

Lillian Brock Flemming

Interviewee: Lillian Brock Flemming

Interviewer: Courtney L. Tollison, Ph.D.

Date: November 17, 2004

Transcript

PART 1 – 00:00:00

Dr. Tollison: Ok, both these tapes are on. Today is November 17, 2004, about 5:10 pm, and I'm sitting here, my name is Courtney Tollison, I'm sitting here with Lillian Brock Flemming in her office at the Greenville, um... Where are we?

Lillian: (Smiling) School District.

Dr. Tollison: (Laughing) Greenville County School District Headquarters, I guess, on uh, Cleveland Street? Camperdown?

Lillian: Camperdown Way.

Dr. Tollison: Camperdown Way, off of Cleveland Street, and today we're going to have a conversation about Furman. Ms. Flemming, ... you go by Ms. Flemming, or Ms. Brock Flemming?

Lillian: Yeah.

Dr. Tollison: Ms. Flemming?

Lillian: Lillian.

Dr. Tollison: (Laughing) Lillian, is a native Greenvillian. She attended Sterling High School. She, along with Sarah Reese, were the first two African American female graduates of Furman. She entered Furman with Sarah Reese and June Manning. Graduated in 1971. She is currently Mayor pro tem of Greenville. She's a Greenville City Councilwoman, and has served as a Trustee at Furman from 1996 to 1999, and her second consecutive term was 1999 to 2002. She has now rotated off the Board. Let's start off a little bit about you telling me life before Furman, growing up here in Greenville, attending Sterling High School, how did you get to Furman?

Lillian: Well, Greenville um, I lived on the southern side, a community near the train station. We were not very affluent, in fact we were poor, and ..., I still think we were poor. When you think in terms of all the materialistic things that other people have, if you look at materials, how we're still very poor, but rich with other things. Attending Sterling I excelled in academics and other things. We

went to Furman for the Model United Nations and my Guidance Counselor at the time, they were looking to integrate Furman with women. They had some males. Well they had one male, and had brought in a couple of more African American males, and wanted more women to integrate Furman, so my Guidance Counselor at that time, at Sterling...

Dr. Tollison: Do you remember her name?

Lillian: Yes, her name was um Mrs., well I remembered until just now (laughing)

Dr. Tollison: (Laughing) I shouldn't have asked.

Lillian: (Laughing) I know. Mrs., um ..., it'll come to me in just a second, but she was very instrumental, in fact she was instrumental in a lot of things that had to do with integrating public education, and changing the schools..., and, ... it starts with a "G," she died last year.

Dr. Tollison: Was she also instrumental in Joe's matriculation at Furman?

Lillian: She, yes, because she was very helpful in working with the school to get him to Johnson C. Smith University for his first semester, and then his coming, because they had to have time to talk to the Southern Baptist Board, and of course I understand that was a very gridlocked situation where Furman just decided to just do it, and move forward, because it was the Christian thing to do.

Dr. Tollison: So she was familiar with Furman and with the process?

Lillian: Yeah, and because she was the ..., I understand she was on the Desegregation Committee for the County of Greenville. They had one earlier while we were still in school because desegregation had started maybe a year or two earlier, like in 1964, 65, because there were some students who would've graduated with me at Sterling who had gone to Greenville High School. Some had gone to Berea, Wade Hampton High Schools as well, so she was instrumental in trying to make that a smooth transition at the time.

Dr. Tollison: She probably worked with Ernie Harrill?

Lillian: Yes, she did. I'm sure she did.

Dr. Tollison: Did you get to know him when you were at Furman?

Lillian: Very well. Very well.

Dr. Tollison: Did you take some of his classes?

Lillian: I took one, one of his classes, yes, but more so in terms of relationships and trying ..., he was more of a mentor, even though we had advisors, you know, just

someone to talk to, but yes, and he was always involved in student activities and trying to make sure that there was great social adjustment as well.

Dr. Tollison: He was Dean of Students when you were there.

Lillian: Yes, he was.

Dr. Tollison: ...Until sixty-nine.

Lillian: And he was very involved.

Dr. Tollison: Now did you know Joe Vaughn in high school?

Lillian: Yes, I did. He and I are from the same neighborhood. From the exact same neighborhood.

Dr. Tollison: Ok, oh, so you grew up together?

Lillian: Yes, we did.

Dr. Tollison: You would've known each other's families.

Lillian: We've known each other for many, many years, and Joe was always academically gifted. He was ..., I called him a linguist, because he loved foreign languages, and loved to learn them, and loved to say them. He even spoke Old English, which very few people could do very well, but he was able to do it. He was an excellent teacher and inspired kids to learn. Kids loved him because he still had a kid's attitude himself, you know? He took things seriously, but not as seriously as some people thought, you know, that kids had to sit at a ninety-degree angle in a chair, and always had to have four sentences in a paragraph rather than three, or they had to have nine words in this place. He wasn't that way. He believed that when you educate the whole child, you look at everything about them and understand where they're coming from, and it helps you to teach them better.

Dr. Tollison: How important ..., first of all, were you a Baptist, are you a Baptist?

Lillian: Yes, I am a Baptist. I am, really am, but I'm not a Southern Baptist.

Dr. Tollison: OK. Right.

Lillian: I'm a Baptist. I'm a member of the Missionary Baptist, African American. There are different levels of Baptists but I'm a Missionary Baptist, yes.

Dr. Tollison: Now was this how you identified at the stage in your life in high school, and did you get the sense that that was important to Furman, or important to your—did your guidance counselors, were they familiar with that aspect of your life and

did they think that that might help?

Lillian: They never even mentioned it.

Dr. Tollison: Never even mentioned it.

Lillian: Never mentioned it. They were looking for some, when she approached me to apply it was about...they were focused on academics and whether you were well-rounded, whether you could handle the situation. And basically, I think, because if you had good parental support. My mom and dad, even though they didn't even have a high school diploma, they were always very supportive and they believed in education. That was going to PTA and checking on report cards and being involved in school ..., was something—my daddy was a religious person with that. That was a religion to him because he did not have that opportunity, he and my mom, so they made sure that my brothers and I had that opportunity.

Dr. Tollison OK.

Lillian: Or at least took advantage of the opportunity we had.

Dr. Tollison: Describe the process for me, a little bit. Was there communication going on between Furman and your guidance counselor in terms of selecting who would be good candidates for Furman?

Lillian: Well, see, I'm not really sure because a student...oftentimes, a student is not directly involved in it. You know, I can only tell you what I heard. But Mrs. Grimes [High School Guidance Counselor]—Alberta Tucker Grimes—Mrs. Grimes...in giving me information in that they discussed it and they reviewed. And it was a matter of them deciding, you know, who would choose to do that and I chose to apply. Basically, I chose not necessarily because I wanted to be the first African American. That was the least—I thought, it was close to home! It was close to home and I could go to school with a friend of mine, Joe. And he talked to a lot of us and, you know, I just wondered what it would be like. A lot of people want to go so they can get away from their parents. I wasn't exactly that way. I kind of liked mine. And I thought it would be a great opportunity. It would be different. And so, I didn't probably internalize and spend a lot of time thinking, "Woah, you're the first African American to do this." You think more about it when you leave then when you're in the process. When you're in the process, just have a good time and move on, you know, do what you have to do. It became quite evident when I started to go to school that there weren't very many (African Americans), you know, and you always want to relate. You always want to relate and you always want to find an area of comfort, and so we spent a lot of time looking for each other. And then if we couldn't find each other, you just move on and do what you had to do until there was time. That was something we did an awful lot of.

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Dr. Tollison: Did you get the sense from your parents, or had they talked to you, did they talk to you since you matriculated at Furman about any type of, any concerns they had about your experience there?

Lillian: No, ...no, no. My parents, I don't think were very concerned about my experiences since I didn't seem to have a lot of negative, now I think if I would've had a lot of negative experiences, or if people were threatening us, or if she felt that I was not secure, I feel that my parents would have moved me somewhere else, which I'm sure any parent would do that, because they're more concerned about my safety, because of the death of the children in Orangeburg, who were just standing around, and they were shot down. When you look at the film. That had a lot to do with it. My mom was upset with me one time when I was involved with Joe and the Organizing Group. We were protesting against the federal building downtown, and we were, we caused a lot of attention, and a lot of news. Reporters, and tv's came out because there were all these kids, both white and black, marching with signs because those kids were killed.

Dr. Tollison: In Orangeburg.

Lillian: In Orangeburg, yes. Because that made no sense, that the government would react. It is our right to protest. And I think my mom was upset about that because there were a few incidents, people did say some things to us, and that kind of unnerved her.

Dr. Tollison: Now that event was organized by the Southern Student Organizing Committee.

Lillian: Sure.

Dr. Tollison: Now how active were you involved with that organization?

Lillian: I was somewhat active, but not as active as Joe. I was not an officer. I just participated in activities because I felt that the organization had viable policies and bylaws that were necessary. Just because you are part of an integrated situation, you don't lose sight of who you are, which is probably one of the reasons ..., which my mom and dad helped me to understand, that if I was going to get an education, that's the purpose of college, but if you're going to be something different, it won't work well, because it's not real. And I think that has been the key to a lot of things in my life that worked well, ... just be who you are. It's easier to just be yourself, not try to put on airs or try to pretend to be something else. If there's something you don't like, say you don't like it, and then move on.

Dr. Tollison: Were you also part of the demonstration about Martin Luther, ... regarding Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination?

Lillian: Yes, I marched in Atlanta. In fact, I went with my mom (laughing).

Dr. Tollison: So she wasn't upset about that ...

Lillian: No, and my mother actually protested, she marched from downtown Greenville to the airport, fourteen and a half miles ...

Dr. Tollison: To desegregate the airport?

Lillian: To desegregate the airport, so I understood, what she meant, ...I understood. My pastor went down to Old Textile Hall and spoke, and protested with Dr. King, so I understood that it was something that my mom and dad, ... my dad wasn't very vocal, but he was always there. My mom would say something, but my dad was more of a background person, the support. But there are some things, ... oh yes, I marched in Atlanta. Walked all the way. People were very nice. In fact, I can remember I had on a blue and white dress. I remember I was about less than two hundred feet from the door of the church. In fact, I couldn't move when they were asking people to move back so they could bring the coffin out. I couldn't move. There was no place else for me to go. After that time, I think my mom and dad, my brothers and I, we went to Atlanta to the grave, and when they erected the memorial and opened the Martin Luther King Center, we went then.

Dr. Tollison: It's beautiful there. So, you were cognizant of Civil Rights, the movement, growing up, having a mother ..., and parents who were ...

Lillian: Yes, well even before I went to Furman I was very involved with the Southern Christian Leadership Organization in terms of voter registration. When I was fourteen and fifteen, in high school, we did door to door voter registration. I've been chased by dogs. I've been spit on. I've been shot at. I've been almost run down by cars, as a kid.

Dr. Tollison: In Greenville?

Lillian: Yeah, trying to register people to vote. You'd be surprised at the things people say to you, that you're less than human, and if anything, that gives you the, ... that gives you the courage to move forward, and I told my own children, because it's not something I want to forget, because I need to be constantly reminded that all is not well. Today, 2004, seems almost like it did in 1965.

Dr. Tollison: Really? In what way?

Lillian: In terms of racism. It's a little bit more overt, but the feelings have surfaced. I don't, ... well, ... it's been that way ...

Dr. Tollison: It's overt. What's overt?

Lillian: Racism, it's subtle. Sometimes the racism, in terms of the way blacks and whites relate. Just something as simple as the O.J. Simpson case, I mean, I don't see that as a racial issue, just because he's black, she's white. It's a man killed his wife, if he killed wife, if he did not, move on, but people have made it a racial issue, which means that there must be something in America that's underlying the racial issue. White men have killed their wives. Black men have killed their wives. So, why is this issue any different? The value of the life is more important than the color of the skin.

Dr. Tollison: So you think there's something just brewing underneath the surface ...

Lillian: Sure.

Dr. Tollison: And that there are certain situations that provide an impetus for this to come through even when that's not necessarily ...

Lillian: It has seen more prevalence since right before 9/11. And for African Americans, ...I don't know about how white Americans feel, but for African Americans, the year of 2001, ... 9/11, right before, right after, has seem to be dividing our nation, and we've gone further and further apart. We've gone back to almost trying to rebuild relationships that we had, that was formulated when integration came in Sixty-Four, because once people began to talk and understand how they feel, that everybody, irrespective of what color they are, feel the same way about their children. They all have the same desires and aspirations. They have different backgrounds, but the goal and aspiration is to live a happy and meaningful life, irrespective of what color you are. Once people find that we have those commonalities, and that we can serve the same God, in the same building, in a different building, whatever, and have the same focus, then we are a much better society.

Dr. Tollison: I want to make sure I understand what it, ... what about 9/11 provided this. Was it that 9/11 prompted a discussion about what America means?

Lillian: I don't think it had anything to do with America, it was about let's get them. It was vengeance. I couldn't understand that.

Dr. Tollison: It was sort of Americans versus them kind of mentality?

Lillian: Yeah, it's us against them.

Dr. Tollison: Which brought about some people who don't necessarily feel like they're part of America?

Lillian: That's right.

Dr. Tollison: Is that what ...

Lillian: And it seemed to divide people further, in that, you know, we've got to go to war. You know, but we say, "In God we trust," and now we got to kill them, ... which, to me, contradicts the Bible, when you're taught "vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay," and then we went after somebody else, who wasn't the person, ...you know, I'm hearing one thing and then we're going after somebody else. It just, ... so it causes confusion. And then, as a teacher, I'm concerned, and as a parent, because I have children close to that age, so many young people to die. I have been very distraught. I have been very distraught. I've been uneasy in my spirit, because we're a nation that just seems to be going a little bit backwards.

Dr. Tollison: That's interesting. So people feel less a part of the national identity, or perhaps this increased discussion has furthered the distance?

Lillian: It has.

Dr. Tollison: So perhaps before 9/11 ...

Lillian: Because it's that, ...those for war, those against war. We shouldn't be at that point, which almost is the same way it was when it was divided racially, the ones who were for people of color, and the ones who were not for people of color, and it seems like they still divide along color lines, and that's a sad state of affairs for me.

Dr. Tollison: So you see those for war and against war as more African Americans relating to against war, and more whites relating for war. Is that what ...

Lillian: That's what you see, but that's not necessarily true, because there are many more whites who are totally against war, but their voices are not heard.

Dr. Tollison: Really?

Lillian: At all. No. I mean millions of people marched against the war. That meant nothing. I mean they got two seconds of press. That was it. That frightens me. That really frightens me, because I don't know where we're headed with that kind of attitude.

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Dr. Tollison: Let's get back to um, ... let's get back to Furman in terms of, ... tell me a little bit about your living situation when you got to Furman.

Lillian: Well unfortunately I lived with African American women. (Laughing)

Dr. Tollison: That had to be intentional.

Lillian: Yeah, well, yeah. You could choose your roommate, so, you know.

Dr. Tollison: Oh, so you selected ...

Lillian: Yeah.

Dr. Tollison: Ok, and did you know Sarah, well, did you live with Sarah or June?

Lillian: Sarah.

Dr. Tollison: Ok.

Lillian: I didn't know her before, and then our suitemates, they came along later, ... two African American suitemates, so.

Dr. Tollison: Ok, and who were they?

Lillian: Jackie Goggins and Dottie Harris, she's Dottie Harris, but she was Dorothy Hill at the time. Jackie Goggins is now the principal at Armstrong Elementary School.

Dr. Tollison: Yes, I've spoken with her as well. So, did you select a roommate once you got to Furman, or did you preselect in summer before your freshman year? I'm wondering how you were able to select Sarah, or did you say I want to live with another African American student.

Lillian: No, the first year I stayed at home.

Dr. Tollison: Ok.

Lillian: The second year I selected Sarah.

Dr. Tollison: Ok, ok. Now, did she live on campus her first year?

Lillian: Mmhmm.

Dr. Tollison: And who did she, what was her living situation like?

Lillian: She lived with June Manning.

Dr. Tollison: She lived with June Manning, ... Ok, now that's interesting. I'd like to know the history behind that as well. Clearly there are lots of aspects that are historically significant about that situation, so. Did you feel as though an African American community existed at Furman? And how would you define community?

Lillian: I think a community exists anywhere where people, where more than one person gets together with somebody else. To me, a sense of community is wherever you feel comfortable, my floor, my dorm, the girls we roomed with, we were "a sense of community." The African American community was very small, ... but yeah, we had a sense of community. We would laugh and say, "well

how many of us can get in one car?" (laughing), and uh, ..."Well let's just see, suppose all of us just disappeared one day, ...see if anybody misses us." You now? Yeah, we had a sense of community. We were all very different. One of the sad states of society is that we all try to make everybody be like everybody else, and feel like everybody else, which is not true. And which never happens, because that's why God made us all different, is to have different views, is to really make us better, to think more. If we were just cookie cutter perfect, it would be really boring.

Dr. Tollison: Did you feel as if white students at Furman, ... people like to put people in boxes

Lillian: Sure.

Dr. Tollison: ... All African American people are this way ...

Lillian: Yep.

Dr. Tollison: All white people are this way, ...

Lillian: Exactly ...

Dr. Tollison: ... All girls are this way, etc. ... Did you feel that the white students ...

Lillian: Because people would always call me Sarah, and call Sarah, Lillian. I'm almost a whole foot taller than Sarah, and I'm a few shades darker than she is, in terms of complexion. So, it was like, they all, you know, you're all Sarah, you're all Lillian, but you learn to get passed that, because when people are not very familiar, they have to establish some familiarity, you know, so they began to learn. When you say to them, when you stop accepting the fact they call you Sarah, and you know your name is Lillian, you explain to them, I'm Lillian. I'm a whole foot taller than Sarah. You look for me. You explain, then you give them something with which to work with. You make them appreciate the fact that no, we're not the same. I am different. I am me. She is she, so that's basically what you have to do as a human being. You have to identify who you are, and appreciate who you are, so you can tell the rest of the world who you are.

Dr. Tollison: Now let's flip that, because you were not accustomed to going to school with whites either.

Lillian: No.

Dr. Tollison: So how did that work?

Lillian: It didn't bother me in the least bit. Basically, because like I said, I'm quite content in who I am. Now I also knew that I didn't know who I was, and I was learning, and college would afford me that opportunity, and so I really had a pretty good time, just having friends, and just growing up. Like I said, my parents kept me

grounded. Know who you are, why you are there, quit making excuses, the only thing that's hard is what you make hard, the time you waste complaining is time you could do something. My parents were very grounded. They were very straightforward, get your buddy and focus on what you need to do, and that made a lot of sense, and have a good time.

Dr. Tollison: It sounds like you understood the mentality of some of those white students that wanted to call you Sarah, or June.

Lillian: I did understand. They weren't familiar with me, and I wasn't familiar with them.

Dr. Tollison: Now that clearly takes, ... that clearly shows a perspective on your part. That also takes a little bit extra work, in terms of what's going on in your head, in terms of understanding the situation. Did you feel that there were a lot of whites that clearly did not understand the situation?

Lillian: Sure.

Dr. Tollison: Did you feel that some whites did understand the dynamics of this?

Lillian: Yeah, and some people go overboard to be friendly. They didn't mean anything by it, but they would go overboard, and they didn't have to. They just needed to be themselves, but a lot of people, when they want to make you feel comfortable, sometimes they do go overboard. Because even today, in 2004, people will still say, "you know, I have a black friend." I'm saying, "you got a black friend?" They don't understand what they're saying, but I do. I understand what they're saying. They're trying to make me feel comfortable. They do have relationships with other people of color other than myself, but it didn't matter to me, and they don't know that, and so this is something that all people have to understand.

Dr. Tollison: Right, right, so sometimes going overboard, when the intent is good, can create an uncomfortable element in a situation?

Lillian: It can. It can. It gives you lots of laughing points later on. (Laughing) "Did you hear what they said?... ok, they got one black friend, ... you know, where is she?" So, you move right on.

Dr. Tollison: I'm struck by how different your experiences must've been than the majority of Furman students, that you know, clearly the majority of Furman students did not grow up being spit on, or being shot at, or perhaps even being involved in their communities to the extent that you were, so I would think that your maturity, and your perspective on the world would be so radically different from so many of these very sheltered Southern Baptists, perhaps rural, students.

Lillian: They couldn't understand it, but you have to understand, they came from a different environment. To be honest with you, my Christian mom and daddy,

taught me that you have to realize that everybody comes from something different. You can't make them live your life. You can't make them understand it. You can share it with them, and you hope that they understand it, but you just do what you have to do. And I think because of having to go through those experiences, but even as a younger person, you don't sometimes realize how dangerous of a situation you're in until you get past it, until you get older. If I had done some stuff like that now, oh Lord no, I would be packing up, leaving town, because I'm a different [inaudible], I have children, and I have a different responsibility, but being a young person, it didn't move me. It's just, you know, I was hurt. I was tired. I was angry. I was angry, because people thought that because of the color of my skin, I was not important, and that people that were black had no right to vote, just because they were black. I'm like, ooh, ... now that's ignorance to me. So, my idea was to get an education and get past these people. Teach everybody I can teach, because I believed that education would bring ignorance to its knees. I still believe that.

Dr. Tollison: Is it fair to say your approach to finding common ground with some of the students at Furman was to understand their starting point, to try to understand their background, and their mentality, and accept them for who they were at that point and time, and to try and learn from each other, not just to say that well, we're clearly very different. I mean, that would've been obvious. So, there's an element of acceptance of the other, in that, um ...

Lillian: Well I think a lot of African American people always accepted whites, because more than not, most African American people worked for them, so you had an opportunity to deal with different families. So basically, it didn't really move you. Most of the time I spent explaining how I got to Furman to white people. Black people, it didn't bother them.

Dr. Tollison: Really?

Lillian: White people, it did. Yeah, it bothered them a lot. In fact, I didn't get a job for Christmas once because the guy that was my supervisor at a department store, which I shall leave nameless, his son didn't get accepted to Furman, but I did. And I didn't know, until the lady in gift wrapping told me. So, I'm just saying I didn't know. So, it bothered some people. It's as if like they did a quota thing and just, ... but you now, my test scores were good, so no problem with that, but he didn't see it that way.

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Dr. Tollison: Did it bother anyone, any of your family members, or anyone that you were close with, that you did not go to a historically black college.

Lillian: (shaking her head no)

Dr. Tollison: I'm sure many of your friends did.

Lillian: Did not bother them.

Dr. Tollison: Did you feel like you ...

Lillian: Most people who cared about me were interested in that I got a good education ...

Dr. Tollison: And that was the purpose ...

Lillian: They were very proud of me, and they always said that. They were very, very, very proud of me. My brother went to a historically black college, so I got a chance to share both, because I would go visit him, and he would come visit me. So, I got a chance to understand that, and my church supported African American colleges, so I got a chance to share in that, so no, it was like, they were mostly very proud, very supportive.

Dr. Tollison: So, we know what the benefits of being in an historically black college or university, or at least some of the superficial benefits would have been. What were the benefits of being a minority at Furman?

Lillian: One of the benefits was that it made it easier for more minorities. It made it easier for people who were interested in trying to work within the larger scope of the world, to be able to move towards true integration and not necessarily desegregation, not just being a number, but making a difference. It also kind of validated your education. People kept saying, you know, that black schools, you don't have the equipment, and guess what, we didn't have the books, we didn't have the videos, we didn't have the tapes. We had the secondhand books. We had the books that were twenty, thirty years out of date, but we had teachers who had vision, and who gave you the extra stuff orally, who gave you the extra time, who showed you how to go to the library to do what you needed to do. So, with that inspiration, you could take a little bit of something and move towards, so when you got into a situation at Furman where you had the videotapes, you had the books, you were stupid not to deal with them. You know, not to go and share, and learn, and do what you needed to do. So, it was exciting, and that's one of the benefits, is that you got an opportunity to be able to share. Not necessarily that I spent a lot of time trying to encourage African Americans to come to Furman. I wanted to go to college, period. I don't care which college it is, because I still feel that education is going to wipe out ignorance, and it's not going to change, and it's got to happen. I do appreciate what Furman can afford, ... an excellent education, particularly if I know there's a student that's interested in law, or pre-med, or journalism, sciences, chemistry. I've even had some of my students who graduated from one college to get their master's degree at Furman, because I really feel strongly about the education there.

Dr. Tollison: Let's talk about Joe Vaughn ...

Lillian: Sure.

Dr. Tollison: ... a little bit, and his experience as the first African American student at Furman. Undoubtedly it must have been a challenging experience, but I hear a lot of talk about, ... unfortunately I was never able to meet Joe Vaughn, but I hear what a dynamic personality he was, and you hear about, you can read in the newspaper about his entrance into Furman, in terms of he has the perfect personality to deal with this kind of situation. Where are your thoughts on that?

Lillian: Joes did have the perfect, ... Joe was flexible, and like I said, if there was a situation that was uncomfortable, he would have diffused the situation. He would've made people feel comfortable. He ...

Dr. Tollison: He was a mitigator?

Lillian: ... He was quite comfortable in himself. He was very knowledgeable. He was a person that had a lot of knowledge, very, very, very, very smart, and he didn't use his smartness for arrogance, he used it to diffuse situations and bring people together. He could get very upset with people, but he would always use his intellect to diffuse the situation, and to even say things very nasty to them in a way that they didn't even know he was being nasty, and we would often just roll in the corner, like "Do they know what he's saying to them?" (Laughing) I'd tell myself, "maybe a little, who knows?" (Laughing) My God, I can't believe they'd sit there, and he would just say stuff, and then he'd go, "I tell you what, they need to get ...," you know, and he'd move on. He was the same way as a kid. He loved life. Oh boy, I mean he was very, he was a cheerleader at Furman, and I think he was a cheerleader because he said he got sick and tired of them sitting there going, "Furman, Furman" [in an unexcited, monotone voice]. "What are y'all saying, get into it!" and so he would get the microphone, the megaphone, and run down the field. And people would sometimes say, "Well gosh, he shouldn't do that because then he's making a fool of himself." But no, I'm not coming to a game that they're making me come to, and be bored out of my mind, so rather than talk, be a part of it. And I laughed at that, and I thought about that, because my father always said the same thing. Stop complaining. If you can do it better, do it better, and stop complaining. So, and that's the attitude I think Joe had. Don't complain about it. You know you can do better, do better. So, he was that way. Oh yes, he was, he was, Joe. Anyone that ever met him, never forgot him. That's just the personality he had. He made sure you knew he was in the room. (Laughing)

Dr. Tollison: These quotes that you read about from the newspaper, "Furman and I were a perfect fit," things like that. Was Furman a perfect fit, or would Joe have made it a perfect fit?

Lillian: He would have made it.

Dr. Tollison: He would've made any school a perfect fit?

Lillian: It wouldn't have made any difference. It wouldn't have made any difference. He would have made it a perfect fit, because that was his personality. He was quite adaptable. Basically, you know, like I said, we were from the same side of town, and when you're use to adjusting to not having anything, it really didn't matter if you got a little something, because he wasn't very materialistic. He wasn't. He wasn't a person who was very arrogant. Joe was very intelligent, but he wasn't arrogant, because he was not selfish. Often times people are arrogant, and not very sharing. They normally spend a lot of times to themselves. He wasn't that way. He knew what he knew, and he wanted everybody else to know it.

Dr. Tollison: Let's talk about, um, ... people have shared quite a bit about some of the problems in Joe's life, or perhaps they weren't problems, ... or perhaps some of them were, perhaps some of them weren't. Um, ... alcoholism, um ...

Lillian: That was a family trait. Yeah, that was something that he grew up with. That was in part of his family.

Dr. Tollison: Was it something that was hidden at Furman?

Lillian: Uh, well, Joe wasn't the kind that was very destructive. He just drank. And um, it just made him a little bit louder than most. I don't think it was necessarily hidden, because he mostly did what he had to do on weekends.

Dr. Tollison: Was he aware that he might have had a problem with alcohol?

Lillian: I think so. I think he was aware.

Dr. Tollison: But you don't necessarily view his excessive drinking as a response to any type of problems with his experience at Furman?

Lillian: Oh no.

Dr. Tollison: He wasn't drinking to escape?

Lillian: Oh no, trust me, no. He was drinking before he went to Furman.

Dr. Tollison: Oh, ok, so this was a continuation?

Lillian: This was not an escape. No, no, this was just a continuation. He probably wasn't drinking to the excess because he got older, and he had more access to alcohol than he would when he was younger, but he was drinking before he went to Furman.

Dr. Tollison: Ok. What about his homosexual relationships?

Lillian: I can't really tell you about those because I didn't have one with him. (Laughing)

Dr. Tollison: (Laughing)

Lillian: I wasn't very good, ... I heard, but if they ask me to swear in a court of law, I couldn't. I only heard.

Dr. Tollison: You heard when you were at college?

Lillian: I heard when I was in college, and that's the only thing I can say, is I heard. He and I were very, very close. He's my son's godfather. We were very close after college because we worked together. We socialized, we went to a lot of conferences and conventions together, etc., but I have no proof.

Dr. Tollison: Never any discussion?

Lillian: No proof, no discussion. We never discussed it.

Dr. Tollison: That's interesting. Why do you think that is?

00:40:00

Lillian: It really didn't matter. He was my friend.

Dr. Tollison: Oh no, of course it wouldn't matter to you, but would it have mattered to him, to be able to share that aspect of his life?

Lillian: Probably not, because it was not a part of our lives together. So, what I mean, we were almost inseparable, we went to just about every teaching conference there was, and all of the events together. When he worked at his school, he went to his school events, and I went to my school events, and sometimes we would go to both each other's school events. He was like my brother. I mean, he was, a lot of people said well they date. We didn't date. We were friends. He took care of me, and I took care of him.

Dr. Tollison: That's just interesting because I'm sure discussion of your husband would've come up, just in casual conversations when you're talking to your good friends. It's interesting that he never, ... he never let on to the fact that he was dating, whether it would be a woman or a man, or anything like that.

Lillian: Exactly. He was dating several girls ...

Dr. Tollison: At Furman?

Lillian: Yeah, they weren't students at Furman, but yes, he was, ... dating several girls. So, like I'm saying, I don't, ... all I know is what I hear, and I don't know ..., people say it's a front, whatever, I can't answer that, because I was really never involved in that part of his relationships.

Dr. Tollison: Did he encounter any problems as the first, ... the first (African American) student?

Lillian: I'm sure he probably had to diffuse some situations with some different people who probably couldn't accept him, but like I said, he was very confident in himself, and that didn't bother him, because they had to deal with themselves.

Dr. Tollison: What about faculty members that you were particularly close with, or perhaps Joe was particularly close with?

Lillian: Ok, um, Dr. Harrill, Dr. Crabtree, ... the English Department, in general, was his love...

Dr. Tollison: Al Reed?

Lillian: Yes, was his love, his life, ... the Chaplain, um ...

Dr. Tollison: Jim Pitts and L.D. Johnson?

Lillian: And L.D. Johnson, um, you know, I just think that um, ... I don't know, the whole faculty. He was kind of crazy about the president. (Laughing) Yeah, he was the one that explained to Dr. Blackwell how he needs to cheer. (Laughing)

Dr. Tollison: What did he say?

Lillian: He had him up there with a microphone.

Dr. Tollison: He had Dr. Blackwell up there with a microphone?

Lillian: Ooh, Lord yes, at the football game. He said ..., they gave him the megaphone, "let me show you what to do Dr. Blackwell." Dr. Blackwell did it. I said, "oh Lord." Everybody was like, I am not believing this. They were screaming and hollering. It was funny. He was just jumping up and down, Dr. Blackwell, "Yes! FU one time!" I said, "oh no, he didn't get him to say that."

Dr. Tollison: Did Joe start that cheer?

Lillian: Oooh, I think he did. Mmhmm.

Dr. Tollison: FU one time, FU two times ...

Lillian: Yes Lord, FU all the time. Yes, I said, "this is not the appropriate time to say that," but anyway.

Dr. Tollison: Do you think Joe might have started that, because that's legendary?

Lillian: Oh yes, I have no doubt in my mind, if it wasn't done before he, he was the one.

Because he was mister cheerleader. He was in charge. He wanted to, ... oh yeah, he was in to spirit. I think some people would come to the game just to watch him cheer.

Dr. Tollison: Let's talk about Dr. Blackwell. He seemed to have valued student's opinions very much. What was your relationship with Dr. Blackwell?

Lillian: Dr. Blackwell did value student's opinions. Dr. Blackwell often times would bring in African American students, to talk to us, to see what direction were we headed, not necessarily were we pleased with Furman, but what kind of things did Furman need to do in order to recruit more African American students. The pros, the cons, ... it wasn't a session where he gave us any wishes, or anything of that nature, or say that they would do, but just to hear where we were. He believed that it was the right thing to do.

Dr. Tollison: He had enough experience with desegregation, ...

Lillian: Yes, he did.

Dr. Tollison: ... And with the process to understand that it would have maybe been an unproductive question to ask you all, are you happy. That really was not the long-term focus of what they were trying to achieve. So, he wanted to know, how can we make this better? How can we make this a place that's welcoming?

Lillian: And how can we recruit more. You know, what is it that we can do to recruit more students, and that kind of thing. So, it was great dialogue for him, to get to know who we were as students, and of course, as students, we got a chance to complain, "Now Dr. Blackwell, I do not want to wear a suit to a football game. Do you understand what I'm saying? Homecoming is a bunch of junk." (Laughing) That was my pet peeve. Why do I have to wear a suit and a hat, and shoes ..., I can't wear high heels to a football game. And he would laugh, you know, at different things. The things that you think, for an eighteen, nineteen-year old kid, ... we're thinking, "ugh, we have to be in the dorm at 11:00, are you at home at 11:00?" You know, just things like that, just typical things. That's no different. That's a concern for everybody. "What you mean we can't wear hair rollers outside the dorm?" (Laughing) You know, things like that. That was a concern of all the students.

Dr. Tollison: (Laughing) Sure. Sure, excellent. What was your advice to Dr. Blackwell then, and what has Furman done, in your opinion, in recent decades, and where is Furman now, in terms of, the sort of state of multicultural affairs?

Lillian: Well, I can't give you a true definitive answer. I can only tell you my perspective from what I've seen. The population is continuing to grow, because whatever emphasis they're putting forth through recruitment is actually working. There are more African American students who are returning to Furman to work, and to get advanced degrees, but what I appreciate more is that all of the students,

whether they be athletes, ... because some schools have always, ... the athletes just don't graduate, ugh, ... Furman is not that way. That's what I appreciate, that the primary focus is your education. Then there are multicultural aspects, part of the programs that are part of the Furman process, to continue the dialogue, to continue the input, to see that yes, there are still people of color. They are not all the same, and there are some differences. And those differences are not necessarily to be advertised, but they are to be understood, and how they best fit. The diversity makes the university better. I believe it makes the university better. It gives a wealth, because that's the way the world is. We just don't have a world where people are all one color. It just doesn't work that way.

Dr. Tollison: And do you think Furman has gotten to a point where you would say that Furman does appreciate and value that diversity?

Lillian: I think it does much more, much more, especially in terms that there are more African American professors on the staff. That is when you really know that you appreciate diversity, when you get to that particular point. There are other areas that need to diversify, but I won't go there. (Laughing)

Dr. Tollison: Well, you're welcome to.

Lillian: I will not go there. (Laughing)

Dr. Tollison: It will probably be productive.

Lillian: Like athletics, they need to, ... but they're working on that as well, and I think that's great.

Dr. Tollison: In terms of the coaching staff and things like that?

Lillian: Yeah, and not necessarily, ... I, as a Board member, we were extremely concerned at Furman's response to the NCAA, in terms of how it relates to its female athletes, because of some of the problems earlier. Now often times you don't have a strong program, because Furman is a small school, relatively a small college, therefore we were concerned with the relationship, that those athletes don't necessarily have the same, ... they don't have the exact same access to certain things that the male athletes have, and I think that's changing. That was something I was concerned about in ninety-eight, ninety-nine, and that seems to be changing now.

Dr. Tollison: How did the trustees handle the lawsuit with Sherry Carter?

Lillian: Basically, what the trustees decided to do was support the administration, but we made it perfectly clear that we were not interested in discrimination of any kind, and so I think that's basically the focus that was taken.

Dr. Tollison: And what was the administration's stance?

Lillian: Their stance was to support the ..., I assume to support athletic director, and there was not, uh, ...I guess they made it perfectly clear, in terms of how they showed that the salaries were different, and supposed to be different. I was somewhat concerned, if I didn't, but the president made it perfectly ..., I don't think he would have supported it if there was a clear violation.

Dr. Tollison: Certainly, yeah. Certainly. Did you feel ..., let's get back to the desegregation. Did you feel as if you were desegregating Furman, or did you feel that you were integrated into the university community?

00:50:03

Lillian: Well, I felt, ... now, the first one and two years of my ascension into Furman, I felt part of the desegregation attitude. By my junior year, I felt more of a part of the university, in the sense that it wasn't ..., you didn't feel so isolated if you went to a class and you were the only African American there, it didn't matter. It bothered me at first, but after a while it didn't.

Dr. Tollison: Now is that because of a natural progression, you spend more time in a place, you get to know more people, etc., or is that because the numbers of African Americans were growing, or perhaps a little bit of both?

Lillian: Both.

Dr. Tollison: Both.

Lillian: Yeah, I think it was a little bit of both, basically because you really ..., if you have thirty-five African Americans, you will never all, you know, one or two of you would be in the same class. That's almost impossible. That's only if you have the same major or something, your junior or senior years, then that might work.

Dr. Tollison: Let's talk about the goals of the Board of Trustees when you started as a trustee, in terms of what committees were you on, the Student Affairs, and Academic Affairs, I think, and um, what were the goals of the committees? What were the goals of the Board of Trustees, ... some of the major issues you all dealt with?

Lillian: Well one of the major issues we dealt with was the fiscal stability of the university. The physical stability of, ... the school had a lot of differed maintenance, a lot of differed maintenance, so an aggressive capital campaign, in order to basically restore Furman to its physical health, in terms of building, not necessarily building new buildings, but in terms of rehabilitating those buildings, and to making the students safe and secure. In the women's dorms, security systems, so anybody can't just walk in, better locks, changing to a different system, building the new buildings, and then some controversial decisions where we decided that everybody live on campus, ... but with

exceptions, there would be some that wouldn't. That turned out to be an excellent decision, because it really has brought the school community. To me, I see more kids now than I use to see when I was on campus visiting in early ninety-six, ninety-nine, when we made that decision, and more kids are on campus, more people are wanting to come to Furman, because the college experience is a great experience, if you get there. We were allowing more and more of them to live somewhere else, and so they didn't feel a part of the community. They didn't feel what is called "a sense of community." Because they weren't. They weren't part of it. They were part of Greenville, Travelers Rest, and Berea, but not a part of Furman.

Dr. Tollison: I was a part of that whole, ... I was there during that time.

Lillian: Yeah, and it was a major protest, and everything like that, but it has worked well. In fact, people wanted to sue us because they couldn't get those rooms [on campus], but that's a good thing.

Dr. Tollison: That's a good problem to have. (Laughing)

Lillian: Yeah, it's a good problem to have.

Dr. Tollison: Well they're beautiful facilities.

Lillian: Yes, they are.

Dr. Tollison: The other ones, out the back gate, really don't even compare.

Lillian: Oh no. I mean, ... I've been to both. No, there's no comparison.

Dr. Tollison: Interesting. Ok, um, it's about 6:00, so we should probably start to wrap up.

Lillian: Ok.

Dr. Tollison: Could you reflect, really briefly, on how Furman has contributed to your life, and how Furman has changed? You've had several, three of four decades here to observe Furman, so how has the university changed, and what impact has it had on your life?

