

## Loriessa Taylor-Randle Interview

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

This is Sylviane Greensword. I'm here with Mrs. Loriessa Taylor-Randle, in Fort Worth. We're in the TCU building called the Harrison, and we're here for the Oral History Project with the Race and Reconciliation Initiative. Loriessa, thank you so much for joining us this morning.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Thank you.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

And welcome back to TCU. I say welcome back because your ancestor Charley Thorp, was instrumental in the building and maintenance and survival of this institution, and so we're here to listen to you tell us about your upbringing, tell us about what brings you back to Texas, and how you even came to understand and realize and interpret your relationship with Charley Thorp. So, let's start from the beginning. Can you tell us about where you're from, where you grew up, where you were born? Any particular influences that you care to mention?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Sure, I am from Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was born and raised there. I... I'm one of 11 children born to my mother, Beverly Sue Randle, formerly Watley. Let's see. I went to Highland High School. I also went to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where I was a proud member of the Lady Rebels basketball team.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Okay.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

I guess my influence... My influence is my mother. She did a lot of social empowerment, justice. Just kind of advocating for people.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Right.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

She started the Legal Aid Society of New Mexico, with a longtime friend of hers. I just remember, you know, as a child, going to rallies, whether they were political rallies or social justice rallies. I remember as a young child going to the NAACP meetings with my mom.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

About how old were you then? Do you remember?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Oh, my gosh, as young as I can remember five, because I remember standing in front of the group doing this as a five year old. And then later in life, I think the last time that I went I was probably a teenager.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Okay.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

So, you know, as far as my influences, obviously, my mother, my sister Regina Schells, has always been a mentor towards me. Both my mom and my sister are college graduates, which at the time when I was growing up, just kind of witnessing that was very, very important to me, especially watching my sister kind of go through and get her degree. Kind of encouraged me. So, those are, those two are definitely my influences in life.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

What did your mother study?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

She studied education.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Okay.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yeah.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

So she ended up becoming a teacher?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Actually, she didn't, which is really interesting. She went the legal route, where she had a friend that was an attorney, and they were fairly close, growing up and stuff. I think they met in college. Her name is Ellen. I think they met in college and she and Ellen started the Legal Aid Society together, and so, she did that for quite a bit of time as well.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

So what was it like, since we are dealing with the Race and Reconciliation Initiative, what was it like being black at Highland High School?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

You know what? One of the best things honestly about Highland High School, home of the Hornets.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Just mentioning it...

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yeah, just saying it! One of the best things about going to Highland High School is how diverse Highland was like, there were, there were black people or white people. There were Native American people. There were Hispanic people. There were Mexican people. There were Vietnamese people. There were Chinese people. It was, Highland of all the high schools in Albuquerque was the most diverse. And so I think that in a way has kind of helped to shape who I am, you know, as a person kind of growing up and being around just different people and being exposed to different cultures and languages and stuff. It was pretty amazing.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Yeah, it does change the perspective you have of the world.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yes, it does.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

And before that, can you talk about maybe the neighborhood that you grew up in? What were the demographics like?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Very proud, I am from South Broadway, Albuquerque. South Broadway was a neighborhood that was poor. Primarily, African American and Hispanic. There were tons of, honestly, resources. There's, you know, John Marshall, which used to be an elementary school in our neighborhood, which is now a historical building. There was Dennis Chavis Community Center, which I feel like I grew up in. I, you know, I'd go there pretty much every day after school. During the summers, I spent my entire summers at that community center. We played outside, you know. You knew your neighbors, you knew the people that lived up the street and across the street. People waved at each other people, you know, said hi, you know. If something was going on, you know, call us nosy, but we all went to check. You know, some of my, some of my best friends that I grew up with in that neighborhood are still my friends today. So, and we've all kind of, you know, there's only a few of us that still well, not a few of us because I no longer live in that neighborhood, but there are a lot of people that I grew up with that still live in that

community, you know, and I think it was a great place to grow up. But when I tell people that I grew up of South Broadway, people kind of like, “and you do this?” and you know, “and you're okay?” “Yeah. I'm okay.” You know, my mom, my family, you know?

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Well let's talk about your mom then. What do you know about her background and any stories that you can tell us when you were little growing up that you, you know, allow you to just know your family history?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yeah. My mom is my mentor. My friend. My foundation, really. I feel like I'm getting emotional, but I feel I am... I feel like a lot of who I am today, came from her, you know? I can I can remember I always tell people growing up, I didn't think that I was poor, but we were definitely poor.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Yeah, yeah.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

We always had a roof over our head. We always had food to eat. I always felt and still feel loved, cared about. I think that you know, the challenges of being a single black woman raising essentially eleven kids--thirteen--if you count my niece and nephew, Ebony and Russell, she raised from infants. So, they all grew up. We all grew up in the same house together. And watching my mom just work tirelessly, I can remember her holding two or three jobs. I can remember her, you know, making the effort to be at events for us or to kind of show us, kind of show us, what it means to advocate. What it means to stand up for other people. I think you know, it wasn't easy. You know. My mom wasn't perfect, right? But I think that my mom did the best that she could with what she had, what she knew the resources that were available to her, and in turn, just kind of watching that and seeing her go through things, struggles, highs and lows, her being able to be there for other people. Kind of, not kind of, *has* shaped who I am. One of the stories that I was sharing with Rebecca the other day, is when I was when I was a child, my mom only made lasagna one time, and I had chickenpox. And oh, I'm bitter about that, because you know, I was sick, I didn't want to eat that type of thing, so that story has kind of stuck with me. But one of the things that I like, came to the realization of the other day is, and talking about that whole situation with me having chicken pox and my mom only making lasagna once. What I came out of that with, every day my mom would come in there, and she would rub chamomile lotion on me, and she'd just sit there for an hour or two hours with me, just holding me and loving me and stuff, and that made me feel good. Even today. Even the other day when I was telling the story. I was just like, I was loved. You know, and I felt that yeah, you know? My mom didn't, she didn't provide a lot of details about her, her history, right. My mom's mother, her name is Barbara Armstead, Barbra Jean Armstead, who was Eileen Lewis's child when at some point during Barbara's life, I'm pretty sure she had challenges. What ended up happening is that she left my mother with her grandmother, who was my greatgreatgrandmother Gertrude. She took

my mom's other sisters, Darlene and Regina, to their families. Darlene ended up staying with Barbara as Barbara moved on to the eastern part of the country. But my mom was raised by her aunt, Margaret Watley, and so from age five, well, I think my mom was five when Margaret passed away, she was either five or nine. I'm not really sure about the time period. She was nine. My mom was nine then. But she went with Margaret I guess when she was five, and when Margaret passed away when she was nine, my mom went with my greatgreatgrandmother, Gertrude.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Okay. Now, Margaret Watley. She's a Watley, is that her married name? Or was that her maiden name, do you know?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

That's actually her maiden name

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Which means that she is a descendant of Charley Thorp.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

She is a descendant of Charley Thorp, and she raised my mother. Her mother was Lilly Mae Smith. Yes.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Daughter of Kitty Smith?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yup!

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

That was Charley Thorp's daughter.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yeah.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

There you go. Lee Ann Hightower, which is, you know, whenever you get a chance to go to Thorp Spring, you will find out that the Hightowers were actually a big family in the Thorp Spring area. So you actually are tied to TCU on both sides of your tree, because the Hightowers, based on this historian who wrote a book and explained that the Hightowers actually were brought by a TCU teacher who owned Simon Hightower, and so even the name Hightower was the name of that professor. So then they founded that settlement called the Colony that you'll get a chance to see it.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Right.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Although nobody lives there anymore, the cemetery is still there. There are traces of the church and the black school that were there. But yeah, so you are actually, that's amazing, so TCU, brought both of your sides of the tree with both Charley and Lee Ann

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

I didn't even know that! Yeah. That is so, wow, that's fascinating!

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

It is fascinating. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, so these two women, Lee Ann Hightower and Kate Thorp both had children with Charley, but both of them were married to Charley, directly or indirectly because of TCU.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Wow. That... Wow. Didn't know that.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Yeah. That's funny how history just comes together.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yeah, yeah. Wow.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

But tell us about, okay, so you've told us about Barbara Jean. Barbara Jean went to the East Coast. What do you know about Margaret?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

What do I know about Margaret? You know, I know the stories that my mom told me. My mom said that, honestly, Margaret made her felt like a princess like she treated her well. My mom didn't go without anything, and for me to say I didn't go without anything it's a little bit different than my mom because the way that my mom described Margaret was like they came from money, which... is just out there for me, and honestly, for that time period. She said that she felt like you know, Margaret loved her. Margaret's the one that taught my mom how to read, how to write, how to be, what mom call it, a young lady, you know? And she kind of did this [bows in courtesy], which probably means that she was wearing a dress or she was like a young lady, you know? So, my mom knew, obviously, who her mother was, right? But, Margaret's the one that raised my mom, and, you know, my mom said, you know, at certain points, I'd be like, "oh, Mom," you know, and I'd have to catch myself, because she knows who her mother is, but Margaret is the one that's there, and she's raising her. So, but I felt like you know, I

could gather from that, that my mom felt the connection both ways was with Margaret and with her mom Barbara. So, definitely loved them both. There's tons of pictures with my mom at this birthday party at different parties different like, I don't know if there were like events or whatever, but my mom's got on some pretty nice clothes, and she's looking fly. She's looking good. So she seemed to be happy, around tons of friends and stuff like that. She just said that she had a really good childhood. You know, not a lot of details necessarily on that childhood because I think my mom, I don't know, maybe she had some reservations about what to share and what not to share. You know, when you think you've got tons of time left, you know, and you might, you know, get to sharing that as, as your daughter like me, I'm asking her these questions. Oh, we'll talk about that later type thing, and then later turns into Mom's not here anymore.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

And that's it.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

You know?

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Yeah.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

And, you know, her time has passed. So you don't really, for me, you know, I didn't get the answers that I was searching for, you know.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

So what do you think make those things taboo? Is it the culture? Is it the religion?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

I think it's not just the culture but knowing the family history. Things that that people may or may not be ashamed of, you know, and kind of suppressing that or pushing that down. You know, kind of like, the attitude or if you don't talk about it, then, you know, you can kind of brush it aside, push it away type thing. You know, I don't think that my mom had an easy life, especially from what I know as far as after Margaret passed away.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Right.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

So I don't think that it was easy. Obviously, my mom had 11 children. You know, she was I believe my mom was 11 or 12 years old when she had my oldest sister. So she had a, she had a rough life, you

know, she took my sister Elena and went across the country to try to keep her child. You know, and of course, they found her across the country and brought her back, and my mom had to give her child up. I can't even imagine, you know? Being in a grocery store, and my sister Elena, who's my mom's firstborn child, is in the grocery store, and she's pointing at my mother because she's her spitting image, Elena. She's pointing out my mom, and she's saying to her, you're my mom, right? And my sister, Regina, who grew up playing with Elena and not knowing that Elena was her sister. Okay. You're my sister? We're buddies. You know? We're like, yeah, you're my girl, you know? And then to find out that they're sisters, gets heavy, heavy. A lot, you know? So,

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

So how then did you come about finding those answers to those questions that your mother did not answer for you?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

I think talking to you know, my brother Rodney. Rodney is like, he writes, he has so much information, but he's got a lot of social anxiety. So he doesn't really talk a lot and stuff like that, so you have to actually ask him direct questions.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

I see.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

So, you know, I'll go over to his house with, my long notes, and I'll start asking him questions. He's yeah, you know, "this happened," you know, because he was around for most of it, you know? So, Rodney has been able to kind of give me a lot of answers, not just about my mom, but you know, some of my family history with my uncles and stuff, on Gertrude's sons. Regina, you know, just getting information from her that she could recall that my mom had either told her or, you know, shared with her, or she found out later. My mom had this chest of, all kinds of like, I don't know, in their dark documents, she's got all of our social security numbers written down and our dates of birth and stuff and there's tons of pictures. Pictures, like some of them have names written on the back so you know that it was Jeannie Watley or you know, that it was Evie, or you know that, you know, it's my grandma Gertrude. Right? Or, you know, that that's, you know, our Aunt Margaret. Right? And then some of them don't have any, you know, kind of like what Karen was telling me about Charley Thorp, she said, there's this picture with this guy in the field and they think it's Charley, but there's no notation. So, kind of like that. There's a lot of photos like that, that you know. I wish that when I was younger, that I was more forceful and more interested and really knowing. "Hey, Mom, tell me who this person is? Who are all these people in this photo?" And it's not just me that's wondering that, you know, I had a family member reach out to me through some of my mom's sisters with a picture, with a photo, and no one knows if that's Jeannie Watley in the photo or not. And if that's my uncle Kermit, who's in that photo?



There's four people in there. There's this older lady, there's two girls, and a boy, who are they? You know? We don't know. So,

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

One day maybe.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

The research continues.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

So stories, for example, the story that you shared with me prior to this interview about the birth of your grandmother, and Eileen with the story and TB Watley. So, I saw on her birth certificate, the father's name is left blank, but clearly, if she was raised by Margaret Watley, everybody knew that TB was the father clearly? And, you know, even on her death certificate to state that he is her father, how did you find out the truth? Or how did you find out what transpired since there were those silences in your mother's account, and how did you piece it back together?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Honestly, DNA, being connected, that way. Also, honestly, word of mouth, we all know, in this community,

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Everybody knows. Yeah.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

You know everybody knows that. And looking at census records, right? You can see where people lived in relation to other people. You know, if these two people live on the same street, right?

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Yes.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

What are the chances of it, of them actually knowing each other or entering into whatever, you know, to be able to have, you know, a child, you know, so, those are some of the things that, you know, we sort

of, looked at, honestly. Rebecca looked at that and was able to piece together a lot of this stuff for us because like I told you, we were kind of ambivalent, kind of, “hmmh,” you know, but then certain things happen and it just kind of pushes you to want to know where you came from and who you are. So...

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

So how would you say that knowing your ancestry changed you?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

[Long silence]

Just knowing that you do come from somewhere, right? And no matter what that journey, looks like, you know, that you come from somewhere. [crying]

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Right.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

And everybody has, yeah, say, everyone has a history. Everyone, there's a reason why every person is here. And just being able to, you know having you guys reach out to us. I can't tell you how important that is, for me personally, and a lot of folks in my family because there's so many rumors out there, you know, about who we come from and how people are conceived and stuff like that, and who were their actual parents or their mother or not their mother, their father right? And to actually have some factual details about that. I am blown away by that. I am grateful! You know, we had saw, we had, you know, saw like, had found about Charley Thorp at some point like in Santa Fe, and we thought that he was from like Tennessee. Where he was from and then when you brought your details and stuff, we were kind of able to it helped us to it what helped to confirm that we were on the right path, and it helped to clarify a lot of things for us. That's why when you call them you said, you know “this isn't a scam,” you know, you had reached out to other folks in my family and they're like, “what do you want?” And I was like, “no, I don't, I'm not going to ask you what you want, or anything.” You have information about an ancestor of mine. You're darn right, I'm here. I am going to participate. I'm going to offer whatever it is that that I can and that I know.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Okay. What are your expectations for Reconciliation Day tomorrow?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Wow, expectations. You know what? I? I don't I haven't even thought about that. What do I expect out of that? I think something that's important to me, is that, honestly, that Charley Thorp is recognized for not just his contribution to TCU, but Charley Thorp is a human. Okay, he's a human, he's a man. And he deserves to be acknowledged as like a human. Charley Thorp wasn't a slave. Right. But he did what people call free work. There is no free work. You know, a matter of fact, one of my models as a

professional ask anyone they know the state of New Mexico when they come in, they asked me to do something: Loriessa Randall doesn't do free work. So you're going to pay me for the work that I do. And that makes me think about Charley Thorp and all of his quote unquote, contributions, how some of the things that he has been said to have done for TCU that he was not compensated for. I would like I guess, to get out of reconciliation, and acknowledgement that that happened. And like I was telling you, I saw that plaque in the hallway there, and how it talks about Pleasant Thorp and the Clarks and stuff like that. It talks about 1873 when TCU was officially established, right? There was no slavery in 1873. But Charley Thorp did free work. Let's call it what it is. You know, that's what I want. Not just, you know, not just for my family. But Charley Thorp was a human, a man. Give him that. Acknowledge that. Tell the truth. About what the reality of that was. That's what I want. I don't know that that's what I'm going get. But that's what I hope, you know.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Well, thank you for making this absolutely clear. Do you feel connected to TCU?

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

You know what? It's really interesting. I feel, I don't know that I necessarily feel connected to TCU as a university. One I didn't go to school here.

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Oh, we were your rivals at some point.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Right. Yeah. So not in that manner, right. But I think where it's going hit home for me, okay, is when I go to Thorp Spring today and I'm able to see their original stuff, the remains of what's left there. And I'm able to, you know, see the gravesites and stuff like that. That's where it's going hit home for me, I believe. I think that what would aid me feeling connected to TCU? Is them acknowledging my great, great, great, great grandfather. That's what would make me feel connected, like a full circle. Thank you,

**DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:**

Well, thank you so much for joining us again, and sharing your words of wisdom and your stories and your experience. Thank you for allowing us to just catch a glimpse of what it was like to grow up as a descendant of Charley Thorp. And, you know, the baggage that came with it, you know, the, the good, the bad and the ugly. But it's what reconciliation is about, you know, filling in the gaps. And just putting the story together, finding the missing pieces and putting them where they belong in the trail of history. So we are looking forward to seeing you again on Reconciliation Day, and until then, stay strong.

**LORIESSA TAYLOR RANDLE:**

Hi, my name is Larissa Randall, and I am connected to TCU through my great great, great, great, great grandfather, Mr. Charley Thorp. What does reconciliation mean to me? Reconciliation means a process.

Going through... what you know, what you think you know, to what reality is. That's what it means to me. So, thank you.