

Marian Brooks Bryant Interview Transcription

August 11th, 2021

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

This is Sylviane Greensword, I am here with Mrs. Marian Brooks Bryant and we are recording this interview for the Oral History Project with the Race and Reconciliation Initiative. Today is August the 11th and it is 1:07 PM. We are recording this interview via Zoom, as Mrs. Brooks Bryant is not located in the state of Texas as of now. Would you like to go by Mrs. Brooks Bryant or just Mrs. Bryant?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Mrs. Bryant.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mrs. Bryant, thank you for joining us today, and we're going to start this interview, and the rest of the process will happen fairly chronologically, but we will go back and depending also on your answers, you know it might be a little bit circular, not necessarily, so like linear chronologically. But let's start with your childhood, if you don't mind, can you tell us a little bit about your upbringing? Where are you from? What values were you instilled as a child? What exceptionally or significantly important aspect of your upbringing should we know?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

So, I grew up in Fort Worth, TX, went to, all my schooling was in Fort Worth, TX from first grade through twelfth grade. We did, the family did live in Washington DC prior to my going to 1st grade, my father was in medical school at Howard University. And so, we moved back to Fort Worth after he was graduated from medical school. And by that time there were four children in the family.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Which one are you among those four?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I'm the oldest.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, you're the oldest, okay.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yes. So, my schooling was, as you know, I graduated from high school in 1964. Brown v. Board of Education took place in 1954, but all of my schooling was segregated. There was no

adherence to Brown v. Board of Education during the time that I was in school. My youngest sister is the only one that went to integrated schools and she only went to an integrated high school. She is 7 years younger than I am.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, what can you tell us about the segregated school that you attended?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I did not consider my education to be, I considered my education to be more than adequate. I did not consider it to be not up to par. I remember some of my teachers in high school were very overqualified for being high school teachers as well. I had a chemistry teacher who had a master's in chemistry, there were other teachers that had advanced degrees, and they never would have if they had had different opportunities. They probably would have taken opportunities where they could make more money, and work more in the fields that they were trained to work in. But as teachers they were very knowledgeable. They were very caring, they cared about their students, which was in my opinion, not always the case when you went to integrated schools. Particularly in the like in 1954-64 when Brown v. Board of Education would have been forced upon the education system in Fort Worth. So, I think I benefited from going to segregated schools.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Why do you think teachers had to settle for secondary education instead of a more lucrative career?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well, because at that time society was very segregated. Black people were not accepted to work in many fields. They didn't really have their choice of what they wanted to do. They had to settle for whatever they could get, and quite often it was less than what they were trained for. I had an uncle who, all of my- I am a third-generation college graduate. All of my mother's sisters that were 7 of, not my mother, but my grandmother's, sisters, there were seven of them. They all went to college and they were all educators. So, I had an uncle who was a college graduate and he worked for the post office and that was quite common for Black man particularly, that was a job that they could get no matter what their education was.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Would you care to share what high school you attended?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I went to I.M. Terrell high school.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, this seems to be the most common institution among TCU attendees.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, Dr. James Cash was in the class behind me.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, really? So, what was it to attend class with him or to attend school with him?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I mean, he was just another student at that time.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Just another student.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah. And we were friends. He was in the class with my sister, so we were friends. She was probably closer to him than I was because I was a year older than him. I remember them, him and his sister very well.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Interesting. Now we can talk about Trinity Terrace.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I'm not sure where you got that from.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, this this was just a background search that that I did, and I'm gonna edit that when we do the future.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Is this supposed to be a place that she lived later in life, like toward the end of her life?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, that's that. But then again, that's like, from the background, research is not always accurate, which is why, you know, I wanted to make sure I address that before that I-

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

That's not accurate. I looked up Trinity Terrace and it looked like it was an assisted living facility.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh okay.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Apartments and things like that. And my mother lived at home until she had Alzheimer's and till, she just really didn't know where she was and needed, I mean we provided 24-hour care at home, but he got to the point where it was just too much for them. And we moved her to a care facility. And I don't, I was looking for the name of it, I know where it was and it had gardens in the name of it. It was on Bryant Irving, from the CVS, but I don't remember the entire name of it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay. So yeah, sometimes those background searches, you know, they yield result, but you can't really rely on them.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

And if you got my mother's degree from that background search, her degree was in sociology.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

In sociology, thank you. So, to go back on the interview, so both of your parents seem to be highly educated. How did that impact you as a child growing?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Education was very important in our household and it was understood that you were going to college. There was no question, there was no discussion about that, that was the way it was. And we came from a very hardworking family, my father owned his own business. He didn't work for anybody else and he did what he needed to do to manage that business and take care of his family. He was gone a lot. He was a general practitioner physician who delivered babies.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, there's always a need.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, babies come when they feel like it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

They have their own schedule, true (laughs). So, after graduating from I.M. Terrell, you first attended TCU. Please tell us what led you to choose this university in particular?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well, I wanted to stay at home. So that was probably a driving force in it. TCU had also had always, well for many years I don't know how long, given scholarships to white valedictorians, when they graduated from high school. That was the first year that they gave the scholarship to Black valedictorians. And I don't know how many of the other students who enrolled in at the same time I did, were valedictorians, but I was valedictorian of my class.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay. So, TCU allowed you to remain in Fort Worth. Were you aware of, you know, their past in terms of race relations or their reputation?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Not really, not really.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, what were your expectations then?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

That I would go to school, and attend my classes, and get good grades, and graduate, and go on with my life.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

As simple as that. Did you have any expectations in terms of socializing or social acceptance? Did you expect to, you know, make any long-lasting friendships, or be part of university life, or mixed in any extracurricular?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, I guess I did, but I lived at home. I didn't live in the dorms, so that kind of made it a little bit different for me than for some of the other students who were not from Fort Worth. So, when it came to microaggressions and those type of things, I wasn't on campus and immersed in it. I could just go home.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, that kind of shielded you from that. You chose to stay at home instead of the dorm?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yes. I don't remember whether there was any discussion in my family about staying in the dorms. But I did not stay in the dorms.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Did you wish you did?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

No.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

No (laughs). Okay, so let's go back to your first day at TCU. Just walk us through your day, your first impression as you stepped foot on campus. What do you see? How do you feel?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Okay, are you talking about first day in general or just a first day of classes?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

First day on campus, first day in general. First day you step foot on that campus.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Okay, alright. Because I was gonna tell you that first day of classes does not stand out for me, but there was an orientation prior to the first day of classes, and that does stand out for me.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Can you tell us about that?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well, there were. Smaller groups of students, you know, it wasn't, you know, if we were talking about the first day of class, you'd be lost in a sea of students. I don't remember if there were any other Black students in my particular orientation session. I do remember that they did the standard thing you know telling you all about the university and then there was testing to decide which classes you would take. You know, what level, where you start with your classes and so that they could give you some guidance on what to take. And I do remember I was very good at math and took advanced math classes in high school. And I took the placement test for math and they told me that I needed to take remedial math. So, I was very disappointed with that. And I talked with my parents about it and we decided I was not going to take remedial math. I took calculus. And I don't remember what grade I got in it, but I can guarantee you it was no less than a B.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Were you shown your test result when you took that placement test? Did you see the test in itself, or what questions you got wrong?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

No, I don't think so.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see. So, what did you choose to major in at least for that one year?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Math, and actually, I attended for an additional semester. I left after the first year, got married, and had a child and reenrolled. I think it was either the second semester of my sophomore year or first semester of my junior year, that I reenrolled.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

At TCU?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yes, at TCU for an additional semester, so I actually spent three semesters at TCU.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay, see I did not know that, thank you so much for sharing that. And so, during that first year and I assume that extra semester as well, you were a math major, what did you plan on doing with a math degree?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well, I didn't know when I selected math as my major, but I took computer programming class. And I loved that. The logic that you had to use to do the programming and the math base, I just love that and I took two or three semesters of those classes. So, at that point, that's what I was going to do with it. It didn't work out that that's, I didn't end up with that being what I did, but I did have a job where I did use the computer programming as a graduate student, in the Washington DC area.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see. So those skills did come in handy.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And what about socially? How close were you to the other few African American students on TCU campus?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I remember one, his last name was Isom, I think it was I-S-O-M. I think his first name was Jimmy, but I'm not absolutely sure about that. And he was from, I think Arizona, not Arizona, Arkansas. I think that's where, either Arkansas or Oklahoma, but I think it was Arkansas. But we did not stay in touch. I don't know where he is or what he's doing now.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And he enrolled in 1964, the same year as you did?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, we were in some classes together.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, okay. Did you ever share experiences due to your Blackness or was it, did you put your student status before you race status or did him being Black and you being Black create some kind of connection?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I think it created some kind of connection but I think we did have some conversations about race at TCU. The climate was just, it's like, you know, I was 17 when I graduated from high school and 17 when I started at TCU. And you put five Black students on campus, I don't know how many students TCU had at that time. If it was 5,000 10,000, I don't know what it was. Five is a mighty small number and I would suspect that there was no preparation. They just decided they were gonna do this and brought five Black kids on campus. The atmosphere was not welcoming. I don't remember any specific incidences, but I do remember that the atmosphere was not welcoming.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see. Did Jimmy Isom, if that is his name, share any of those frustrations as well?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

It's like they didn't really want us there. They just did it because somebody decided that it's time to do it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

You see, those five students who did enroll in 1964, that that is the year that TCU officially integrated its main campus, you know, main undergrad campus. Otherwise, the campus was pretty much limited to graduate programs. Most of the students were older, several already married, already had families. And out of the group of students that you were part of, every single one of these students did not remain beyond the first year.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

And I don't blame them. There are plenty of Black students that have gone through situations like TCU and just stuck it out and nose to the grindstone and graduated from the school that they started at. If you had another choice, would you do that? My father graduated from Howard University.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Him and his brother. So, I had another choice. And college is supposed to be a happy time for students, a time when they could join in and make lifelong friendships and participate in

extracurricular activities. TCU just didn't seem to be ready for all of that in 1964. And so, when I had the opportunity, I reassessed my options and went to Howard university. Howard has a very strong tradition with my family. I can't even tell you how many of us went to Howard.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, really?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah. My father started it but there's quite a few that went to Howard.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, I know that we've been talking about your experience as a Black student at TCU. Now let's just talk about you being a regular student. Is there a class that you remember with fondness? Which one and why?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, the Fortran classes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What class is that?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

That's the computer programming class.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh okay. So, this was your favorite class, huh?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see. So, I'm not really going to talk too much about the microaggressions because we did cover that. But let's talk about the 60s.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Okay.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

It's 1960s now. Okay, so let's discuss the Civil Rights of the 1960s. You were in high school when a lot of the turmoil was going on. How did you live that? I know that you were in a segregated school and in your neighborhood, you did not really have that many interactions with

other ethnic groups. But how did you personally experience the growth of the Civil Rights Movement?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well, my father was one of the key leaders in the Civil Rights Movement in Fort Worth.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Can you please remind us your father's name just for the record?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Dr. Marian Jackson Brooks. And a large part of the reason why he became that leader was that he understood that because he owned his own business, his job would not be impacted. He would not have financial consequences for his family if he spoke up for his community and worked for change in the community. While there are many other people whose job would be impacted, they could maybe work behind the scenes, but they could not speak up and be out front because they might lose their job. So, he was a big part of the Civil Rights Movement in Fort Worth. He was one of the leaders that negotiated what became integration, when that happened. He led demonstrations that forced Safeway to hire Black people in their stores. He led a parallel march in Austin, parallel to the march in Washington in 1963. He just, and because he was our father, we participated in a lot of that stuff.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Did you believe in it?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yes, absolutely.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And when you say we participated, what role did you play?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I remember participating and there was a ticket in front of the Safeway store on Evans Ave, and I remember participating in that. There were other demonstrations that we participated in. Four of the five of us participated in the Austin march. I had agreed to be in someone's wedding on that day and was very disappointed that I could not go. But we participated in a lot of demonstrations and actions to integrate Fort Worth as a result of our father being one of the leaders. And yes, absolutely believed in it and still believe in it today.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, I see that, which we're gonna talk about in just a minute. And your activism. So, we're now transitioning from a primary white institution to an HBCU, as you move back to DC and enrolled

in Howard. How would you compare and contrast those two, besides the ethnic difference, of course?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well, they were very different. There was not really any evidence of welcoming, for me anyway, and I suspect for the other four students, there wasn't any when we entered TCU, we were just another student there. And yeah, maybe I was just another student at Howard, but to see people that look like you and to know that there's no animus against you just because of the way you look, that you are welcomed into participating in whatever you want to participate in. Teachers, you felt like they cared about your success and about your achievements, your learning. It was just a very different atmosphere and the social atmosphere was so, so very different. There was really no social life at TCU for five Black students in a sea of white students.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, you would think that would stand out.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

But the way you're saying, it's almost like there was a deliberate effort to not acknowledge you.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, in Howard, I assume you participated in extracurriculars?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yes. I pledged a sorority. There was a lot of activities that I participated that would not necessarily that you joined them, but they were just available to you to participate in. I remember during, that was still the 60s when I was there, so I remember H. Rap Brown coming to campus, Stokely Carmichael coming to campus. There was, during the time that Martin Luther King was assassinated, I remember participating in demonstrations. There was, I think it was kind of at the same time, there was a takeover of the administration building. I don't remember what the issue was now, but I participated in that, slept on the administration building floor for several nights, along with many other students. Just fully participating in college life.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What a contrast.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, what are your proudest achievements from Howard?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I transferred to Howard when I was a second semester junior. One of the proudest achievements is that I graduated on time despite having gotten married and had a child, and transferring, and whatever that cost and classes that may not have transferred, I graduated on time. So that's one of my proudest achievements.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

And just being able to participate in life, to see Black people achieving, and running their own school, and caring about each other. And Howard, yes, it's an HBCU, but HBCUs don't turn away anyone. There are white students at HBCUs.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Exactly, yes.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

There are international students at HBCUs. So, participating in that wealth of diversity, it gives you a different perspective on the heart.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's interesting. And after that, so you did go to grad school?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I did. I went to George Washington University.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Did you? Okay. And you got your degree, did you continue in the same?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yes, I did my degree from Howard was in sociology with an emphasis in statistics.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay, those math skills.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, and my graduate degree was in the same area.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay, I see. And so now you directly, I suppose, use those social science and sociology skills as you direct the Building Child and Family Initiative?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well, I wanna tell you about- that is my retirement. So, I wanna tell you about the job that, my real job.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, please.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

So, I worked for, the name of it was a Lansing Entertainment and Public Facilities Authority. It was an independent authority created by the city to manage its entertainment facilities. And so, we managed the Convention Center, there was a city market and a minor league ball stadium. And we also created a seven-day music festival in the summer that became very successful, and I was on the team that created that festival. I was the, I worked my way up at the company starting with the box office manager and worked my way up to being the CFO of LEPFA.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Impressive.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

So, I developed a lot of skills along the way. I did, by the time I got to be the CFO, I was handling all of the business of the company. All of the budgeting, all of the finance work I had, people who worked for me, who did a lot of it. But we did all of the finance work. When it came to, we did events in the Convention Center and also at the at the Ballpark. So, one of my favorite stories is when you had like we had boxing and WWE and things like that, and the promoters would come in, and you have to settle up with them and pay them off after the event. So, you know, I had to go in and settle with a lot of these promoters and they, you know, they know their stuff. They travel around the country doing these events and they know how to handle the people who are there to settle with them and make sure they get all their money. So, I learn how to deal with these people.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Any particular celebrity that you have in mind?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well, there was a boxing promoter that was particularly difficult, but during the festival, which was called Common Ground, we had a lot of music entertainers, whose names you would know,

who performed there. And I didn't settle with them, I headed the finance team and we prepared the checks and did all the finance work, but I gave the check to someone else to actually pay them. But we did get to see it to some extent, I mean we were working, but sometimes you get a break and you could go see, like I saw Earth Wind and Fire.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh! I'm sure we all jealous here (laughs).

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah (laughs). There are a number of entertainment celebrities that you would know that John Legend was there when in his early days before he really became John Legend. Black Violin came. So, there's a lot of people there. It was fun. It was a lot of work, but it's also fun.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, did you see those initiatives in entertainment benefit the city's population equally in terms of race?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

No. The person or the entity that we partnered with to book the talent, most of the talent was not people that I was interested in seeing. I named a few, but it was a seven-day festival we had, I can't even tell you how many we had in one year. But most of the entertainers were white, and that discussion that you just raised was had just about every year. And I would get from my office things like, "Well, don't Black people listen to this country singer or whatever." They just couldn't understand, and yeah, I'm not saying that things were perfect.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

In Lansing or at the company I worked for. I was one of the few, in fact, I was probably the only one in that upper level of management.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

And I was asked often by my boss to speak for the Black community.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, a lot of time, you know, being the only Black person at that level, you're just the designated expert on all things Black.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, absolutely.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So how did you deal with that? How do you overcome those frustrations?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I am more of an introvert.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

And I guess I just have learned how to know what to say, so that the white people will be appeased and okay for the moment, and accept me and try to bring in. I did what I could to bring in Black people, in fact, my community always said that I ran the place. I was actually the finance person, but I will take whatever opportunities I could to try to help, try to benefit them. Tell them how to, what to do, and what to say to get a good deal, deals that might be handed out to other people without that schooling. But it wouldn't happen for our community unless they knew, unless they got some schooling on how to handle the situations.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, I was asking you this question because a lot of students of color here at TCU, as you know, they're still a dramatic minority and a few times, you know, they will be like the only one or two Black students in the classroom. And they have told me personally, they say that every time there's a question about Blackness, everybody just turns around and look at me because I'm supposed to be the expert. Yeah, and you know, whatever my testimony is, is supposed to speak for all the rest of Black people. So that's why I was asking you, how you overcome that frustration. So, if I understood what you said is that you basically, you understood how to play the game, but then within the amount of authority and power that you had, you did your best to act within those limitations so that you can enhance whatever leverage you had?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah. And I did it behind the scenes without they're not without their knowledge.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's very interesting and very wise. So, what about your retirement job now? Or, well, let's talk about maybe how long you stayed at Lansing, and when did you decide to retire?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I was there almost 20 years, just under 20 years.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

And I retired in 2008. My husband had passed away, and I had decided while he was sick that I wanted to do something different. And so, I waited just about a year after he was gone. And I didn't know what I wanted to do in retirement, but I knew that I didn't want to continue to do what I was doing. So, I took a leap of faith and just said I'm gonna retire and I'll figure out what I want to do. So, I retired at the end of December of 2008. By January, a board member, who was a friend of BCFI, approached me. She well, she ran a YMCA program and she actually asked me to come and speak to her students. So, I did that, and during the conversation with the students, she stood up and asked a question as to whether I was ready to do something else with my retirement. I was retired about a month by that time and she approached me about working with BCFI, and I told her I would think about it. And for six months I was just retired and enjoying my retirement and no mention of BCFI, and then in July, I believe the board chair approached me and said that they wondered if I would come and help them out. And I am a volunteer for them, basically.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, okay.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, but I am the executive director. There's not a lot of staff. They had had a grant from the state for a number of years that sustained them, but about the time I came on board the grant went away. So, there was a need to raise money to fund programs, and there just was not money enough to pay staff. There was some staff that finally went away and I was left to build programs and lead the organization, there was someone to do the financial piece. Which of course I could look over her shoulder, whether it was in order or not.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

The math person (laughs).

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah. So, they had programming in place when I came on board, but they do after school programs and summer programs basically. And the summer program, they've been doing the same program year after year after year after year. And I felt a need to spruce up the programming. So, I heard about the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School, which I'm not sure whether you're familiar with them.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I'm not

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

It's a Children Defense Fund Freedom School is Marian Wright Edelman's organization. Are you familiar with her?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I've heard of her.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah. So, and it's based off of the 1964 Mississippi Summer Freedom schools.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

So, I understood that they had looked into the freedom schools once before and the board had not agreed to do it. So, I looked into it, found information online and decided that I would try to find a program that was close by, and started talking with them and they invited me to come and look at their program. So, I plan a field trip, took some board members with me to see the program and once they saw it, they were on board. So that was my first innovation of the program, it was to do the Children Defense Fund Freedom School. And we did that for about four or five years. It's a very expensive program to run because you have to- the training for all the staff is done at their camp in Tennessee. It's the Alex Hayley farm in Tennessee where they do all of their training. So, the program has to pay for all of the staff to go there and stay there for, I can't remember I think it's a week, I think it was a week for the teachers and for the other staff it was less than that, but it still makes the costs of the program a lot more than some other programs you could find. They select wonderful books for the kids, books that have a diverse population of characters. A lot of Black characters, but they are also disabled characters, Hispanic characters, Muslim characters. So, the kids get to see themselves in the literature and they get to talk about it and bring forth their ideas about it, and it's just very engaging. And they have the first session of the day, it's called Harambe and that is really what, largely what we saw. We saw some of the classroom activities which were very interactive, and we also saw Harambe, which there was a song that they would sing. Which was, they started with Hallelujah Chorus, so strong... oh, I couldn't hear the song now, and there were dance steps to go to, and it was just very engaging. Then we'd have a community reader to come in and read to the kids one of the books that was in the library from Freedom School. And they would get introduced to the person and then they engage in conversation about the book or something in their background that sparked the kids. So, it was a very engaging time and it got them ready for the school day. And then in the afternoon, we had a lot of other different- most of it was literacy. The morning was literacy and then in the afternoon we got to add some activities that we partnered with people to provide for the kids. So, it was it was a six-week program all day, like 8-4 or 5. And so, we did that for about four years. Took a lot of staff, it was a lot of work, but it was very, very rewarding work and it laid the groundwork for the subsequent programs that we have done.

So, when we could no longer do Freedom school, the church that was allowing us to use their space for the school decided they did not want to be involved anymore. And that happened at the last minute we were just a few weeks away from the next program, so we had we had to put something together pretty quickly. And so, what I came up with was, we call it Steam Ahead Count: science, technology, engineering, arts, and math. And the first year was, you know, it was okay. We provided activities and all the different areas. The next year was better, we were able to add a technology program, that had a mobile bus that would go out to locations and provide programming to kids. So, we were able to engage that bus to come and be a part of the program, and as well as I had a number of vendors that would come in to do art, and science, and math. We had a teacher who was a young man who really knew how to engage kids, and his area was math. And he just really, He had a math academic game that they would play and the kids just really engaged with him, middle schoolers. And that that just really warmed my heart. So, we've been doing a version of that since then. We are about on the fifth year of that program and this year we have added a new program. So, we'll have our second camp starting on Monday, actually, we had a couple of days to do planning. The name of it is Neural-Matics. So, it's a combination of drawing a mural on a downtown building and mathematics. Very innovative program, we partnered with the creator of the program, his background is education and he's an artist. So, he combined the two in this new Neural-Matics curriculum, and we are doing it with middle school to high school kids. And they will be drawing a mural on a downtown Lansing building. So, we're just really so excited about that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Do you have any particular success story from any students that you personally remember?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yes. We have students that come in and they're very quiet and very hesitant to participate. And by the time they leave, they have turned around, and they are engaging. Some of those success stories I like are the first year that we did the Steam Ahead program, we had trouble getting middle school students to stick with the program. We had a teacher that was okay, but kids would come and four, five of them and then they would start dwindling down. They wouldn't stay. When we engaged with this young man, we had to have a waiting list and we had to start turning people away to that. So many of the kids were coming, they were telling each other about it and bringing their friends. So that was a success story, not necessarily a particular student. He also knows how to engage, we had one young man who was, he was very smart kid. He been skipped so he was young in middle school, and he presented discipline problem sometimes because he was so smart and would get ahead of himself, but he knew everything. This young man knew how to handle him and get him to settle down and try to get him to do what he needed to do, to not distract the class and get the benefits that he needed to get out of the class. And then the fact that my philosophy has always been that I want the kids to learn, but I want the programming to be interactive. It is summer and I don't want them to feel like they're sitting in a classroom.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

So, we've been able to do that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Very good. So, we're reaching the end of the interview, but I wanted us to conclude with some Race & Reconciliation Initiative specific questions.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Okay.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

My first question for you is, what advice do you have for current African American students who are minorities in primary white institutions, what piece of advice would you have for them?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

I don't know if I can offer them advice. I don't feel like I would have been able to, maybe in a different time and this is a different time.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

It is to a great extent it's and yet.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Yeah, it's, I mean, there are still challenges, but there are opportunities for African American students to be successful at PWI institutions, and there are a lot of them that are successful. I have nieces and nephews who went to Harvard and Brown, and they graduated and have gone on to be successful in life. I also have nieces and nephews who went to Hampton and Howard and Black schools so. Just tried to figure out what you can do to manage any microaggressions that they receive. If the aggressions are very egregious, report them to someone. And try to get a conversation going about it, try to let there be some learning that goes on in association with whatever the aggression was, so that white students- They may not necessarily, they've never had to think about what the situation is with people of other races. They're in power and whatever they do, they do, and they don't really think about anybody else. So, figure out how best you can manage that aggression. See how you can have people learn from it, and see how figure out how you can best care for yourself in this situation.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That was profound. And one final question, in your own words, of course, how would you define the term, reconciliation? What does reconciliation mean to you?

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Well to me it means there are situations that may have happened that hurt somebody, and there needs to be conversation about the hurt that occurred, the trauma that occurred, and recognition by the people involved, that that trauma, that that hurt occurred. And talk about what you can do to correct the situations that cause the trauma and the hurt, and how you can move forward so that people of different ethnicities can live together. Can manage life together. Yeah, figure out what can be done that gets you around the traumas. What can you do that will work for both parties, so that everybody gets some benefit from the situation, and everybody can live at a comfortable existence. So that there's no, necessarily power over another, that there's some equality in the situation. That everybody knows how to manage the situation so that parties can live together.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Living together. Well, thank you for ending this interview on such a high note. A note of hope I might add. Okay, and I'm going to conclude. So again, this was Sylviane Greensword with Mrs. Marian Brooks Bryant. Mrs. Bryant, thank you again for sharing your testimony and your words of wisdom. We cannot express how grateful we are that you decided to share your voice. We have lost so many of the voices of 1965 already, and so we are trying to grab on to the living histories of those that made TCU what it is today. And although you stayed here for three semesters, you completely changed the trajectory of TCU's history. So, we appreciate your contribution. We appreciate that you took the time to share that with us and, you know, we wish you all the best. Thank you for all the work that you're doing with the children, and with making sure that the next generations get to enjoy the benefits that were so hard, honestly.

MARIAN BROOKS BRYANT:

Thank you.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Thank you so much.

END