

Dear Future Friars Oral History Interview

Interview Subject: Joseph N. Small Jr.

Interviewer: Nahyr Morales Lugo

Date: May 1, 2023

Time: 2:08 pm

Transcript:

Nahyr Morales Lugo 00:00

Hello, this is an interview for Dear Future Friars, Providence College's project interview alumni, and document their experience. Today is May 1, 2023, and it is 2:08 PM. My name is Nahyr Morales Lugo and I'll be conducting the interview today. So we're gonna start with some, like a basic bio. Can you please introduce yourself stating your full name and graduation year?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 00:31

My name is Joseph N. Small Jr., and I graduated from Providence College in 1974.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 00:38

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

Joseph N. Small Jr. 00:42

Well, I'm from Duxbury, Massachusetts, which is just south of Boston. And after living in many cities and countries, I've now returned back to the same area on what we call the south coast of Massachusetts.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 00:54

Wonderful. And what did you study at Providence College you major in your minor if you had one?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 01:00

Well, I wanted to major in teaching, but we didn't have that major at that time when I entered the school. So I chose English as my major, but business communications as my minor.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 01:12

All right, and now we're gonna go on to your PC experience. And my first question is, what did being a POC college student mean to you?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 01:21

It meant an awful lot. When I entered Providence College, I was one of eighteen males of color. We were the last members of the last all-male freshman class in Providence College history, we went co-ed the next year. And of the numbers of us who were of color, we were also told we're the largest class of entering students of color in the school's history. So we knew we were making history, in several different ways, the last all male freshman class, and most likely, the largest and perhaps the last of the largest class of students of color coming in at one time.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 02:16

And kind of going off to that, in what ways did this identity influence your everyday life during your college years and continue to influence you now.

Joseph N. Small Jr. 02:26

We all came from from different cities and states, even though we were all students of color we came in from different backgrounds, socio economic backgrounds. Some of us came from rural areas like myself, others came from big cities like Harlem and Los Angeles and Detroit, just to name a few. But we found common ground here in the fact that we were all students of color, who were struggling to make our way. We needed to find how we could fit in how we could support each other, and how we could be successful making our way here on this campus. And I think for me personally, learning how to work cooperatively, learning how to support each other as students of color, learning how to go beyond our safety zones, if you will, to join student organizations, helped prepare me for my future, which ended up being an education publishing for over 40 years.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 03:39

And kind of switching gears, what activities organizations or clubs were you involved in on campus?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 03:47

Well, one of my most favorite and most memorable was joining WDOM, the college radio station. And I happen to be fortunate enough to be in the dorm where at that time St. Joe's, the radio station was in the basement. So it was easy to just get get right to it and do what I needed to do. And I was particularly fortunate to have a jazz radio program there. And I had the support of our station's manager to be creative with the work that I was doing there, including being able to read poetry in between some of the jazz pieces that I was broadcasting. That took me out of my comfort zone. In addition to that joining of course the Student Union. I also played intramural basketball and we won a couple of championships during the four years that I was there. I had the pleasure of having dear friends who played varsity for Providence College you went eventually going on to the Final Four in 1973, including my cousin Nehru King and just to be a witness to history in the making in that context clearly helped me become just prepared to just take on whatever life would throw my way.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 05:13

What did your roles in these organizations mean to you, and what made you want to become involved?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 05:23

Just to be able to contribute, being a freshman, some of the big men on campus, the the the older brothers who were leading some of the civil rights activities that we had on campus at the time, one of which was in my freshman year, the student body, the Black student body went on strike, because we felt that the administration wasn't treating our athletes of color in the right way. We felt that in some cases, they were being exploited for their athletic abilities and not being given a real opportunity at getting a quality education. The demands of practice were such that, and they didn't have the kind of academic supports that they have in place today. So our student body, the Black student body initially started the

strike. And we were supported by the larger student body on campus. And the leadership of our African American student body helped us craft a list of demands of which the administration met all but one, of course, we wanted to get one of our ballplayers back on the team, but that was not going to happen. But we were very pleased to know that the administration was going to make every effort to support that particular ballplayer who, unfortunately needed greater academic supports, over the four years that he had matriculated here. I think when we look back at that, in retrospect, that was happening not just at Providence College that was happening all over the country, particularly among Division One schools playing both football and basketball, and perhaps other sports. And today, we can say that there's a higher graduation rate among athletes of color, we can say that the institution's very sincere and providing the appropriate levels of support for these student athletes. And I think that the efforts that we put forth back in 1970, in the winter of 1971, when this, this protest took place, I'd like to think that we helped kind of forge the way to what our students are benefiting from today.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 07:55

Wonderful. So I think you can touched on this, but if you want to elaborate any more, what were the resources that PC offered your clubs? And did you feel that your group was supported? Why or why not?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 08:13

Well, in addition to the resources that we had, in so far as being able to participate in some of the established activities, whether it is theater arts, whether it's the radio station, whether it's intramural sports, as we as a Black student body on campus, and our first Advisor, Dr. Father, Robert Morris, the late Father, Robert Morris, was our first mentor, administrator of our MLK program. And I couldn't have thought of a better individual to help us find our way. And of the eighteen or so who came in as entering freshmen, half of us graduated on time. And there were others who came a semester or two behind us. And I think a lot of that had to do with what Father Morris was able to bring as a resource to us as students of color here on the campus.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 09:25

I always hear about Father Morris, he seems to be a very impactful person during this, like time.

Joseph N. Small Jr. 09:32

I wish you could have met him he was something special. He's a no nonsense guy. But at the same time, he had a great sense of humor. And he had just this incredible source of empathy and support for students of color here on the campus. He was authentic.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 09:51

That's very important for students.

Joseph N. Small Jr. 09:53

Yes.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 09:55

My next question is how did the professional connections and personal ones that you formed at PC affect your time here? And do you keep in contact with any of them?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 10:07

I only wish I had taken advantage more often of professional contacts that were right here, right in our faces here at Providence College. Unfortunately, I didn't. I look back in retrospect and I said, Gee, I should have stayed on campus more, instead of heading home on weekends to work in the family business, for example. But my dad was a pioneering Black entrepreneur here in Massachusetts, and in New England. And in fact, he was the first to head up an organization called the Black Corporate Presidents of New England. And in the work that he did to help promote minority and women owned business enterprise, I watched him carefully and closely and began to sort of attend some of the meetings that were taking place, not only in Massachusetts, but also here in Rhode Island. And it was in some of those meetings here in Rhode Island that I was able to make some connections, even while at Providence College, junior and senior that I still hold those connections still to this day.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 11:21

Who are what at PC had the biggest impact on you?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 11:29

My best friend, college roommate, John Chan. I don't know if you've ever heard of Mr. John Chan, who is the owner of Chan's in Woonsocket, Rhode Island known for its not only its great cuisine, but it's live music, Chan's jazz and egg rolls. And John and I became roommates second semester of our freshman year, and we remain roommates right straight through to graduation. He had the greatest influence on me to have, as a dear friend and someone you're living with and making your way coming from a different culture, different language. He's Chinese, to become brothers in arms as it relates to social justice to cheer each other on and our own individual pursuits. And to find myself over the years, looking back and drawing upon some of my experiences with John to help inform me as I would make my way as an adult in my career. So without question, it was John. Now there'll be others who will probably want to take exception to that, including my cousin, Nehru, Nehru King. But there are a lot of others, of course, but John is the number one.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 12:59

And you touched on this when we're talking about the clubs you're a part of. But again, if you just want to expand on expand on that, were there any important political events during your time at PC, and were you involved in any protests or any other forms of activism.

Joseph N. Small Jr. 13:16

So again, the most important political event activist event, if you will, was in the winter of 1970, when the Black student body here at Providence College, went on protest in support of our Black athletes, basketball players in particular, whom we felt deserved a better opportunity. And we are most proud of that event. Because it was, I believe, 10 years later, that the institution brought us back with the guidance of Father Morris, to thank us for taking a chance to have this kind of a protest, to be activist in a very

thoughtful way. We didn't go around destroying buildings and things of that nature. But we struck we stayed away from class, the ballplayers stayed away from playing basketball until we got the institution's attention. They even brought in some of the notable alumni, basketball players, some of whom are in the NBA Hall of Fame, to talk to us to persuade us to come off of strike. But at the same time, they understood that we were committed. And they supported our efforts in that regard. And we were able to prevail. And I think for me, personally, that was the defining moment of the Providence College experience, which is all about serving and giving of ourselves back to our community. And it starts with our community on campus. And so for me it was, how do we help and support our student athletes on campus. And those were the learning lessons that kind of helped guide me, as I go forward in my work, and a larger context. I'm a member of Rotary International, which is an international service based organization, we focus on giving back and being of service to our communities.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 15:27

That's very inspirational. And assure that that even affects us now, like, not affects us, but impacts us and how we support our athletes and any like POC students on campus. So thank you, for your efforts.

Joseph N. Small Jr. 15:41

Thank you.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 15:44

And how did your experience at PC influenced your current or former occupation?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 15:52

I absolutely love my English classes here at Providence College, particularly my classes in Shakespeare and Chaucer. And it wasn't a surprise that - Oh, I should add, as part of the minor to be able to take classes in computer program. It was one of the first computer science offerings on the campus back in 1971/72. thereabouts. And so to be exposed to that, and combining that with my love of the classics, that I found the combination of those two experiences, prepared the pathway for me to get my first job in educational software publishing. So I started with a company that was a pioneer in education technology and computer assisted instruction, computer based education. Were talking back in the mid 70s. And to fast forward to see how far online learning systems have come in the work that I have found my pathway taking. Without question I give Providence College a lot of credit for those early days of preparing.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 17:11

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

Joseph N. Small Jr. 17:20

I think as a student of color, here at Providence College, the challenge has always been about inclusion. You know, of the various programs and activities and clubs that exist on the campus. But as a student of color, it would be nice if someone invites you to come join the club as opposed to having to find the courage in yourself to say, Hey, can I attend this meeting? Can I learn more about what you're doing here? With the theatre arts group, for example, or whatever. So it's about inclusion, those have

always been a challenge for some of us as students of color matriculating here on the campus, and I hope that today, the institution is encouraging its entire student body to be more inclusive in their thinking in their awareness level of extending an invitation to that student who sitting on the sideline, little shy, maybe feeling a little intimidated, but just invite them to a meeting. You'd be surprised.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 18:44

I agree. wholeheartedly, I agree. And on the flip side, what were some of the successes you had while at PC?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 18:54

Oh, my goodness. There's so many but some of the most memorable successes that as the student body, we had, perhaps the best concert on the college campus in its history. We had Earth Wind and Fire, we had Bruce Springsteen. I think perhaps Willie Nelson performed. This was all in one weekend's event of a music festival that we had on the campus. It was the best time, no one got injured. The music was fantastic. It was a smashing success by all accounts, not sure if we made any money in the event, but at least it was a wonderful experience. I think that along with just bearing witness to the success of the basketball team that went on to make it to the Final Four. Those were two memorable experiences that we'll stay with me forever.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 20:02

So my next question is, What did you wish you knew before you came to PC?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 20:08

I wish I knew more about the study abroad program. I didn't know enough. And as I look back in retrospect, I might have considered applying for the junior year abroad. I don't know if it was available in sophomore years. But I dismissed it. And I dismissed it because I thought to myself, well, I'm just a Black student, and they're not going to consider that. So why waste my time. And so I wish I had gone beyond my comfort level, if you will, attend some of the informational sessions, ask the right questions and make that decision at that time instead of just dismissing it. So that's the one thing in particular that I regret. Because as I went about my professional career, I traveled internationally for the corporations that I've worked for. And I would have loved to have been able to have had a, you know, a study abroad experience. Providence College has a great study abroad program.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 21:12

They do ,I agree. My next question, what advice would you give current POC students, especially first generation students about navigating life at PC or college in general?

Joseph N. Small Jr. 21:28

My advice is to go, wherever your interest level takes you. Don't be intimidated by that what you don't know, or who you don't know. Don't be afraid to attend an information meeting. Don't be afraid to go into that meeting and as I call it, work the room. Introduce yourself around, find out who's there. I mean, really find out who's there. It could be someone who is a corporate executive, it could be someone who can help you with your career who can help you with an opportunity for internships, for example. So

Providence College has so many things going on so many offerings going on, you can't just sit and wait for someone to spoon feed you, you got to get out there. I used to always say to my daughter and son when they went off to college, get your money's worth. Right? If you had to pay for the price of admission. That is, if your parents said you have to pay, would you go and get your money's worth? Would you attend every meeting you could get access to to make sure you didn't miss out on any opportunities. That's my advice.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 22:48

And this is our last question. But is there anything else that you would like to add a could it could be about the project, it could be about your time at PC, anything that you'd like.

Joseph N. Small Jr. 23:02

I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be here to share my personal truth about my experience here at Providence College, when I found myself in conversation with the President of Providence College, Father Shanley at the time, and we talked about how important it was to capture these stories before we aged out. And there are a number of our brothers, and now sisters, who are no longer here. And we have to rely on others to tell their story. So to be able to take this time and opportunity to gather up as many of the students of color who are coming through Providence College, they get them to sit down, whether it's in front of the camera personally or on Zoom to share their stories. That's invaluable. And I think that it's worth the effort. And I thank Providence College for doing that.

Nahyr Morales Lugo 24:01

Thank you for jumpstarting this. It's such an honor to meet you and learn your story and just be a part of this. I just wanted to tell you this because I've been wanting to meet you for so long.

Joseph N. Small Jr. 24:11

I'm just an average guy. I loves, I love storytelling. I love the fact that there are so many rich stories of the students who attended here in Providence College. And I wish we could have caught and captured the story of our departed brother Clarence Witherspoon, Spoon, as we called him, or departed brother Doug Sullivan, G-Mo as we call him. And Greg Cook, our first president of our Black student body here at Providence College, Dr. Tony Rocha, who I believe is still with us. You want to make sure you get his story. You want to get Charlie Crawford and Nehru King, two other members of the Final Four of 1973's Final Four NCAA Men's Basketball, get their stories, particularly what it was like because they were the Black student athletes, who we were focusing our activist attentions on. They were fortunate they were the beneficiaries of our of our effort, because once we made that known that we were not going to tolerate the exploitation of our Black student athletes, then the school made supports available to them so that they were able to graduate with degrees. So Nehru got an accounting degree. And not to say that he couldn't have gotten it without but to say rather, the school made sure that they attended class made sure that they got the proper credits so that they would get that degree and not just cycle out after four years of playing eligibility. That's the difference.