**Dear Future Friars Oral History Interview**

Interview Subject: Joseph Small

Interview Subject: Mallory (Mal) Davis

Interviewer: M. Michelle Chiles

Date: September 19, 2022

Time: 2:30pm

**Transcript:**

**M. Michelle Chiles** 00:06

So, this is for the Dear Future Friars Project where we are seeking to document the Providence College alumni and their experiences at PC. Our pilot round is particularly focused on our Black alumni and the experiences that they had at various times in their Providence College career. I'm going to introduce, ask our members today to introduce themselves. And then we have some questions from the oral history project. So, if each of you could introduce yourselves.

**Joseph Small** 00:46

Yes, my name is Joseph small. I'm class of 1974, Providence College.

**Mal Davis** 00:53

Mal Davis, class of 1981.

**Question:** Why is the Dear Future Friars project important to you?

**Joseph Small** 01:02

I'll go first. I guess it was just a little short of a year ago that I found myself in an interesting kind of compensation with college president. Father Shanley? Is that correct? about the importance of preserving oral histories and the importance of capturing authentic voices for many members of my class, as we are just shy of our 50th anniversary of Providence College, becoming Golden Friars. And the fact is, is that through attrition, or numbers of dwindling, and there's some incredible individuals who came through this fine institution who had some amazing amazing experiences that only they could tell. And if there was some way that we could record some of that before they passed on before they transition, then all the better. And that was my thinking at the time. How about you Mal?

**Mal Davis** 02:16

I concur with that. One of the things that I would just add on is that, you know, this is my alma mater, it's where I got my pigskin from. So I don't deal with other colleges. But I deal with trying to make the Providence College what it is supposed to be, it's almost the same as this American experience. And so in that case, we need to capture full histories that stories need to be told. Stories, good. Not so good. And frankly, bad, all those stories need to be told so that you can get a full spectrum of what's going on. And Joe hits it right on the head. We've we've both been at a lot of home goings over the last few years, a number of guys from his era, who didn't even make it to age 60. You know, and unfortunately, this is coming along a bit later, where we can't capture Dr. Robert Hamlin or Father Robert Morris, or it would even really be, because she has diminished a lot, to capture Dr. Willesse Comissiong. So somewhere, we have to have a starting point. You know, even Dr. Ken Walker who didn't pass that long ago. Those are rich pieces that we won't be able to have with this but but if we start now, then we will have something that's very rich, because not to butter, not to butter him up. But Joe's group was quite a group when I will look at what they were able to accomplish during that point in time.

**Question:** Why is it important for us to focus on the stories of our Black alumni with this initial project?

**Mal Davis** 04:10

Well, I'll jump first on that, you know. I don't have a good way of doing this. When one looks at Providence College, one sees the basketball team. And you think that the student population reflects the basketball team and it doesn't when you start looking at numbers, you know, over the years, so we need again, this is this is important that that we just need to do this so that the general everyday student because in my mind, that's what this project is really about. It's about the general everyday student and they'll find out I believe through the stories, even though numbers have increased significantly, that some of the same issues that were going on in the 70s and the early 80s, they've not disappeared. So we need so in having all of this, they will. I think I don't have a -, I do have a good way of saying that. They'll feel some camaraderie, they won't feel like they're out on an island. Because sometimes you feel like they're out on an island. I don't know if we'll to get to something. But, you know, it was, for me, it was just interesting. Just when I moved into Fennel Hall, it was culture shock, because I was the only one on the floor that looked like me.

**Joseph Small** 05:53

I would add that it was 52 years ago, that I as an entering freshmen, or maybe even longer, because obviously I was still in high school. So maybe it was my senior year ah getting the tour of Providence College. And I'm in a tour group where I'm the only person of color. And I'm walking the grounds, and we're, you know, obviously getting the big sales pitch on how fine this institution was. And I'm looking for anybody that looked like me. And I found one brother coming out of the library as we were entering in and I remember, like it was yesterday that I, I hung back to the back of the line, so I could get a chance to get a quick one on one with him make eye contact and then quickly ask, So what's this place like? And his answer was short, curt, and to the point. He looked left, he looked right, and he looked me right in the eye and he said, don't come here. And then off he went, and I was startled by his answer. Now, fast forward, I show up a year later, and he sees me on campus. And he's like, damn fool, didn't I tell you not to come here. And of course, we laughed our heads off, became the best of friends. Mal, I'm talking about TJ, and brother Ted Jones. And my point is this. Not everyone gets an opportunity to make contact with another student that might look like them that perhaps may culturally come from similar backgrounds. And with the wonders of modern technology, like we have today, which were not available to me 52, 53 years ago, to be able to sit in the comfort and convenience of their home, get on the internet, and look and listen to two minutes, three minutes of somebody's personal experience, good, bad or indifferent. It's invaluable. And that's what I think, hopefully, we're able to accomplish with this collection of authentic stories going forward. Let the student make their own decision. But at least it's more than one person that says don't come here.

**Mal Davis** 08:30

What just one thing I know, you got you have to move on. Michelle, one of the other reasons why I would do it is is that. And I have said this with different African American alumni is that we need to be in all spaces on this campus. So we have those that are represented inside, you know, the administration and what I mean is I can't even come up with the right but but they were in the board of directors or whatever we call that has never been my charge from 1983 on when I showed back up in the state. I have worked with student populations there they've always known that as I always call myself Big Brother alumni, that I'm in the area, and if I'm in town, then I am available for you because I can deal with the administration in a way that you can't as a student, and they've taken advantage of that over the years and different things and so I just find this a a next phase of that and that we can get more voices you know, not not just mine and not just Joe's.

**Question:** What do you think current and future students will get from having access to these stories?

**Joseph Small** 09:54

Well, I'd like to add, you talked about current and future. I'm also I'm going to add in their past students, alumni. It's my hope that for some of our alumni members being able to tell their story, perhaps for the first time to really hear their experience, in their own words, in some cases can be healing.

**Mal Davis** 10:28

Cathartic.

**Joseph Small** 10:29

Very much so because we've had some members of our, of our community of Providence College Friars of color, go through some traumatic experiences, and today still carry those scars. And if they can be persuaded to lend their voices in such a way that they're able to arrive at some resolution, even if it's just dammit, I finally got my story out, you know, got the story straight, then all the better.

**Mal Davis** 11:00

I support it all the way I have watched the angst of folk. And I've even said to some of my alumni of color that if I can love my institution, which I do, and go through what I went through, which no one else went through, I can promise you that much. My senior year was pure hell, there's just no other way to describe it. And still be committed. And the commitment is because of today's students, especially. I got I like what Joe said, though, that people need healing, you know, from the past because you, you can't keep carrying that stuff. I wouldn't trade my Providence degree for anything else is one of the reasons why and I'll probably reiterate this too many times, and while we're talking is that I've had conversations with the administration and they start telling me about Villanova or Catholic U. or B C, and I didn't go to school there. Now was at the corner of River and Eton Street. So now one Cunningham square. That's what I want to talk about. I don't want to talk about the other schools – let, let their alumni talk about that school. We want to talk about what we're doing, you know, and what I consider this overused phrase of the beloved community. Well, how do we put teeth and make it real?