

Learning About Prejudice Early

I grew up in Pittsburgh in the Hill district. We had two swimming pools. We had white pool and we had a Black pool so prejudice wasn't new to me. Although having been around or having had prejudice been a part of uh my growing up it wasn't new so I didn't completely uh shock and kill me. I knew it was out there and I knew that what I was going to do I was going to get past all of the prejudices all of the hatreds all of the uh people who don't like me. I didn't care about that. Didn't matter. I wanted to do what I wanted to do and I was going to do it. It wasn't the prejudices that was going to stop me but there were kids that um I I saw growing up who had so much talent who dropped by the wayside because of the prejudices and the um hatreds that were out there.

Finding Support at Penn State

Penn State was a racist town. We couldn't do certain things at Penn State but there were good Black people around them. Those were my friends who came to school with me. There was no uh faculty. There was no one that I could look up oh I want to be like that person because they were no African American faculty.

Finding Good Faculty Members

The teachers were some were of course uh opinionated and it showed. Most of the teachers that I had were absolutely wonderful. Embraced me as a Black person and I can't speak to how they treated other students. I can only speak to me and my experience. My experience with the teachers that I had were very very nice people. Very nice. They were not um the opinion of the entire school. There is a separate here. A separate group there I was Betty. I was not Black Betty. I was Betty in their classes and that's the way I was treated.

Denied the Chance to Be a Cheerleader

When I tried out as a cheerleader um they said we don't allow colored people to um participate our cheerleading staff. Um you know it really disappointed me. It really hurt me because I knew that I was as good as any one of those cheerleaders cheerleaders that were on on the uh the field. But I also knew of the prejudices of the United States and they said we don't allow colored to be on the team you know. And I despise that word colored but had to go with it. It didn't bother. It bothered me yes but I was also a dancer and I was also a captain on the dance on our dance club and I as a Black woman was the first Black uh president of that that uh group. Okay I couldn't be on the the um cheerleading squad but boy I was a principle dancer in the dance club and also president of the dance club so that cheerleading that brushed off my shoulder.

Dealing With Racism

In Penn State the um places there were places that we could go uh restaurants we couldn't go into. Go to another restaurant. That's not the only restaurant in the place. You know it's not the best place anyway so you go to another place. And that's what what my thinking was as I was growing up as I was coming along. Yes there were many many prejudices and they were uh uh racial injustices against me didn't let it bother me. Of course well let me say not bother me. Of course it bothered me but I went past it and said hey I can do this. If you can do it I can do it.

I've got two eyes, a nose and a mouth same as you. Two arms two legs same as you. Mine work. Yours work. We can do this together or we can do it separately. And I can do just as well as you can do. My thinking throughout my entire life. You know prejudices did not deter me. Yes they bothered me. Yes I it bothered me to say sit at the back of the bus when there was a seat up in the front. Yeah it bothered me but it didn't deter me from going forward. I still went forward whether I had to sit at the front of the bus or the back of the bus I went forward. The bus still rolled whether I was at the front or at the back. It still rolled and I was on it.

I did not allow that to make me into this person of hatred. This person of uh callousness against white people. No I am not that person because I know some very wonderful white people as well as very wonderful Black people and now the world is becoming a one world not a white world a Black world a Spanish world but people world is what I'd like to see.

Life As a Dancer

When I moved to New York I auditioned for a dance company called the Hal Greco Dance Company. And we toured around places places around uh New York, Brooklyn, Long Island, different places as a dance company.

I auditioned for lots of shows. Didn't make them. Didn't deter me. I thought well I am good. And I am going to keep on working at these places. There are places. It's their loss not mine. So finally I got a show uh Langston Hughes play and I was excited about that. Because Langston Hughes my goodness gracious. This is a world renowned author and I got a chance to meet him talk with him. I thought oh my goodness gracious alive. Look at me. Little ol' me meeting Langston Hughes anyway the show was called the Prodigal Son. It played New York for a while and then it went on tour to the European nations.

I loved Paris. Loved it. Wanted to stay and so the show closed and I stayed in Paris with Marian Williams a gospel singer who was going to tour in Europe so I stayed with her. She was she is a singer. Um she has dances with her entourage and I just stayed being in Paris of course I wanted to stay in Paris which I will just stay and be a dancer with Marian Williams as long as she wants me. I'll I'll dance for her. So um and then I met my husband who was uh an Army person.

Being a cheerleader being a dancer being all of those things takes hard hard hard work. And I know the kind of work that I have put in as a dancer as a teacher as a performer as a person. It takes hard work. And to be recognized for it is such an honor. I cannot tell you. It gives me some pride and some pleasure in all of the hard work that I have put in over the many years with love and dedication. It wasn't that anyone pushed me into doing this. What I did and what I have done. It's because I wanted to do it. Because I had the love of doing it that pushed me every single step of the way.

Making History at Penn State

I think there is such a great value to learning the history of Black students at Penn State because we also made Penn State in a very little way because we were only a little population but we made some history at Penn State also. If you look at the football of course you know that's going to be the biggest thing. But um in the arts in every aspect of Penn State's history I bet you can there's a black name that is somewhere in there. In the end I think this is a great achievement that's that's happening. It needs to be done. It needs to be told.

Learning from Predecessors

I hope that they can gain from our experiences some of the things that they will not have to go through the same way. And that young people nowadays will begin to think not allow certain kinds of things happen to them without thinking them through. Without questioning why what what for when. Think for yourself.