

## Dear Future Friars Oral History Interview

Interview Subject: Wanda Suzette Johnson Ingram

Interviewer: Nahyr Morales Lugo

Date: April 3, 2023

Time: 12:43pm

### 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 April 3rd, 2023, and it is 12:43pm. My name is Nahyr Morales Lugo and I will be conducting the interview today. Can you please introduce yourself stating your full name and graduation year?

**Wanda Ingram** 00:29

My name is Wanda Suzette Johnson Ingram, class of 1975.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 00:35

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

**Wanda Ingram** 00:38

I was raised in Newport, Rhode Island as a military brat as we all refer to and I currently live in Cranston, Rhode Island.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 00:47

Perfect. What did you study at Providence College, your major and your minor?

**Wanda Ingram** 00:53

I started in chemistry my first two years and then moved on to experimental psychology, which is what I finally got my my bachelor's in.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 01:01

Perfect. And now we're going to talk about your PC experience. So the first question is, what did being a POC college student mean to you?

**Wanda Ingram** 01:12

With so few of us, there was the issue of always standing out. I mean, we definitely- you could find us very easily in the cafeteria and any other location on campus. So few women and very few males, we dealt with a lot of curiosity, a lot of differences, especially living in the residence halls. And that was- that was quite the experience in reference to differences in hair and, and makeup and how to take care of one's skin and things of that nature. A lot of curiosity, but a lot of good relationships and a lot of good education, in reference to getting folks to understand the differences. We learned a lot. And I think a lot of students learned an awful lot from us too.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 01:57

Amazing. In what ways that this identity influence your everyday life during your college years and continue to influence you now?

**Wanda Ingram** 02:07

Well, understanding that there are so many differences, and you can't take things for granted. I think one of the reasons why I ended up going into higher education was because of that. To kind of educate on many different levels. You're not just learning about the A's B's and C's, and the ones, twos and threes, just dealing with how people cope with one another. The differences in reference to how our outlook is, what our families bring from all that situation, etc. It's been- it's been quite the journey.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 02:35

And how long have you been working with PC?

**Wanda Ingram** 02:39

1990? I came here and said I was going to be here for five years. And how long has it been? (laughter) So that- be maybe 33 years now, I would say.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 02:50

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

**Wanda Ingram** 02:57

I was part of the rifle club, a COWL editor, we had what we called the Black- the Black supplement, so one edition of the actual COWL was in relation to what the experiences were for folks of color. I was a part of the karate club, taekwondo and got my yellow belt in that. And I got involved with the intramurals, so I did a lot of softball. Plus Afro- AM society. I think everyone was a member of that as well.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 03:24

I was doing a little research on you for the- in the cowl. And the most interesting thing to me was the karate club, just because we don't have that. Do you know when that stopped?

**Wanda Ingram** 03:33

Ah, no, I don't- actually, no. It was- it was fun. We enjoyed it. I mean, if we weren't hurting one another, but it was- it was great in reference to just learning all the different kinds of basics and whatever.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 03:46

And going off of that, what did your roles in these organizations mean to you, and what made you want to become involved?

**Wanda Ingram** 03:55

Um, I wanted to become involved because of just interest. I, when I looked at some of the information from yearbooks from some of my classmates more recently, I realized that most of them had various leadership roles in all these activities, and I didn't. But I was so involved with a lot of lab work that I was doing. I mean, I was happy just to be a part of those organizations. But leadership, I wasn't able to do that, as well.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 04:24

And what were the resources that PC offered these clubs? Did you feel that your group was supported? Why or why not?

**Wanda Ingram** 04:31

Our group was always supported, but we were very close to Father Morris and Father Peterson and Dr. McKay. Those are the three main individuals who were very much responsible for us having the MLK scholarship, and as a result if we needed something we'd go see Father and we were able to negotiate. Let's put it that way.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 04:53

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

**Wanda Ingram** 05:02

All of them, for the most part, we've lost a lot of good people, though. But the majority of us have stayed in contact with one another. For those first four years, when we were there, here together, it didn't matter if you were a basketball player, or if you were a science major, or whatever else, because there was so few of us on the campus, we stayed very close. I mean, Alan Baker, who was a member of the basketball team, was also head of Afro-AM. So we were all in this together.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 05:32

And I know you guys always call each other like big brother and little sister.

**Wanda Ingram** 05:36

Well, I didn't appreciate that. Because I'm the oldest in my family, I have one younger brother, who's three and a half years younger than me. So when we first arrived, and we found out that all of the brothers that were here, decided they were going to be our older brothers, there was some discussions, lots of discussions.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 05:54

I just love that, like family connection that you guys have with one another, it's beautiful.

**Wanda Ingram** 05:59

And still do. Oh, yes. Some still trying to be older brothers. And obviously, it goes in different ways now.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 06:08

And who- like going off of that question, Who or what had the biggest impact on you?

**Wanda Ingram** 06:15

Ah, you could call, consult, and now we have the luxury of emails and text messaging and whatever, with everyone that we were connected with when we went to school here. And that's still the case, what I try to encourage students that I work with here on campus now is you've got even more opportunities to be connected with one another, there is no excuse. You've got cell phones and what- I mean, we had a phone on the wall in our room, that was as close as you were gonna get. And you had to send things by letter. So I mean, folks don't even know which side to put the stamp on sending out letters. So there is no reason why we can't stay connected.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 06:58**

Were there any important political events during your time at PC? Were you involved in any protests or other forms of activism?

**Wanda Ingram 07:08**

Well, Father Quigley was very much involved with us. He was our chaplain, and- and still here, connected now with the alums, and we call him Quig. And Quig was very much involved with Cesar Chavez and the lettuce pickers. So a lot of us got involved with that particular activity. One of the other things that was very common back in that day was going to various concerts for different groups, etc. And Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Gil Scott Heron, they all had different groups and organizations that they were all part of in reference to what was going on in South Africa and other kinds of countries. So we had an international kind of way of looking at things and protests, as well as just things that were local. Plus, anytime and every week, there was something that would occur mostly on campus in reference to this whole issue of various colors and there weren't that many of us, and we'd end up in Father Peterson's office or Father Morris's office, or whatever. So- so we had it at home and we also had when we were out and about.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 08:11**

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

**Wanda Ingram 08:17**

Well, the fact that Quig was involved, right from day one. When we had the 75th anniversary, I was still at UMass Dartmouth, working as a counselor. And he gave me a call and said, well, since you live right in Rhode Island, why don't you become a part of the 75th anniversary committee, our meetings are early in the morning, I know you- you know- you commute, so you can stop in, be a part of that committee, and then you know, head to work or whatever. Little did I know, there was more going on behind the scenes. Father Cochran who was a part time Dean with Father- Father Bond was- was overseeing the freshman class. Obviously, it's not a part time job. But what they were doing was looking to make it a full time one and to try to figure out who could handle that job. Needless to say, I ended up in the position. And from that point on after saying five years, I'm going to be here. It's what 2023 now? I'm still here.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 09:13**

We're so glad to have you.

**Wanda Ingram 09:14**

Aw, thank you.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo 09:17**

And can you share any other successes or challenges you had while in college?

**Wanda Ingram 09:25**

Ah. There's a lot of stereotyping that occurs. There's a lot of ways that one has to try to educate the differences in that because I used to always ask a student or even a colleague, so does everyone do this the same way? And then they'd give me that look, and I'd say, well, why do you think that it's going to be the same if they're a person of color? Do I have to answer for everyone of color in reference to a classroom or in any other kind of situation? I can't speak for everyone. We are all individuals and trying to get folks to understand that from faculty on down, even presidents, that that takes some time and energy. So I spend a lot of time still doing that, even here.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 10:13

And what did you wish you knew before you came to PC?

**Wanda Ingram** 10:17

More about the Catholic traditions. Every now and then I get myself into some kind of difficulty with that. Including things like eating meat on the wrong days and bringing lunches in. And it was a number nine, or I think I ordered from some place, a steak sandwich, and it was a Friday, and it was a Good Friday and- and I apologized pathetically. And they kept saying, no, no, no, we understand that. But boy, it smells so good.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 10:46

I even did it with my roommates, I completely understand.

**Wanda Ingram** 10:49

Oh my goodness. (laughter)

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 10:52

And the next question is, what advice would you give current POC students, especially first generation students, about navigating life at PC or college in general?

**Wanda Ingram** 11:04

I've been doing it for how many years now? So same thing over and over again, with the different workshops, discussions, meetings, talking to students about their academic status, learning how to support one another, and not being unto oneself. I mean, get it out there in reference to staying connected, and I'm gonna talk about cell phones and everything else, we have to look out for one another. And I think that's just something that's good advice for everybody. I don't care if you're polka dot you- you- everybody needs to be doing that. Even though I didn't get a chance to serve and reference to chairing a lot of committees or whatever, I still encourage our students- get involved in committees, the only way you're gonna learn the differences as to how things impact you is to be a part of it. You can't just get- you know, get up on TV and watch those kinds of things. Take advantage of the resources. Not letting fear or anxiety, keep you from trying something. And that- that's one thing I find that a lot of our students will pretend not to do in reference to, you know, just jump in the deep end and just make sure you got somebody with a life preserver right there next to you, that's all. But keep that in mind in reference to that. Seeking out role models. And I'm not just talking about another faculty member or administrator, but one another, just make the connections with other people. Working on one's strengths and weaknesses, the fact that when I've talked with students, they will say, well, you know, like, I don't have a lot of strengths. And they'll ask, okay, well, how did you get here? How did you do this? How did you do that? Then they're realizing, okay, yeah, I do have a lot of strengths. Alright, let's talk about the weaknesses. And that same kind of category. And what you can do about it in reference to, I don't expect you to change and have everything automatically just become from A, B, and C, you know, unless you're flying into that window with the blue tights and the red cape it- everyone has their weaknesses and things that they need to work on. All of us are a work in progress- God made us that way. So taking care of oneself and realizing what your strengths and weaknesses are. So that you can kind of gain something from that and work with others. But just staying connected with one another. I find even though we've got the cell phones and social media and everything else, some of the students are so lonely, and by themselves and just talking a little bit more about our experiences when we were here at PC, and there was no such thing as a computer, no such thing as a cell phone, which you get the weird looks, calling collect, they don't know what that means, among other things, what's it- a dime for making a phone call, a phone call for paying a dime. I mean, all those kinds of things, but getting them to laugh, like you're doing, so they understand, okay, these are what we were dealing with. And yet

we have made connections that we still have to this day. And that's something I'm not saying it's gonna be a test, you gonna get it right or wrong all the time. Just work at it.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 13:56

That's beautifully put. And the last last question is anything else you'd like to share? It could be about your experience at PC, it could be about the project, anything for students, anything you want.

**Wanda Ingram** 14:08

Well, I'm just glad that the project, you know, finally took it a life of its own. Because once we're gone, we're gone. And I think one of the things that we realized when I was talking with some of my older brothers who came up with this concept was that we've been to more funerals and more wakes than we'd like to even think about and we're going to lose more, obviously. I mean, I'll be turning 70 in what? Twenty three days? So it's a case of alright, so, we need to make sure we've got something that's there for us to remember, and for- for us to pass on to others as well. It's important, our history, we got to know where we're- if we want to where we're gone, got to remember where we came from. And so much of this keeps being done over and over and over again, that maybe our country's not getting it right now in reference to how things are being run. But there's nothing wrong with a school of this size to be able to do something like that. So I couldn't wait for us to get this up and running. I'm just sorry it took so long to be able to get involved and whatever, but I'm trying to retire at the same time so. I'm trying to get things packed and whatever else, so, but we'll see how that goes.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 15:14

Well, thank you so much for joining us...

**Wanda Ingram** 15:16

Thank you so much for having me.

**Nahyr Morales Lugo** 15:17

.. (I loved hearing?) your story.

**Wanda Ingram** 15:19

Thank you.