

## **Transcript of Interview with Ms. Karen Marbury 11/11/17**

**FG:** I am Frieda Greenthal, and I am interviewing Ms. Karen Marbury. It is Saturday, November 11th, 2017. To begin, would you say your full name and the years you were at UMD?

**KM:** Sure, my full name is Karen Marbury. I was a student at the University of Maryland from 1999 through 2002.

**FG:** Okay so we would like to know some background information about you first. So, like where did you grow up and what was your family like?

**KM:** Okay so I heard the first one, where did I grow up? What was the second one?

**FG:** What was your family like?

**KM:** Okay um, I grew up in a military family. My dad was a military officer so we kind of grew up all over the place. Lived on the west coast for a while, California, we lived overseas in England and Germany. We lived in Virginia, Northern Virginia. We lived in Nevada, we lived in North Carolina. Kind of all over. So he had just retired about 10 years before I went to Maryland.

**FG:** Why did you decide to go to UMD?

**KM:** So, my parents, after they retired they bought a house in Maryland. It was pretty convenient to where the house was and to where I worked also. So, I was like, "Maybe I'll apply to the University of Maryland." And I had transferred, I actually attended James Madison University in Virginia, and I ended up transferring to the University of Maryland.

**FG:** So did your family influence your decision?

**KM:** Definitely. For sure because we were living in Maryland and I was interested in in-state tuition and at the time I was like I just need to hurry up and finish school, so let me go to school where I can work and go to school full time at the same time. So definitely my family influenced the decision. As far as like my family, like my parents have been married now like 50 years and I have a sister so it's the two of us and my parents.

**FG:** Did your sister go to school?

**KM:** Yeah, she went to George Mason University

**FG:** Cool, um, same area. So what were you feeling and what were you expecting when you first arrived on campus?

**KM:** I think for me because I think I had been to another university. For me it was about getting this done. You know me getting undergrad under my belt so I could move forward. I think also I didn't realize how big the University of Maryland was, so that was something that kind of struck me. When I got there I was like, "Wow this is really a big school," and there is actually so much to offer here. So, I think the scale of the school, the size of the school and just what the resources were available is something I was impressed with.

**FG:** Do you mind telling me why you transferred and decided to go to Maryland instead of James Madison?

**KM:** Yeah, I think I went to college right out of high school and I wasn't really ready. I wasn't mature enough. I was hanging out with my friends, and I think also it was just a bad fit for me. Being in a military family kind of travelling a lot. When I did go to school I went to this small school in a small town. And it wasn't really what I expected or wanted from the school experience, the college experience. So, the transferring was really about me finishing school, but also, I realized when I was there it was the added benefit of being in a school that was much more diverse and that was larger and had a lot more resources. So Maryland was probably about 3 times the size of JMU at the time.

**FG:** Ok, great, so how would you describe your overall experience at UMD?

**KM:** I had a wonderful experience at Maryland. I love the University of Maryland, and I think the thing that I loved is that there's so many things to be involved in. There are people from all over the world. And I really had people that took an interest in me, um, I think intellectually and academically I had people that were really invested in my success.

**FG:** How did you decide your major?

**KM:** This is a bizarre story. I went in as a communications major, and um, while I was there, something told me to change my major to African American studies. And I did it. And it was the best decision I ever made.

**FG:** Do you know what influenced it?

**KM:** It's kind of hard to say, I hadn't taken any African American Studies classes or Afro American, I think it was kind of where I was. It's funny when I was at JMU the classes I liked most were African American Studies classes, right, so they were history in particular. And when I was there I was like you know what? There's a whole major here, these are the classes I like and tend to do well in. Why not? I just changed my major, and I hadn't taken one class at Maryland. I went in and changed my major and really good things started to happen from there. I was kind of following my gut.

**FG:** How did you like your major/did you have any issues with it?

**KM:** Um, there were a couple things, right? One is that at the time the department graduated on scale, right, percentage wise. There were higher number of students that went on to Ivy League graduate schools from that department. So small department but percentage wise that was the highest number. I liked the rigor. I loved the intersectionality of it. I focused on, so there's two tracks. At the time there were two tracks for the department of African American studies. There's kind of the cultural track and there was the public policy track. I had interest in the public policy. So, it was great to be able to sort of look at the history and science and um, know just social phenomenon to understand our country better. Right? You know, why this place looks the way that it does, some people are where they are, right? And other people are in other places and having the opportunity to understand that and study that, in a scholarly way was fantastic for me.

**FG:** Yeah, I took a public policy in the black community as part of the African American Studies school I really liked it.

**KM:** It was fantastic, who did you have?

**FG:** Dr. Alana Hackshaw

**KM:** Yeah, I don't think she was there when I was there.

**FG:** It was really great, so when we were researching the major, we are curious if you know about the Black History Month Cabaret and if you could tell us about that?

**KM:** I don't remember that. I don't remember the Black History Month Cabaret. That's probably because I worked a lot, I was working full time.

**FG:** You mentioned you were part of Intercultural Dialogues. Could you tell us a little about that?

**KM:** Sure, it was a program from the Human Relations Office at the time, I think it doesn't exist now in the same way that it did. But the HRO what they did is they did these dialogues between an ingroup and an outgroup. So, you might have white students and black students, you might have men and women and the dialogue would be around certain issues in the community. I kind of first started from this, um, literature course I took, comparative literature course. And I ended up in this class that was um, I can't remember the exact title but we looked at certain areas of like gender and race and class. And one component of it of course is being involved in an intergroup dialogue. From that dialogue, I kind of fell in love with it. Then from there I participated in other dialogues and I got to be trained as a facilitator who conducts the dialogues.

**FG:** Do you know when it stopped being a formal group?

**KM:** The Intergroup Dialogue Program?

**FG:** Right, because you said it doesn't exist right now.

**KM:** Well I think it still exists but it does not exist in the same way. So, it's not housed in the Human Relations Office, like it's under some other office now. But I think they still do the dialogues on campus, the intergroup dialogues on campus. And also, sometimes they were mandatory, I know RAs had to participate depending on where you worked some staff members had to participate in the dialogue series.

**FG:** Do you have any specific memories or stories or dialogues that you found particularly interesting or stood out to you?

**KM:** Yeah there were two, so there was one, the first one I participated in was a black and white dialogue. That one was really really, that was really interesting being able to see kind of how much people don't really know about each other, right? I'll actually say this, I'll be direct. How much white people didn't know about black people, at the time it was very surprising. And then, I was part of another dialogue that was an intra-group that was African American and African Caribbean students. By the third week everyone was like we don't have many differences or perceived differences. That was very interesting.

**FG:** So you realized you weren't so different?

**KM:** Yeah.

**FG:** Were there other organizations or activities that people were part of on campus that were like really big at the time?

**KM:** Yeah, I think the Black Student Union was really huge. I also in that work, Hillel House, I believe, I had a lot of interaction with them. So, some of the students that I did dialogues with were part of that I also believe. One of my favorite students from the white dialogue was from the Hillel house this white guy named Michael. We got to be good friends. I think one of the groups I remember at the time, I also was involved and I don't know this is more of an academic thing, I was also a teaching assistant. I was an undergraduate teaching assistant. So from that same diversity course I took, the comparative literature course, my teacher asked me if I wanted to TA that course he was teaching the next semester. I got into this undergraduate teaching program, from that I was his TA the next semester. Then there was a component where we had to do, we had to go to another course. So I was a TA but there was a course I had to go to once a week to learn how to be a TA. The teacher of that course asked me to be a TA for that course. Yeah, so I was involved with that. I ended up being a speaker at a conference with my teacher for that course. It was cool, I had some fantastic experiences there.

**FG:** I can see what you meant when you said people were really invested in your success. That seems really supportive. That's exciting.

**KM:** It really was. The center for teaching excellence, that's what I was involved in. The Center for Teaching Excellence, the founder was Dr. Greenberg. He's retired now but that was the professor that I became the TA for, and I went to a conference with. He was just an amazing person, a really good guy.

**FG:** So, you said the Black Student Union had a connection with Hillel House?

**KM:** Yeah, well not Hillel House. There were all these kinds of groups on campus, right, so there were um, really active Asian American student groups. People of different groups they were involved in doing these things. I know the Intergroup Dialogue was in place so people from those different organizations got to meet each other. So, it wasn't necessarily formal relationships between like Hillel house and the BSU but students that were involved with BSU also tended to be students involved in ID, and students in the Hillel House tended to be involved in the ID, and the ID was a place where we all kind of met each other.

**FG:** Did you live on or off campus?

**KM:** I lived off campus. In an apartment in New Carrollton.

**FG:** How did you like that?

**KM:** It was fine, the Fountain Boat apartments. A lot of students lived there.

**FG:** Was it common for students to live off campus?

**KM:** Uh, yeah, I think that at the time, Maryland was a little different. I think there were a lot of commuter students, there were people who lived on campus but there were also just lots of students who lived near campus. There were a lot of people who lived in their homes with their families, but also people lived in apartments nearby.

**FG:** How did you choose to live there?

**KM:** It was affordable and close to work and close to school.

**FG:** Were you living with friends you made?

**KM:** I had a one-bedroom apartment, I lived by myself.

**FG:** How would you describe the campus politically when you were here?

**KM:** Well it's interesting cause I went back later and worked at the University of Maryland too, so um, I think at the time it was really vibrant. Politically students were very engaged and people were very active. I think it was such a more diverse place when I was there. Yeah.

**FG:** Did you feel that UMD was diverse only in numbers or in interactions as well?

**KM:** Definitely, I think at the time it was, you know it's weird I think also it was just a different time. Before we had all of this technology that people communicate through so people were much more active. You would see people actually out and talking to other people and engaged in organizations and activities. People were much more outspoken I think. Students were much more activists probably. A lot of activists.

**FG:** Cause they don't have social media to speak their mind.

**KM:** Exactly.

**FG:** How do you account for the numbers of diversity being higher than....

**KM:** Um, I think under the last president, cause I worked there, I left the University of Maryland two years ago. I worked there for about. Off and on for a few years I worked there. I think part of it was a real interest of Dr. Mote, the president was from Berkeley, he came from a tradition of activism and wanting there to be I will say this black students in particular. I think it was much more of an effort, a concentrated effort to work with black students in particular. There were higher numbers of Africans, African Americans and Caribbeans on campus. I think beyond just having the numbers I think there was an effort to make people really feel integrated in that experience, that's how the Human Relations Office developed. Now that we have you here, what are we gonna do to make sure that you feel like you're a part of this campus too, and to create a community. I think now it's more kind of Maryland went in a different direction when it was really about how can we be more competitive and make ourselves more like UVA and other flagship schools. I think it became more of a focus on grades and SAT scores. Which I think are important components but I think there are other aspects of people that are important to consider.

**FG:** That's hard to hear. So, what about specifically for black women, how did it feel like to be a Black woman on campus?

**KM:** At the time also it was really great because I feel like it was mentorship that happened. I had mentors that were fantastic women, there were a lot of black women faculty members that were there and also UMD at the time and I think it's different now but at the time it graduated more black PHD students outside of historically black universities, it was the number one place where black PHDs matriculated. And that was because of President Mote I think. It was a really good place for black women, students, and you have faculty members that you could, that would mentor you or served as examples of what was possible.

**FG:** Did you feel a community of black women as well

**KM:** I did, yeah, some of my best friends are people I was in Africa... Afro American Studies with. I went on to go to University of Pennsylvania to get my master's degree there and I didn't go on to get my doctorate but I, most of my friends, they went on to go on and get their PhDs and they were really inspired by the faculty we had in Afro American studies in particular, they really took us under their wing.

**FG:** You spoke somewhat about race on campus, how about racism and hate? What was that like?

**KM:** It's funny I don't remember a lot of that? It's probably the circles I was in. I remember that we would, you know, you had people that just didn't know, right, but I think that's representative about the country, right? People already don't know people of color and their experiences and I kind of feel like there was that, kind of not an awareness about other people's experiences. But I don't feel like they were hateful, I'd hear about incidents and people doing weird things but that's what the dialogue was about, changing the culture. I was really there at a really good time, because I feel like there was a genuine interest for most people even if they weren't black people or other POC for people to have a real community and understand one another. So, I said having Jewish friends who were invested in that, and Asians who were invested, and white friends who were invested. I felt like that was a place at the time where people really wanted it to be an inclusive community. And again, my experience is kind of skewed because that was the work I was in and the people I was around. I felt too like, yeah, my faculty members even if they weren't people of color I felt like they cared about me. It's a huge school. I also felt like my white professors were also just as like interested in my success.

**FG:** Did you have smaller classes and that is why that happened?

**KM:** Yeah, I talked to friends about this, and we talked about like once you got into your major the classes were smaller so you actually could form relationships with faculty. Yeah. And then also like just the higher you went, the further you matriculated the classes just had to be smaller in general. So I remember I took another comparative literature course so I was thinking of adding a minor in comparative literature. And it was like an international women's literature course and there were like four women in the course and the professor.

**FG:** Wow, what was that called?

**KM:** I think it was international women's literature.

**FG:** Four people. Awesome, how would you characterize UMD at the time in terms of gender?

**KM:** Um, I felt it was a good mix of, I don't remember there being any real significant gender issues, I thought it was like um, just in terms of numbers it was mixed students. There were lots of opportunities for women to be involved and active. It was a good experience, I had a really fantastic experience at the University of Maryland.

**FG:** So there's nothing that stood out to you?

**KM:** Not really, what I do remember is there was a lot of courses about gender. There was a comparative, this did strike me, I think that's why I had a different experience than I did at JMU, it was larger and there were courses that spoke to race that I could take, or women's experiences.

I did take like women's literature and one of my big classes I remember learning was black feminist nationalism, right? So, there were lots of classes that focused on women's experiences. And that was something that was great, there was a women's studies program where there wasn't at my former school. Being able to take those kinds of courses was also something that was fantastic. Again, it represented the fact that women had a voice, right? Yeah, women's experiences were considered.

**FG:** Who did you spend your time with at school?

**KM:** Socially?

**FG:** Yeah.

**KM:** Um, I spent my time with a lot of students who were interested in the dialogue programs and interested in teaching and education and who were interested in like going on and going to graduate schools. So just, highly motivated students and students who had an awareness of issues of identity and culture. I had a diverse group of friends, they were of lots of different racial backgrounds. I had a lot of African friends from West Africa.

**FG:** How did you meet the people whom you spent your time with? Orgs? Classes

**KM:** Exactly, classes and organizations. It's funny, there's one of my good friends, another friend, he's a professor at Maryland now, but we graduated together. Jason Nichols, we were friends at school, we're still friends. He and another guy I was friends with started a hip-hop organization Beats and Life, so Mazzie Mustafa was a good friend of ours. It was awesome for African American studies. A lot of us were activists and interested in education and politics. I still kind of partner with them in my work from time to time, once in a while the work that I do or did, Dr. Nichols would have somebody have a student come and talk to me and my students about something. And our friend Mazzie would do the same thing, workshops with my students. I was working with high school students at the time.

**FG:** I'm hoping to take a class of Jason Nichols's.

**KM:** Yeah, he's great.

**FG:** It's cool that you know him.

**FG:** So you said you had a job full time, what were you doing?

**KM:** I was a tech desk manager, so it was really bizarre I was working like Monday through Friday regular 9-5 job, and I came to a place where I was like I'm going to have to make a choice like school is hard I can't take 5 classes and work full time like this is just impossible! And then this opportunity came at my job where they needed a site supervisor on the weekends, I literally ended up working Friday Saturday and Sunday like 46 or 40 hours in those 3 days and then going to school full time.

**FG:** So, you worked on the weekends and you had a full time... wow.

**KM:** Yeah. Like 12- or 13-hour days. It's crazy, yeah,

**FG:** So that work didn't have to with your major or the activities you were involved in?

**KM:** No, it didn't. I feel sorry for my coworkers who had to hear me talk about all the stuff I was learning at the time

**FG:** Where was your job?

**KM:** Silver Spring, this place called Merchant Link, and we did like support for credit card, credit card support for restaurants and hotels.

**FG:** And where'd you get that background, did you come in not knowing how to do it?

**KM:** Yeah, I didn't know I had a friend who went to JMU and he was working their full time, I was looking for a job and he let me know they had one. I worked there for like three years.

**FG:** Is there anything else you want to share or feel is important to share?

**KM:** Yeah, I don't know, again, I said this already, I had a fantastic time there. I always regretted not taking a class with Dr. Elsa Barkley Brown, she was someone we read her work in some of my other classes, but I don't know, I just feel like there's some really special people there. Just, good luck to you Frieda.

**FG:** Thank you! So, Dr. Barkley Brown was there when you were?

**KM:** She was definitely there. She was someone I really respected because I was reading her work on a regular, but I just never had the opportunity to take the class with her.

**FG:** Yeah, we read her work also. Okay awesome thank you so much for your time and amazing answers.