just didn’t know who she was. Like I said it should have been Penny or Jamie, and neither won. So anyway, I quit the squad. So if you

look at the yearbook in '93, you will see my picture appears in some of the candid photos, but the group shot I'm not in it. I didn't take the picture.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah. That's interesting how her father was sitting next to the Chancellor, but yet your father had to go and wait until the Chancellor came out of his office just to catch.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah, and I ran into Chancellor Tucker. Bob Schieffer was in town for an event, and it wasn't a TCU event, but TCU had a table, and a lot of people were there. Dean Bunton was the one that invited me because we're there to represent Schieffer. At the time, I'd been on the Board of Visitor for Schieffer for some years, and I was also on the billboards and the bus panels, and I walked into the building downtown in Fort Worth, and there was Chancellor Tucker. You know he's up in age now, and I don't think he'd recognize me, but I made a point to go over and say hello, and went on and spoke to Ms. Bunton, Dr. Bunton, and whoever else was there, but that was kind of a weird moment too. But Dean Bunton knew the story, I told her the story because she was the one who sought me out to be in the campaign. She crossed the river, that's how I like to say, and went east, and met me at AT&T where I was working at the time, and she wanted to visit me there, found out what I was doing 'cause she had heard from Dr. Lambiase about me. So, there was a gap between the time I went to graduate school and that timeframe, which was around 2009, well 2015, '16, something like that, that I kind of had a, a not really connective relationship with TCU through the journalism school at the time. It wasn't a Schieffer school, but the Neely School would call me, and I would review candidates, stuff like that, but Dr. Lambiase she was at UNT at the time, and she would call me because some of my employees finished UNT and she would call me up to speak. So it took Dr. Lambiase after coming to TCU to tell Dr. Bunton about me, and a couple of the professors who were still here. My thesis chairperson Dr. Anantha Babbili, you've got to talk to him. I don't know if his name has come up. He's Indian, but this is a man who would gather the black students in the journalism department—all four of us—put us in the back of his BMW every second Tuesday, and take us to the National Association of Black Journalists meeting that was local to Fort Worth at the Fort Worth Star Telegram, and if that man did not do that I would not be sitting here in front of you doing what I did. I got my first television job because of that you know. Meeting some of the best producers, and anchors, and everybody in the industry, but it's because he took the time to take the black students. We would have been disconnected. There was no NABJ chapter at that time. Anyway, gosh I forgot all what I was saying, we were talking about Jennifer Giddings.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Sorry, there was a lot to tell in there. Jennifer, so yeah, I saw the microfilm, saw the microfiche. It was depressing. When I came back to campus my senior year, I had interned at WFAA in downtown Dallas, and gotten a taste of what real life could be for me, and it was a wrap. I was

like if I can get through my senior year as fast as possible that's what I want to do. Quit the cheerleader squad and was like my eye is on graduation. I'm marching and I'm going to do what God has for me to do because, I have some great things in store. I don't know what all they are, but they are. But Dean Bunton came to visit me at AT&T and learned about my story. I told her about the homecoming thing 'cause I asked her I was like, "what do you want to know about me and TCU because it's not all roses, you know?" and she said, "I want to hear it all." I told her everything, she said "okay but you have a lot to offer and if I could engage you in some way would you be willing?" I say "sure." I expected her to call back and say, "we'd love for you to come guest lecture, you know, blah, blah, blah," which they did, but her next call was "we'd want you to be in this Lead On campaign." Now what I would find out at that reception dinner or whatever we were that was for Bob Schieffer that day was that Bob was actually supposed to be the face of the Lead On campaign for Schieffer and she recommended that it be me instead.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Why is that?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

She said that she thought that I was more relatable, first of all, but she also wanted to see a woman and she wanted to see a woman of color represented. But she also felt like my story was compelling enough to undergird that message around, you know community, and the greater good, and so, apparently, they put it to a vote, and I inched out Bob Schieffer, which is crazy! So it was exciting for me to come to that and actually meet Bob that night, but I remember telling my parents "you know, the whole homecoming thing?" They're like "yeah." I was like thirty billboards across Dallas Fort Worth and the, you know, and the national ad. I mean my phone would blow up every time football game came on and my face was on the TV for like three seconds, right? And I would get texts "I saw you, oh my God?" and that kind of made up for things.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And I do believe Dean Bunton took that step when she heard that story too. So, I can't say for sure that she was like we owe this to her, but I also do believe that she felt there was merit in my story around what I was doing in my career, and you know staying connected with the school. I was guest lecturing from time-to-time and before long, I would put my name in the hat for adjunct, because I believed there were students that needed to see me, and not just on the billboard. They needed to see a woman of color in the classroom who had over thirty years in strategic coms, some of the best brands.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay, so, now in retrospect, what do you think could have been done besides the homecoming connection incident. What do you think could have been done to make your stay at TCU better?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Hmmm. You know, I think having more black students would have helped because that sense of community just was not there. There were so few of us, we found ways to do things together, and of course the black student caucus was a way to do it, the gospel choir was a way to do it. I don't know if you know, but while we were here, we were the choir that recruited Kirk Franklin. You know about this?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Because Ron Shirie, who I knew well because I was in the concert chorale, and also sang and well I made the jazz ensemble, but I quit. I'll tell you about that too. He didn't believe that gospel was a real musical discipline. He said, "it was too mean, savage, and uncivilized," and he told me "you can sing in Latin, why do you want to do that?" and I said, "it's my culture and it's my faith." I don't understand why you wouldn't want me to do both? He was trying to dissuade me from being in the gospel choir because he felt like it was "uncivilized savage."

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Rest his soul, and so he didn't put any, any support, resources behind the gospel choir. We were on our own as students, and Shonda Jones, who was the president, and she is at another school right now as a dean? Or something like that? I mean she's pretty high up, but she's a pastor. We connected on Instagram. She would talk for days, by the way. She went to the Church of Philadelphia. Several of the students went there, and they went there on Sundays because it's nearby and discovered this little man who was willing to come and direct our choir. What's interesting is that we fired him too. I don't know if you know that. Do you know this story? We had to fire him.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay, can we talk about that?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

We can talk about this.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Can we please talk about this?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

We fired Kirk Franklin before we knew he was Kirk Franklin. I think if we knew he was Kirk Franklin we would have still fired him because what he would do, now mind you, we're already feeling like stepchildren because the music department wouldn't help us out

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And sometimes we would get on the docket for chapel service, and so we would feel very self-conscious going in there knowing that Ron Shirie was over there with his concert chorale or whatever group he was with, and we didn't have anybody to play the piano or anything like that. Sometimes we had to go in and sing acapella and face this *sea* of white people, you know, and try and sound the best we could.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I mean what you want to do, stomp?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Right, right. So, Kirk seemed to be the answer to that, and he taught us some great songs, and I don't know if you know of "Gospel Word of Truth," which was the name of the gospel choir, it was multi-cultural—it wasn't just black kids, we had white kids, we had Hispanic kids, anybody who wanted to sing gospel come on, right? And so, Kirk would come and rehearse with us. I forgot when rehearsal was, Thursday night? Something like that, and over in the lobby of Shirley Hall, he would meet us there, and we'd line up and he'd play, and he'd teach us a song and get us all ready and not show up the day it was time to perform. So here we were sitting in front of a sea of white folks, and Ron Shirie over here with his nose in the air...

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Already thinking this is savagery.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Right. Nobody to play for us. Nobody to direct us, and we just said you know what? We just have to go for it. A one. A two. And you know we would sing acapella and bring the house down. And so we're like "yay!" But that dude? Why did he do that? He'd show up to rehearsal the next time dropping names. I'm so sorry I didn't make it, you know Bebe Winans is calling and I had to answer the call and Mississippi Mass needed me, so you know he's dropping these names and we're sitting here being like this guy is really doing this? I've run into Kirk since then by the way, he knows, you know, we know, you know? And so, he did it one too many times and Shonda came to rehearsal one night and said we have to get rid of him, and we were like "yes!" Now what's interesting, he taught us a song that was called "Joy" and the words were "joy, joy,

God's great joy, joy, joy, down in my soul, sweet beautiful soul saving joy," are you recognizing the song? It's from the soundtrack of *The Preacher's Wife*, which hadn't even been recorded yet, but he taught that to the Gospel Word of Truth. Isn't that crazy? Showed up on *The Preacher's Wife* CD and Mississippi Mass sings that behind the late Whitney Houston, isn't that crazy?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

We fired Kirk Franklin.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And you fired him.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And we'd do it again. But that you know, that's really my experience at TCU, a small little tight knit community we had, moving in-between, BSC, the sorority meetings, you know? And we knew, not to show up on the Greek after a certain hour, of course we didn't have a house down there, but sometimes there was some need to go down there. Whatever it might be, but you didn't want to be caught after dark because we'd heard the stories

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Of people who looked like us, especially the girls, more the catcall, but you know things happening to them—assault, that kind of thing too. So I remember one time being on the Greek, I don't know why I was on the Greek, and the sun was going down, and we were so scared, and someone did shout out the window at us, but they didn't say anything bad, but we were really afraid, so that was, that was a part of the experience too.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Now, I know you were involved in the whole battle to get MLK Day recognized as an official holiday here on campus. Can you tell us about that?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yes, so the BSC meetings again, we were wondering why we didn't have it, and you know diversity wasn't even really a term that people used back then. It just wasn't a thing. But we knew that there were certain things that we should be getting. Now mind you, I mention Cosby, *A Different World*, we're coming on every Thursday night so we would see this experience going on at this made up black university or college, and we would also see the t-shirts and things that they would wear. They were wearing "free South Africa" t-shirts "free Mandela t-shirts" you

know, “bold, black, and beautiful” type of t-shirts and we were getting all sorts of pride, and we’re thinking what can we do with this little school, and one of the things we thought that should have been done is MLK Day and we said among ourselves, why don’t we have it?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I mean all the universities have it.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah, and you know, I remember you know, colleagues of mine, other students at other universities, they had the day off, why couldn’t we? So we said “well, what can we do about it? And we thought about it and thought about it, and I was like “well you know the one card that we hold, our brothers are on their football team, and that’s a whole lot of money.”

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Leverage, yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And I raised the idea, and I was like “what if they walked off during a game?” and it got dead silent. They were like “oh no, mhh, mmhh, they would get us! Like they would never do that! They would never do that!” big debate went on about that, and I said “okay, what if, we bluff ‘em. We have them walk off of, you know, practice, and see what they do with the threat that they will walk off from the game on Saturday,” and they agreed it’s worth a try. I said, “well how do we get in contact, like how do we start talking to them,” again, they had a totally different schedule than us. It was hard to catch them.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

If they were on campus, they were moving. They were going somewhere, you know? They were going to practice, going to the train table, doing something. I don’t know how we got some of them to actually come to a meeting one night, but there were at least a couple of the ones that could, you know, leave and make a decision and take it back to the group, I can’t even remember who they were. I remember them, when we told them the idea, they kind of sat back, you want us to do what? It took some real cajoling and convincing, and we’re like “look, just practice, that’s all. All you gotta do is just start walking, and just come up in front of Moncrief, down the side in front of, what’s the name of the guy’s dorm, Pete Wright? Then come in front of frog fountain. We will be there to meet you, and we will hold hands. *The Skiff* will be there and everything.” I never will forget the night that we’re supposed to do that. We were waiting, and we were, you know, you can kind of see, right where Frog Fountain was it was a crest, so you could kind of see people walking up from Stadium Drive. You would see their heads first and then their feet, right? And we waited, and we waited, and then we turned around and saw Jim Walker first, and he was holding hands with the guys like this. Now, say what you will about Jim, he did not win

football games, but that was a good man, and the reason why he was there was because the boys were scared and instead of just walking off campus. One of them broke and said, "I'm just going to tell Coach Walker what we want to do and see what he says," and that's why they did. They said "Coach Walker, this is what we want to do, and we're scared, and we know you probably won't like it," and he said "no, I'm with you," and they came up the hill. We saw Coach Walker, we saw the guys, and they were, you know, arm in arm, like we shall overcome. They weren't singing, but that's how they were, and *The Skiff* was there to get the shot, and I was like "yes!" You know? We were so excited, but again, we didn't know what would need to happen in the background for the dots to be connected and all of that, and I do believe that Shonda was probably the one that did a lot of that brokering because I think she might have been the president of the student caucus? I can't remember who it was, but it took the caucus and the Gospel Word of Truth, and what we could cobble together, the sorors, and the frat brothers, and there you go, and we got the next MLK Day. I don't know how much time went between, but it was the same year it happened.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow, wow.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And I stand in front of my students, and you know, that's the first holiday right out of the gate. The semester starts and they're off the next Monday, and I want to tell them, you know, some of us had something to do with that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

That y'all take it so for granted.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely, absolutely, yeah. Thank you so much for sharing that. Now, when you were a columnist at *The Skiff*, is there any particular story besides the ones that you have already mentioned, that struck or impacted you in particular?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

There were a couple columns that got a lot of attention. One had to do with a poster, and again, it had to do with the athletes, and on the poster they had two students athletes, one was white, one was black. The white guy on the poster had a schoolbook or a diploma or something like that, and the black athlete was in the back with the football, just like that, and we're like no. This is not going to work, and again, these were the conversations that came up in Black Student Caucus, and I said "I'll write the column, that's the best I can do, I'm given a platform, but we got to do something," and I can't remember what kind of civil disobedience we did, but we, we thought we had a little civil rights movement going on in the '90s.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

The beauty of youth.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Right. At TCU of all places, and at the same time I had friends at Morehouse and Spellman, there was a dragging that happened in a town, oh gosh it was a town, begins with an f, I forgot, near Atlanta, it was a dragging that happened, and they were like literally walking from the AUC to the capital building, to protest that stuff, and that was *serious*, and here we were, you know, we got a poster? But you know, it was what we thought we were called to do. Ultimately, we got the poster pulled down, but that was one of the columns that got some backlash from people. They were like “oh, come on, really? I mean...”

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Stop complaining.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Stop complaining.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I mean it just so happens to be the white guy has the diploma and the black guy has a football. What do you want us to do, switch it? We were like yeah, why not? So yeah, that’s one that I can recall of the top of my head.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And, the racism, so clearly, you know, microaggressions were common practice, even back in the ‘90s, do you think that the racism was one-sided? And let me clarify that, do you, based on your experience, do you think that African American students were intentional about integration, or did they tend to separate themselves?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Ah, you know, that’s a layered question because if you don’t feel a part, if you don’t feel included, where you gonna go? And the other thing about it is, we stick out. We stick out. Maybe I don’t stick out as much as the next person, right? But together we stick out, and I remember someone asked me, “why do y’all congregate outside the Main?” and what they were talking about the football players and some of the basketball players would all sit outside the main cafeteria, which was in Brown Lupton. There were some stairs that went upstairs to some of the Student Life offices and things like that, and they’d sit there between classes, and the girls didn’t like it because it was like you walk by and you were getting checked out, you know? But we never had a problem with our brothers sitting there, and we would go into the cafeteria maybe

two or three of us would sit together, but you wouldn't see like all of us sit together, but still I was getting the question, why do you congregate? And I asked them "why do *you* congregate?" and they were shocked, and I was like you guys sit together all the time, in fact, you guys outnumber us, but just because you see some brown and black guys sitting together that's congregating? More power to them, why not? This was a brotherhood, they played sports together, again on a job, which actually leads me to another column that I wrote that was called *The Commodification of Sports*, and it talked about how, it pretty much compared plantation life to professional and college sports, and because these folks were on such a different schedule, they had a separate culture, and there were certain things they weren't exposed to that many of us were.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And so they were at a disadvantage even though they were making money for the school, at the same time, they weren't making money for themselves until they might get drafted. So, to say that these guys were congregating was just not seeing the entire context. What are they going to do? They're on the same schedule. That's who they know. Every once in a while, you see one that kind of you know maybe dated someone from a different race and so you'd see them hanging out with some of the folks who weren't black. Nobody scoffed at that and most of the, a lot of the black guys were dating white girls. You didn't see anybody balking at that. It was interesting come senior year because it kind of circled around and started looking for the black girls because mom and dad were coming to graduation, and they wanted to have a black woman on their arm. I was keen to that, turned down a lot of dates in the last semester my senior year. But no, I don't think there was, and it, the thing about reverse racism, racism is a power construct, and if you don't have the power, you can't be racist because that's what it engages, so if you're othered, man, you're just, othered, you're on the outside. Now, I do a lot of talking about privilege, and how the centering of whiteness can involve the people who are othered and often does because if you center whiteness and someone of color, you're part of the power structure, so you will see there are black people, brown people, who are very bought in, and will fight to make sure that that power center stays the way it is, so that's the only way that I see that black people, brown people, whoever could participate in the power center, but I would not say that they had power. Most of them would agree they don't.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Interesting. Where you there in the days of Cornell Thomas and Darron Turner?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I remember, Cornell, yes. Darron, not so much. I don't remember Darron. He married my soror, DJ Turner. Roly, is what we called her, she, I made Roly, Roly was my little sister in AKA, and I didn't get to know Darron until after she married him, and that was after I was well out of grad school, but Thomas, what was his name? Cornell, he was like the only black faculty member that

I knew during that time, and I don't even think we was full-time, I'm not even sure. I think he dealt with the Alphas on some level, I can't remember. I'd only see him every once in a while.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, okay, so you didn't interact with him quiet often because he was telling us a story about speaking to the black students whom, there was this gathering, and he comes and he looks at the people in the room, and all of them are female, so he's like well where are the guys? And so the girls say well most of those guys are athletes and they are interested in dating white women, so we're stuck here, and so when Cornell asked the guys they say "well, why would we have drama when we can have this for free?"

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Oh wow, interesting.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And of course, once they reached their senior year they wise up, and you know.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

I only know one guy, Barracka was actually the only guy I knew that actually married white. But he's from California, he was always white. He came here different, you know? Most these other guys were from east Texas, the south, the deep south, and came from blackity-black-black you know homes and communities, and gotta a taste of something different, so it was very interesting to see.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Interesting indeed, especially knowing that integration is according to, from Chancellor Sadler, one of *the* reasons for delaying integration. They were really, that was the number one fear, and even you know the fact that Jennifer Giddings Brooke got a handshake.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Because there was no physical contact to be between people of different races.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And now we're seeing it at play the very thing that they feared.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, I mean we could go real deep with miscegenation and all of that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Gee, the brothers were doing it to us because they didn't see us sexually but they saw white women that way. It's very interesting. But I knew a lot of black couples, you know, there were a couple that hung tough till graduation. You knew they were going to get married you know? But they were in the minority. Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Very good. I only have but a few other questions. Looking at, the more recently TCU's reputation, especially 2018, 2020, between those times. TCU's reputation has been smudged among report of racism and you know the killing of George Floyd definitely triggered a lot of emotions. Do you think that these stories about TCU bring in more transparency as to what's really going on campus behind the scenes, or do you think that it distorts what our institution is really about?

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

You know, when I learned that you guys were doing this, I thought it made a ton of sense to at least, at the very least, acknowledge the bad stories because I think just like with anybody's marketing, you tend to see the highlights reel. The fact that it is okay for me to tell the story about homecoming, nobody wanted to talk about that. I mean my dad couldn't even get in the door to see Chancellor Tucker, right? So, I don't think it distorts it. I think it rounds it out. It makes it more real. It gives it far more authenticity than it's had because even if you just look at the history of Fort Worth, let alone Fort Worth and Dallas, and all of the things that were going on in those places, you mean to tell me that TCU sat in the middle of it and there wasn't a problem with race at all? It's just not true. It's just not true. So, I think this is a step in the right direction. The word reconciliation for me means that you're not only going to go back, tell the stories, but you're going to try to do something to make something right. That's what reconciliation means to me. So, I am very interested to see what happens next. But I also believe that actually coming to terms with the truth is the first step. National Geographic did something very similar. I don't know if you know about that. No? Okay. So they went back into their annals, realizing that the way they did journalism was very racist.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, yes, yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

And also, sexist and was a lot of things. What they did was they went back into their issues, and they pointed out where there were wrong and that was the first step to actually trying to move forward. I think you have to do it, and this is the only predominately white institution that I

know. Maybe there are others. Maybe I'm just not aware that are taking this, what someone would call a radical step, to actually record the stories of the voiceless because I mean honestly, I might have been on your billboards, but I haven't told a story.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well L Michelle Smith, we are so grateful.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Thank you.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

For you taking the time to share your stories with us, to voice it, your perspective because it has been committed from our literature for far too long, and we're grateful for your words of wisdom, and we truly appreciate you supporting the whole process.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

Well, I appreciate you calling me, seeking me out, to be able to share the stories. It's cathartic.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

L. MICHELLE SMITH:

It really is. It's, it's a healing process too. I can actually put this away. [crying] I know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Thank you.