

Dear Future Friars Oral History Interview

Interview Subject: Eva (Westin) Irby-Davis

Interviewer: Nahyr Morales Lugo

Date: April 25, 2023

Time: 2:29pm

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 25, 2023. And it is 2:29pm My name is Nahyr Morales Lugo and I'll be conducting the interview today. We're gonna start off with some basic questions. And the first one is, can you please introduce yourself stating your full name and graduation year?

Eva Irby-Davis 00:31

My name is Eva. I'll give you my maiden name Eva, Eva Weston Irby-Davis and Class of 1975.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 00:43

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

Eva Irby-Davis 00:47

I grew up in Bellingham, Mass. And I currently for the last 22 years have lived here in Providence, Rhode Island.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 00:56

And what did you study at Providence College, your major and your minor? If you had one.

Eva Irby-Davis 01:01

My major was education, my minor English.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 01:06

And now we're gonna get more into your PC experience. And my first question is, what's it being a POC, person of color, college student mean to you?

Eva Irby-Davis 01:17

Well, back then, to me, it was more a growing up experience. Because where I grew up on pretty much my whole education, I was the only person of color in all of my classes. So coming here, and having visited here, and ran into some of the guys that were already students here saying, we need some women, we need some women. And so of course, I was very excited when I got accepted. And it was my chance to learn how to be a person of color with other people of color. So that that I really looked forward to.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 01:54

Alright, and going off of that. My question is, in what ways does identity influence your everyday life during your college years, and continue to influence you now?

Eva Irby-Davis 02:06

Well, again, growing up in a predominantly white community, and coming here, I almost left because I didn't feel welcomed by anybody. But going under the wing of a senior who told me to hang in there, I did, and I'm happy I did. So slowly, you learn to adapt. It's a different kind of lifestyle from what I had, growing up in the small town. And just having fun, you know, learning who I was as a female, a woman, in how to get along with other folks, especially people that went to better schools had more life experiences than I did. So it was a whole growing up process for me.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 03:00

And my next question is, what activities organizations or clubs were you involved in on campus?

Eva Irby-Davis 03:09

Well, for a short time, just a couple of weeks, myself and my former dorm mates got lost walking through the lower part of a Slavin which was brand new at that time. And we got over where they hold the classes for the guys that are in ROTC. And one of the supervisors, there was nice enough to invite us to come and shoot guns. So we did that for a few weeks. So that was that was fun. I was a cheerleader for two years. In the they didn't have BMSA. So back then it was just the African American Club. That was pretty much it. There wasn't a whole lot of stuff going on back then. Because it was still getting used to getting used to women being on campus and have to say a few times that were upperclass men that did not appreciate women coming here, although the priests were, were happy for us being here because having women in in the classroom made some of the guys get up and come come to class. So yeah. And just just getting used to - I was raised Baptist, but I appreciated the college, the Catholic college experience, you know, fell in love with, with several of the priests, especially father, Robert Morris, who was at that point head of the MLK scholarship program, so.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 04:43

wonderful. And what did your roles in these organizations mean to you? And what made you want to become involved?

Eva Irby-Davis 04:52

Well, because I didn't really do a whole lot when I was in high school. So being a cheerleader to me was like, you know, a time, to, to get out and just just have fun, you know, again, experience life because back then, I mean, you're talking almost 50 years ago that we didn't we didn't get out. We barely left campus. I mean, back then Providence was not the Providence it is now. So, yeah, just just experiencing life. I think I'll say that throughout the whole thing, it's just experiencing life, growing up, seeing what it is for me to be to be me.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 05:33

Wonderful. And with the clubs and organizations, you're a part of, what were the resources that Providence College offered these clubs or your sport? And did you feel that your group was supported? Why or why not?

Eva Irby-Davis 05:50

Didn't really think about to be honest with you, whether we were. I know when one year when they were putting out The Cowl, we we were allowed to do a supplement to the, to The Cowl. As far as being students of color, we added poetry, etc, etc. So so that was nice, you know, but other than that, I didn't really didn't really think about if we were being supported or not, you know. Although I do have to say one time when, when we were first starting here, a person of the faculty and I won't say names because she's gone now. But asked if they had lowered the standards to let students of color into the school, which I was very offended by. Because it's like, you know, I work just as hard as anybody else and top of my class. So why would they have to lower the standards to get us in here? I would think that a school of this reputation would want only the best to come here.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 06:54

And my next question is, how did the professional connections and personal bonds that you formed at Providence College, affect your time here? And do you keep in contact with any of them?

Eva Irby-Davis 07:09

Well, when I first came, Dean Comissiong, back then was Dean Hester, Wilesse Hester, she had she left to finish her doctorate and came back. So we still keep in touch with her. And Dr. Hamlin, who preceded her in the Balfour Center, he since passed away. But yeah, you do keep in touch with a few folks. And my former roommate is a dean here, so so that really makes me feel special that I can come back at any time and visit her in the Dean's office. Yeah.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 07:50

That's wonderful. And going off of that, who or what Providence College had the biggest impact on you?

Eva Irby-Davis 07:58

Well, always wanting to write and I still feel I have a book in me somewhere. Dr. Rene Fortin from the English Department, Dr. Barber, they were really, really influenced me as far as improving my, my language and writing skills. And you have Dr. Dr. Sullivan again, I believe he's since passed away from the education department. You know, but I've always wanted to teach it did teach it, and stay with it. But yeah, just being here, and knowing that I was one step closer to my, my, my dream from the time I was eight years old.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 08:44

And kind of switching gears. Were there any important political events during your time at Providence College? And were you involved in any protests or any other forms of activism?

Eva Irby-Davis 08:57

No, no protest. I do remember streaking was, was pretty much common place. We had a few of those run across campus. And I believe it was President Ford came to visit. We didn't have a whole lot of that I recall. I didn't have a whole lot of political things going on back then. But I have to say that desegregation was still in the works, you know, one of one of the one of my jobs that I was hoping to get and never went into, they were still desegregating the schools in Boston. And I had one of my great grandmother's, God daughters was a principal there. So I had a chance to go and interview with her but I never accepted the job because things were still kind of in turmoil in in Boston, you know. Thank goodness that's over with.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 09:55

And how did your experience at Providence College influence your current or former occupation?

Eva Irby-Davis 10:02

(current or former) Well, again, it still goes back to life is life, you know, and even though I didn't go on to get a masters, took some classes, but it didn't finish, you know, versus my two roommates got their masters and their doctorates. But I feel that I've gotten a doctorate just in, just in living, you know? Yeah, things don't always turn out the way you want them to. But I don't regret any minute of it. So.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 10:36

Can you share any challenges you faced, or overcame while in college?

Eva Irby-Davis 10:45

Well, being accepted being accepted as me being accepted as a fair skinned person of color, you know, growing up in a white community then coming here and just feeling like maybe one of these days I'll, I'll fit in. And then I look at folks that have graduated from here knowing that because there are other folks out there that are graduates of Providence College, and they were at the school that I taught at, but I didn't feel welcomed as a Providence College graduate. Even though the majority of the men at the school where I worked were PC grads. So that was a little odd. But again, it goes back to life is life. And I don't regret one minute of it, you know.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 11:35

And kind of opposite to that. What were some of the successes you had what PC?

Eva Irby-Davis 11:44

Well, I think most of them came after I graduated versus being here. That I was involved with, WIN which doesn't exist anymore. But Women's Involvement Network when when women alums started arriving. They didn't feel like they have a part in the Alumni Association. So we started a little branch of it. And now you have several, several of the alums that are been presidents of the Alumni Club. So yeah. Too many things, I think, to think of, I've come back to speak for some of the different parts of BMSA, you know, been asked to come back and speak as an alum. Try to make all the reunions Those are fun, you know. No, and just the folks that I've met along along the way, you know, a lot. And I was on the Board of Governors for what do they call it now, the board of it's not really called the Alumni Board of Governors

anymore. But I was on that for eight years representing alums of color. I received in an award for my volunteer work from you know, being here. That's about it.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 13:24

Thank you for your contributions. And my next question is, What did you wish you knew before you came to PC?

Eva Irby-Davis 13:36

Oh, that's too much. Too much to know. I suppose how it wasn't tough, but that I was gonna run into walls, you know, and how to adjust to running into those walls. But again, like I said, it all worked out. So

Nahyr Morales Lugo 14:09

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

Eva Irby-Davis 14:27

To take advantage of everything that's offered to you, I don't think I reached out enough to or investigated enough. The various you know, clubs, you know, just to take advantage of what's ever out there, you know. See if you fit in. I didn't do that. So again, it goes back to coming from a small town and just me concentrating on you know, getting good grades and getting out here and getting a job. But I did have fun along the way. So met a lot of folks where I consider them family now, you know, and of everything here besides getting a good education. It's the folks you've met and the family that we've made. And now being older, almost getting ready to celebrate 50 years. How, how we've lost some of our family already, you know? Yeah. But it's the family. And seeing folks like you guys, yeah. You don't forget the ones along the way, and if there's anything that we can do as alums to help you along, you know, always willing to do that, too.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 15:48

Thank you so much. And the last question, is there anything else you'd like to share? It could be about anything you didn't get to squeeze in or about the project? Anything you'd like to add?

Eva Irby-Davis 16:00

Just again, regretting not have reached out as much as I could have, or maybe even studying as hard as I should have. But yeah, just having fun and enjoying these four years because they go by so fast. And if I had my druthers, I'd rather be here than out there, yeah. School is fun. But you learn stuff every day. And like I said, I don't regret. I don't regret one minute of it.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 16:31

Thank you so much for sharing your story. I love talking to you. And that was the end of it. Thank you.