

## Dear Future Friars Oral History Interview

Interview Subject: Brenda Chapman McGill

Interviewer: Nahyr Morales Lugo

Date: November 15, 2022 Time:  
10:18am

### Transcript:

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 00:00**

Hello, this is an interview for Dear Future Friars, Providence College's project to interview alumni and document their experience. Today is November 15, 2022 at 10:18am. My name is Nahyr Morales Lugo and I'll be conducting the interview today. Can you please state your full name and your graduation year?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 00:24**

Yes, my name is Brenda Renee Chapman McGill and I graduated in 1975.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 00:32**

Perfect. Where are you from? And where do you currently live?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 00:37**

I was born in Macon, Georgia. And the majority of my relatives still reside there. I currently live in Rhode Island, and came here as a preschooler when my dad was assigned to the naval base in Newport. So I've been here the majority of my life.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 00:58**

And what did you study at Providence College, your major and your minor?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 01:04**

I had a heart to become a teacher, and when I came to Rhode Island, Providence College in 1971, we did not have a major for teaching. And so the closest thing I could get was to major in psychology and take some education classes, but I don't think I had enough to actually have a minor at that time. But um, so Psych was my major.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 01:31**

My first question about your PC experience is, what did being a POC college student mean to you?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 01:40**

Going to college in general was a really new adventure, I saw it as a path to some new opportunities to meet lots of new and different people. I saw it as an opportunity to challenge myself, I felt that I'd had a pretty close rearing that my neighborhood was always pretty much the same, my friends had always been pretty much the same, and that this was going to be a new adventure for me. And it was.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 02:20**

Are you a first generation student?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 02:22** Oh, yes, I was. Yes.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 02:25**

Did that add on to your experience of like wanting to venture out?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 02:31**

Well, I'm in in the newest phrase, I don't think I was totally woke (laughter). If I, again, you know, we weren't wealthy, but we didn't struggle. And so I just thought, this is something great and fun to do. I, as a first generation student had no plans to go to college, because that was not in the sights of my family. No one had gone through college, my brother and sister had started. And so this was like, my first opportunity to be out of the house and on my own. And to try to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. So it was it was a good thing to do.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 03:21**

So, next question, in what ways did this identity influence your everyday life during your college years and continue to influence you now?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 03:30**

Well, well, my identity, this the identity that I developed while being at PC was really the extension of my friends. I came from a diverse high school. And so I had diverse friends, but they were not as close as we could have been. And so I really learned to strengthen my bonds with friends and not only with students of color, but with my non-brown student friends as well. And particularly because we were all on the same floor, we were there was only a limited number of women in 1971. And so we really had to have each other's back. And the ladies that were on my floor in oh my gosh, not remembering the name of building not Harkins. But anyways, wherever my first was, it was it was a great experience. And it really did help me find myself as far as how to relate to people. So, it continued, you know, I used it all the way through my careers as relating well to people. So, yeah, that was good.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 04:47**

Amazing. All right. What activities, organizations clubs were you involved in on campus?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 04:55**

Um not a lot. Most of those clubs were very much male dominated, and so I didn't look into them very much. I was a member of the Afro Am Club. And that was probably because of the the upper class men who, of color, you know, they were like, you guys might as well come on over here, because there's nowhere else for you to go (laughter). Obviously, there were other areas we could have joined, but that was the main one. And then in my sophomore, or junior year, probably was sophomore year, could have been the end of my freshman year. Anyways, I joined the cheerleading squad for the basketball team.

That was that was pretty awesome. And so those were, those were the two major things that I did on campus.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 05:54**

That's so cool to hear, because we still have Afro Am on campus today. And a lot of my friends, they're like, in the exec. And it's just, it's so cool. Like knowing from like, 1975 Until now that it's still going on.

**Brenda Chapman McGill 06:07**

Right. Yes, yes, it is. I'm so glad it's still going on.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 06:12**

So, what did your roles in these organizations mean to you? And what made you want to become involved? If you just want to elaborate a little bit?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 06:21**

Right? Yeah, I think it was really, nowadays, we call it the sense of belonging. Right, it was building that community around me to have people on campus that you would see and could speak with someone, if you had to go someplace, and you didn't think you would know anyone, some of those gatherings that we had to do on campus, you could always see a friendly face. So there was that sense of community that it really helped. And then that's, I think, what helped me become involved. And then I began to realize, like, you know, sometimes we were experiences on campus that weren't as positive, that I always knew I could go back to my family there, to the bonds that we had, and have a safe place with them. So yeah.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 07:10**

I feel like we can relate in a lot of levels.

**Brenda Chapman McGill 07:13**

It doesn't change a whole lot, unfortunately.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 07:18**

I feel, um, I was actually talking to like the POC student clubs, just so we can collab. and just, like know, what, what, what they would want to find out from these interviews that I'm doing and, (oh yeah - interjection) and potentially just like, have some of the alum come and just like speak to them, or, like collaborate with them if they were a part of the club. And that's exactly what I was telling them when I wrote them this, like really long email, just saying, like, like, I'm so glad, because I know a lot of them. And they're such amazing people, they're all. So I'm always telling them, like, Thank you for like building this, like community, this family that we have, because you know (right - interjection), like, like the POC, we just have to stick together because there's not a lot of us (that's right - interjection). But even though it is 2022, but there isn't a lot of rain

**Brenda Chapman McGill 08:07**

Many more, many more than we had. Yes.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 08:10**

And hopefully in the future, we have a lot more to know.

**Brenda Chapman McGill 08:13**

It was amazing. I think there were I'm gonna probably get this number incorrectly, but 15 women of color. Oh, yes. When I started. (Oh, wow, was it - interjection). We had to stay together. We would have been lost. All right,

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 08:31**

What were the resources that PC offered these clubs? And what do. Oh, I'm sorry, did you feel that your group was supported? Why or why not?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 08:41**

I was not that active to be aware of the like politics of how the school was supporting our club. So again, not woke (laughter). I didn't. The people that were much more politically active would have probably been much more aware of we were not getting what we needed. It was just a wonderful environment for me to join. And they started talking heavy stuff, and I just started talking about what what are we going to do this weekend? So, (laughter) I didn't really weren't aware how much they were supporting us or not. So hopefully in the future interviews, someone will be able to give you that answer. Yeah.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 09:27**

Oh definitely. I feel like it's a little difficult when you're not an exec. because I've definitely seen it in the clubs that I'm involved in.

**Brenda Chapman McGill 09:35**

Right. I mean, I was aware they were disparities, because you would hear the conversations, but I didn't get that engaged as to well, what are they going to do next? Who's going to talk to who? And we had great advocates there and we'll talk about them, I think in the next question that too. But, and I'll share more of that.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 09:53**

Perfect. How did the professional connections and personal bonds that you formed at PC affect your time I'm here. Do you keep in contact with any of them?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 10:04**

Yeah, so let's see. It's funny to say the leader of our pack was not a person of color. Reverend Robert Morris, who is who has passed, but um, he was an office that was always open. And it was a learning experience to know that I could trust him and share with him my struggles were and that he would then do something. So it wasn't like Yeah, yeah, here you go figure it out. It was always come back, and he would do what needed to be done. And then supporting us on campus was Dr. Robert Hamlin and Dr. Wilesse Comissiong because we were such a small group, it was I needed it. I didn't know that I needed it. To see those men and women of color there who had a voice where I was learning to get a voice at that point in time. I think the other connections and bonds that I made were certainly my, the upperclassmen. I didn't

have any upper women, upper class women to work with. So we were it. But they took us on as little sisters and protected us constantly and reinforced us like don't do walk across campus at night. You know, we're like, Well, I gotta learn the library. Well, I'll come over and get you You stay there until I show up. I'm like, okay, and it. And again, there was this like, unspoken commitment for us. And not just people of color, but even my students, non color students that I got to meet with and to work with. I also met my husband there at PC. I didn't go looking for one, but I found him. And Patrick Joseph McGill, he graduated in 71. He's now transitioned. But we have 42 years marriage in two beautiful children. And I spent those 42 years watching and going to PC basketball games. So I love you PC, but I don't do sports (laughter).so I'm free now. I do keep in contact with my old roommates. Eva Irby Davis, originally Miss Westin. So I don't know how they do that now all the dashes. And Dr. Wanda Ingram, they were my roommates. And so we do keep in touch. And then we have the PC Black Connection, which is an email that was started, and so that we could speak across the generations as much as possible. And keep in touch. So yeah, it's been a while since we got together, but I'm looking forward to our next gathering.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 12:52**

Who are what had the biggest impact on you.

**Brenda Chapman McGill 12:56**

I think it was just an overall experience. It's that kind of, you're a stranger in a strange land. I, you know, I don't know how this whole thing works. You know, it's first generation, there's no one talking to you about what you're doing or understanding the struggle in the timeframes that you need to accomplish things. You know, I grew up on the East Side of Providence. So it's very diverse community. And I had very few experiences with racism. And those experiences continued to happen. And so it, I want to say what I really grew in, was how to address my own feelings, how to adjust my own ability to communicate. And in the end to, to live a life of forgiveness. That phrase, they know not what they do. It's like, how could you not like this pretty face? What is your problem? Right? And so that was kind of always my attitudes, like, I don't know what's wrong with them. And so, my friends would go like, we know what's wrong with them. Yeah, I know. I know. I think academically though, I found my strength in surviving the those two years of Western Civ. I, I could not believe it. I kept saying they created this to wean us out. Because having four classes, plus four classes in Western Civ, and an essay exam every Friday, I was like, these people are crazy. But I figured it out. And it continues to be something that I love to do now. So we'll talk more about that too.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 14:51**

Perfect. All right. So are there any important political events during your time at PC? Were you involved in any protests or any forms of activism?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 15:04**

Again, no, I wasn't really active politically, during that timeframe. Again, I have my my personal excuse of not being woke. And, but I know that on campus, I constantly had to repeat to myself that old songs, I'm Young, I'm Gifted, and I'm Black. And so whatever came up, I just had to keep repeating that to myself, and then get up and do what I needed to do, to get where I needed to get to have my good grades and to be involved with my future. So I think that was my level is to remember who I was, and that I'm Young and Gifted and Black and keep it moving girlfriend. (laughter)

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 15:48**

How did your experience that PC influence your current or former occupation?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 15:54**

Wow. So I think one of the first things getting through psychology, having psychology friends was really really, really cool. Again, as you can imagine, I didn't have any other What's the new phrase, BIPOC students in my classes, right, so we were almost always alone, and but I did an internship at Wrentham State School, which was a school for the, this is an old term for them, severely and profoundly handicapped. So these students had no speech, they might have had multiple physical disabilities, usually cerebral palsy, and so we were there to try to teach them to speak and give them a language, not speak, but to use like a word board or picture board and things like that to communicate with. And, and that became a major stepping stone for me, I, I continued in that field of working with students with disabilities, and in Massachusetts, and for about five years. And so then I moved on to Polaroid, which is no longer here. And they had an educational division, and loved that worked worked on creating curriculums. I worked with adults now who may have not been diagnosed with disabilities, learning disabilities, but just found a job in a factory, and now they wanted to train them. So that was, that was an interesting challenge. And I had to educate myself much more. And I did some publishing in the process around that. So I learned that I love writing curriculums, and eventually ended up in colleges, and spent the last 21 years before retiring at the Community College of Rhode Island, right here in our little state. As Director of Advising and Counseling for more than a dozen years, it felt like, and then Director of Disability Services, which felt like coming home. So applying all of the, you know, the adult with disabilities act laws in the campus, it was, I loved it, I loved it.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 18:14**

And that (interjection - well yeah) you combined everything all together.

**Brenda Chapman McGill 18:17**

It really did, and at the end, it having started at PC and having that love for education that just kept as a thread all the way through my work. When my children were grown and gone, after college, I decided to go back to school one more time, and get that PhD. So in 2016, I got a PhD in behavioral science from the University of Rhode Island. And I said, I'm all done. Now I don't have to do this anymore. But as a first gen, it was something that I think I had planted a seed in me that I wanted. And I knew I might have a hard time doing it with the children, even though people do. And I'm just I was just felt so blessed that it was still there. And I was able to do that. God said, yeah, you can have it go ahead. (laughter) Um, can you share any other successes or challenges you had while in college? It seems like, you know, I probably have touched on most of them. But I guess I guess the success again was more like the life learning that there are good people everywhere. And there are bad people everywhere. And so, choose well. Choose where you're going to go and who's going to support you to do what you need to do. And when you do that, you can survive the bad people because you'll have more good people around you.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 20:02**

Definitely. What did you wish you knew before you came to PC?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 20:09**

Wow, well, geez, I wish I hadn't been first gen. I would have known a lot more. I think, basically, how to network. Right? I mean, I had my close little group at home, you know, my best friends lived within walking distance of my house. And you know, that was, there wasn't there was no struggle in that. But now, I don't know all these people. I don't know all these offices, I don't know who I'm supposed to ask, how to ask. And if I didn't get a good response, I wasn't strong enough to fight for it, or, you know. And so learning how to network, I think would have been a really good thing, how to speak for myself how to make sure my questions got answered in to ask for someone else if you can't help me, I totally understand it, but can I speak to someone who can? (laughter) And I think that's what I missed the most. So using your upperclassmen, because as I said, I didn't have female upperclassmen to talk to. And I wasn't that eager to talk to all the guys. But having a good strong network would have been something really, really nice to know, coming right off, you know, what is it right out of the gate and starting.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 21:28**

What advice would you give current POC students, especially first gen students about navigating life at PC or college in general?

**Brenda Chapman McGill 21:37**

Wow, that's a mouthful, huh? So I think the first thing would be to realize that college is going to be like a microcosm of the real world, it might be insulated, but you're going to have all of these different experiences, all of these different opportunities in front of you, that you get to decide. And I think the idea is not to insulate yourself so much that you don't have those networks, that you don't work toward those opportunities. It's a great time to try new things out. You want to stay safe, but try new things, right? Nothing dangerous, nothing dangerous. And in the end, realize that you're going to survive this. You've got to ask for help, this you do not need to do this alone. If you have a strong faith, rely on that to get you through, remember to be humble, and be courageous at the same time. I think, you know, not that I think I know. But that, you know, we all have a purpose in life. We're all here for us to develop that passion, that seed that's in us that energizes us and keeps us happy and full of joy every day. And that, when we look for those opportunities, that will become so much better than when we started at college, so don't quit. (laughter) You will survive college, and we just hope they survive you. (laughter) Amazing. All right. And just the last question, anything else you'd like to share? Wow, okay, so let's all live life to the fullest. Let's help somebody along the way while we're doing that. And know that for me, my my favorite verses, Jeremiah 29:11. So it's that, know the plans that He has for you. And He has good plans to prosper you, not to harm you. And that He is giving you plans for your hope in your future. And you just hold on to that. And you can get through just about everything. (laughter) So stand in your faith, stand in who you are, because there are a lot of people that don't have the same faith, but just stand where you are, and know that you're there for a reason and a purpose to help other people. And so don't quit, because there's a great future for you.