

## **DELTA XI AKA ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

Interviewer: Briana M. Davis  
Interviewee: Janet Jack  
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### **TRANSCRIPT BEGIN**

**Briana M. Davis:** Awesome. We're just going to start with Section 1, Question 1: Please tell us your name and your role in the Delta Xi chapter?

**Janet Jack:** Okay. My name is Janet Jack, and I was the Dean of Pledges one semester after I completed and became an Alpha Kappa Alpha.

**Davis:** Amazing. Second question, Section 1. What high school did you attend, and how did you come to be in AKA?

**Jack:** I attended John H. Reagan High School in Austin, which is in the same city with the University of Texas. I completed my senior year there. My dad was in the Navy and had a job that moved him around. I ended up only one year at my high school. But it came in handy because my parents lived in town while I was at the University of Texas, and I had a full scholarship, so I stayed on campus.

**Davis:** Well, the ability to have a full scholarship and to stay on campus is a blessing for sure. What part of campus did you stay on?

**Jack:** I stayed in the Jester Hall. I think it's still there probably unless they renamed it. I stayed on the first floor. My roommate actually pledged the sorority with me. I will definitely share her name with you because she would be a good person to call also. Her name was Terry Fields at the time. Terry Irving. She's my line sister. You had asked me how did I come to pledge AKA? I didn't answer that, but basically, I know you mentioned that it's only 4 percent right now, but it was 300 Black students out of 40,000. I didn't figure out the percentage yet, but that was how it was, and it was hard to really find the other African American students on campus. We did have quite a few in Jester Hall.

**Jack:** I will say that there were quite a few of us on scholarships, achievement scholarships that were targeted to the Black community. The reason we even had 300 was because the university had actually granted achievement scholarships to quite a few people. There were quite a few people from Texas. My roommate was from Dallas. I lived in Austin and I was pretty enamored with -- and heard about the sororities, but I had gone to some of their functions and the ladies seemed very professional and very much united. I thought it was a way for me to meet other women on campus other than my roommate, and she also felt the same way. We pledged I believe, the first semester or second semester I was on campus. It was the second one because I remember I was on the dean's list, the first one, and then my parents were concerned about grades, but I knew that academics was a focus for them, so I didn't feel like it would be a problem.

**Davis:** Well, congratulations on being on the dean's list. That is amazing, especially with only 300 people that look like you, and out of 40,000, I can't imagine what that's like. Super cool. Well, we can go ahead and move on to Section 2. Now, there's two tracks here. We can focus more on the UT first in the

academic and service side of things or we can talk about more of the experiences of socializing and living on campus. There's two tracks here. Would you like to cover both or just one?

**Jack:** I can probably cover both.

**Davis:** Cool. Let's get into it. Section 2, Question 1. What can you tell us about the activities and service projects you participated in and how did they impact you?

**Jack:** You're speaking of before I joined the sorority or as I was in the sorority?

**Davis:** During your time as a Delta Xi.

**Jack:** The sorority definitely had giving back as a purpose. I honestly don't remember the specific ones that week that we worked on. I'd have to think about that, sorry, I can't think of anything. I know that we did, but I can't think of anything specific to tell you. Sorry.

**Davis:** That's okay. We can go ahead and skip that question there.

**Jack:** Okay.

**Davis:** Moving forward. Section 2. Question 2. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, in my notes here, was the first Black organization at UT that was established by and for women. What are some firsts you've experienced or contributed to the organization? Examples of this are initiatives founded by this chapter and social experiences that you've had that were first for you, just any firsts.

**Jack:** I honestly can't think of anything that's first. Sorry. I'm going to have to skip that question.

**Davis:** Yes, we can skip it. Section 2. Question 3. Please speak to the legacy of the chapter and its members. What would you like the community at large to know about the Delta Xi Chapter and its members?

**Jack:** I would like them to know that the members that I know, and that I've kept up with have done very well in the community, and have been very successful in their careers, in a variety of careers. I do know quite a few that have reached the C-suite level in corporations, including myself and prominent attorneys. I just feel like most of the women in the sorority that I was member with have been very successful and we have kept the sisterhood connection. Because of Facebook, you can see the postings. I've seen my sister was also an AKA. She pledged about two years after I did, and my other sister did too. They keep up with their line sisters very well. It created a sisterhood, almost like a sibling sisterhood, that was a point of contact that continues.

**Davis:** That definitely comes in handy in the corporate world where it's difficult for women to even get their foot in the door. Especially Black and Brown women. That is amazing, y'all are like a power group, which is super cool.

**Jack:** I also sit on boards in Dallas with a few of the Delta Xi members. That actually has reconnected us in another way after our corporate lives.

**Davis:** Do you mind speaking a little bit more about sitting on board with the Delta Xi members?

**Jack:** Actually, the Dallas Arboretum is a really big non-profit organization that makes it a priority to have people experience not only the gardens but events and culture. They brought sculptures from Africa, Zimbabwe. I actually am on the committee, I believe you might have interviewed Linda Todd, who is the executive board member, and she reached out when they were looking for, they wanted to make sure that they had a diverse representation. She reached out to me, she knew that I had been in corporate and had been seeking board positions now that I have my company and I have time.

She recommended me for the board and we actually worked on the first Black American experience cultural event. That was a huge success. Actually, it's going to be repeated next year. But it gave an opportunity for Black vendors, Black performers. Also, we reached out to community leaders to be on the committee and found that we have representation across a lot of the corporate and community leaders from the sorority and, I mean, from our UT alumni.

**Davis:** That is so amazing. I was recently a part of us, a first Black celebration from a small home town that I used to live in. I really like those. I really, really like those. I think that they boost the morale of the Black community in general. I think just feeling celebrated as a Black person, although it's not reparation. It is definitely kind and a sweet thing to be a part of. I sing in my free time and so I was a singer there. I sang, "Lift Every Voice", and another song that doesn't come to mind at the moment. But I just felt so full and that is such a full experience to have to be on the board of, are you getting me? So crazy.

**Jack:** It's a great opportunity and the sisters think of the sisters, you know? I've seen other people like Loretha Clay and Dimitra Sampson, who I'm sure you've interviewed. They are on boards and they are very active in the community. I'm not sure if Ron Kirk, who was a former mayor of Dallas, was also at UT at the time that we were there. To become a mayor, the first Black mayor of Dallas, and to come from UT and from that climate, I think it's pretty impressive. That's why I'm glad that I settled in Dallas because my career has taken me to Minneapolis, has taken me to Florida. It's taken me a lot of places, but I wanted to end up here. That's because I get to see the familiar people that I graduated with. I never understood why they were all South Dallas as well, because they grew up here. Whereas North Dallas is where the people that work for the corporations, when you come in and out of Dallas in a corporate job, you typically go north. To be over here and to see I'm successful and to see the things are moving now towards the population that is more diverse in terms of leadership of the community.

**Davis:** Yes, definitely. Corporate is definitely in the north of Dallas near Addison. Yes. I had a friend who was an engineer that lived up there. So super cool. It seems you're a Texas girl by heart. I see the Texas pillow in the back. I'm too, for sure.

**Jack:** Yeah. I mean, I grew up in California but as soon as my dad retired, he's from Texas, we came back here, yes. Yeah. I am definitely really happy to be in Texas. Yeah, I love Dallas. I mean, I've lived in Dallas three different times. I started my career. As I left UT, I started at Neiman Marcus as an assistant buyer. This is probably a question for later, but I was able to choose from several offers, when I left the University of Texas.

**Davis:** I love that for you. I think that is very amazing. Just this idea of being excellent and the best of the best has definitely reverberated throughout the Delta Xi chapter. Regardless of when each person has pledged, I've just noticed that the ones that I've gotten the privilege to speak with are very, very successful and success driven, just regardless of some of the things that they faced during their time at

UT, because it wasn't always easy for a lot of Delta Xi members being a Black woman in higher education when the world was still very racist. It was not something that was easy to do. But I think that it's shaped and formed like a corporate warriors in innocence. I feel like we're bunny trailing a little bit. We can move forward when you're ready.

**Jack:** Okay.

**Davis:** Please speak to your experiences, courting, living, and socializing on or around campus.

**Jack:** I had a unique experience that my parents lived in the town, that I went to college and as I've mentioned, it's the scholarship. At the time, Jester Hall was the new and the most sought-after, I believe, dorm to live in. I lived right off the first floor and there was a lot of opportunities to meet in the lobby and just to be really at the center of things. I was excited to be on campus and to have that experience and I was able to do that because of my scholarship. What should I say? Around campus was nice because having the sorority community, we really did utilize each other for our experience and what we did outside of college or if we really needed to study together.

There was a student union at the time, I even wanted to say there was a Black Student Union group, which when you think about it back in late '70s that existed for us. We not only had our network of the sorority, but we also had the student union. I think because the sorority really preached excellence and making sure we were successful and that we excelled in our studies, that was a commonality. There really wasn't the option just to not take it serious and really make the best of while we were there. I will say probably one of the biggest difficulties was really graduating on time because there were struggles along the way. Probably I would say that I was one of the few that I know that graduated on time, graduated in four years. I was very driven. I was very much into my studies almost to the point where other than the sorority, I really didn't have a lot of social life. But I would take the sorority and my friend's home on Sundays for dinners at my house because my mom and my dad was actually really good. He was a chef in the Navy and my mom was a good cook. They're both from Louisiana. I would think that some of the people would remember that we were able to go and feel some family life because my family lived right in town.

**Davis:** I know that food was good. I know that food was good. I'm a big fan of Cajun food.

**Jack:** Yes.

**Davis:** Both of my parents were also in the military. My dad, the Air Force, mom, Army. She doesn't cook at all, and he never really cooked. I had to learn to cook myself but I appreciate a chef. I'm telling you.

**Jack:** They ended up later after I graduate from college, they opened up a restaurant in the Houston area. I think the opportunity to have that close network of sisterhood and then also the brothers and really being somewhat connected to Austin. I remember we had some field trips out to the city and I was the expert about where everything was because I had gone to high school there. Definitely a great life on campus. I enjoyed it. I'm so glad I got that experience because a lot of people that lived in the city didn't get that experience.

After the first year, we were able to take one of the sorority sisters. As a roommate, we had a four-plex apartment situation and one of my sorority members was on the other side and my roommate, actually was from high school. I had a network of friends from high school because I went to school there. I really

had a good experience. I would say the challenges were as we got through the second year and so forth, the courses were a little more difficult. I started out as an accounting major and changed my major to marketing because the accounting classes were so hard, they were so difficult, and I really didn't enjoy numbers. I really enjoyed communication, marketing, and I ultimately became a buyer in my career that led to leadership in the corporate world and the retail world. That change, my first year of the ability to do that and talk to other sorority members about majors, because you really don't know when you first start, what you really want to major in.

**Davis:** I know that's right. I originally went to UT as an opera major and then since went into anthropology and African studies. You never really go in knowing.

**Jack:** Yes.

**Davis:** Exactly.

**Jack:** I can't even imagine it. But what I know now that I would think that I wanted to be in accounting because I hate numbers. Although I always say I make my numbers, I had good report cards and in terms of the business but I always had a team. I think that learning and I think being the dean of pledges, the dean of pledges, by the way, you had asked me, was someone that really is the person that helps lead the new sorority members or the new candidates. You're assigned to their well-being to make sure that there's no issues and to make sure that they are keeping up with their studies while they are pledging the sorority, so you're in charge of them, for the new members.

**Davis:** I see. It's like the mom of the group?

**Jack:** Yes. I'm going to say like the dorm mother, whatever. But yes, you are. I think that was a great idea to have that.

**Davis:** I think so too. It definitely must have taken a lot of time and care.

**Jack:** I think when I originally was approached to do this, I thought, well, my experience wasn't that extraordinary or I didn't have a lot of issues. I was just very focused. I did my studies. I made time for the sorority and the sorority events and functions and the things that they did to help the community. Sorry, I couldn't remember what they were specifically, but I generally think I had a great experience because I was in the sorority because I did feel that I was included.

**Davis:** I see. Really quickly, I'll go ahead and pause this.

**Jack:** Okay.

**Davis:** We'll go ahead and get back into it here. The next question I have here. Before we move on, did you want to speak more about the surface or would you like to move on?

**Jack:** We could probably move on.

**Davis:** Awesome. This is Section 2, Question 5. How has your experience with the Delta Xi Chapter impacted your skill set? How has it affected your approach to the community? Example, what are some skills, life lessons acquired and how do you view your role in your community as a result?

**Jack:** I would say that part of being in Delta Xi was really our focus on mentoring and helping the next set of students or women, particularly. With that being a priority, I have kept that as a focus for me in my career to make sure I always give back. In the corporations that I've worked for, I have made it a point to mentor and to help other people that I work with that were joining the company, be it trainees or first assistants and so forth like that. When I worked for JCPenney, for corporate, myself and another corporate leader came up with a group called Mocha Mints. Wasn't only just mentoring young women, but mentoring women of color. Because when I came to the company, there weren't a lot of women leaders. As a matter of fact, there were quite a few Black men, and they actually called me and took me under their wing and gave me some mentoring. I wanted to make sure that when another corporate leader myself, a female, we thought we would specifically focus on women, and we thought mocha would be like women of color. We would make sure that everyone was paired up with a mentor. Maybe if you are a buyer, we probably go for the buyer, peer and planning and so forth. I made sure in corporate if something didn't exist, we came up with it.

The same thing in my company now, I have a company that helps small businesses and I have a lot of larger clients, but I tend to give back to the African-American community by donating my time doing pro bono. A lot of times people will want to store a business or startup product line and they really don't know how to start. I typically give that as a free counseling and I made a part of my business, it's not officially a non-profit artificial, but it's just something that I'm doing, as I'm growing my business called Inspire Mint like the Mocha Mints. This is where I inspire and mentor people to come up with ideas that they love, what they're passionate about when they start their businesses or also to have a side hustle while they are in corporate, so they know what they're going to do and how they can take their own business further. Started with a sorority mentoring and then made sure that it was corporate in my own company focus.

**Davis:** I see. That is really cool, especially since you're taking time out of your day to help spread the knowledge that you have that people could really use and use for multiple streams of income. Used to really set themselves up. Super cool. That one is called Inspire Mint, but it's not an official non-profit organization yet?

**Jack:** Because I do it myself. I don't have a lot of people. I work with other consultants, so I don't have a company that I can make that a priority because it's still hard having your own company. I've had some big clients that have come and gone and COVID recently, I lost my biggest clients, so I'm working on new clients. Actually my biggest client now is a shopping channel out of Austin, which is a newer focus on shopping, but I still make time because people are always referring people to me. I just don't have time to make it official, so I'm not going to wait. I'm going to go ahead and help people as I can right now.

**Davis:** Very admirable. Just to recap, you have taken what it means to be a mentor in the Delta Xi Chapter and have applied it throughout the levels of your career. Please talk a little bit about your life on campus and where you lived, when you were a student, and how did being a part of Delta Xi Chapter interact with your experiences on campus. I know we already covered this a little bit. I know you said you lived in Jester on the first floor there with your roommate who also pledged. But how was it living in the campus bubble as you were at the time?

**Jack:** Well, I think it made it easier when I pledged because I lived on campus and I think that our room because we're on the first floor in a main center building, became a hub for our group of pledges. We were able to have meetings right on campus. We could walk everywhere. I believe I had access to a car,

but nobody else did. Sometimes it was difficult to even find parking on campus. Living there and being right there with line sisters in the sorority just made it very easy. We were able to access each other and to help each other and to attend events pretty easily.

**Davis:** Was there ever such a thing as an AKA house? I know a lot of fraternities and sororities they have like a house with the letters on the wall.

**Jack:** No, we didn't have that. I think that our sorority was relatively small and over the years, there are only five on my line and three on the next line and maybe there were 10-12 soros active at the time, I'm sure it's much bigger now. We really didn't have that funding to take care of a house. But a lot of our white sorority counterparts absolutely did. They absolutely had houses.

**Davis:** That's not surprising, unfortunately. Do you know if there are plans for the Delta Xis to have a sorority house in the future or have you heard anything about that?

**Jack:** I have not heard anything about that. I will say that we really aren't that connected to the actual chapter once you leave because I left. I actually came back many years later to Dallas to be active in the chapter here. I don't believe so. The only thing that I will say once a year there is a homecoming on the campus and the Black Student Union does provide events and there is an AK luncheon. There was a networking to meet some of the current soros. That I haven't attended lately and then with COVID I don't think they've had in a couple of years but I think that was something that was really great to bring the old and the new together. Because I'm not aware of what's going on in campus at all.

**Davis:** That's okay. I graduated this past spring. I'm not aware either.

**Jack:** I don't know. My daughter ended up pledging but she pledged in Ohio so she's not connected to either. I imagine that maybe Dimitrius and Loretha I would guess are somewhat attached or may be connected. I will say that someone did reach out to me from the school but it was more of from an academic and a corporate or a business standpoint. I would say the Business School has reached out to me. That's really my only connection. What?

**Davis:** You are such a boss. Boss lady, we love to see it. I wanted to go ahead and verify what chapter you're a part of now. The three-letter chapter?

**Jack:** The Omicron Mu I'm the same one as Dimitrius and Linda. Wait a minute and Loretha, we're all in the same chapter, there are quite a few chapters in Dallas. It's was amazing that the four of us are all on the same chapter.

**Davis:** That is super cool. Omicron Mu. I have that written down. Let me go through my notes here. Yeah, and there it is. Everyone is in Omicron Mu.

**Jack:** Well, I would say the four of us are Dallas, South Dallas based. Again, interesting. Because I lived in this Northside when I was at the corporate office at JCPenney's and there's another chapter that I considered because I knew a lot of people. But then I felt that this was probably more comfortable, there were more people that I knew from my actual college here in this chapter.

**Davis:** I see.

**Jack:** I am a new member too. Like my card is in the mail. I don't even know if Dimitrius knows I'm a member. I think Linda does.

**Davis:** Well, that is exciting. I'm excited for the next chapter in your life there. We'll go ahead and move on to section 3. Section 3 is very short it's just two questions here. Question 1, what was it like being a Black woman in the '60s '70s '80s, during and after desegregation at the University of Texas? What was it like in the decade of your time at the university? What can you say about the climate then?

**Jack:** I would say that when I lived on campus or when I started, it was already desegregated. I didn't know what it was like before, but I would say that we shared the same dorms and we shared the same eating halls and everything but we did not really interact or intermingle socially. I had no white friends when I was there, pretty sure. We didn't intermingle at all. I don't think I can remember anybody that would have dated outside of their race at that point. I'm sure it happened but I can't remember anybody. Because I was on the dean's list, I believe is Alpha Lambda Mu is the sorority for studies excellence or whatever, but I didn't really interact with that at all. I didn't interact in any other clubs that was really my social. My sorority was my social outlet. But I didn't know anything other than the way that it was when I got there. I don't remember any issues of racial unrest or issues. I know we had our Black Student Union that we pushed for different things but honestly like I said, I was really focused and I really didn't have time to entertain a lot of extra activities that were not about me finishing and getting my degree. That's just to me. I would say maybe somebody else might have had a different experience. I know for sure I didn't even date when I was in college. I had the opportunity but I didn't because I was very focused.

**Davis:** You go. Dating in college was definitely not something I ever recommend. I have a little, well, I'm technically not her mentor anymore now that I've graduated but I'm still holding on. I'd tell her that all the time I'm like, "Leave the boys alone." It's so easy to get sidetracked and to just lose hope just because a boy broke your heart.

**Jack:** I saw that happen to some of my, to my roommate actually who ended up leaving college and coming back later. But I didn't really focus on a lot of things. I don't know why I was so focused, but I was.

**Davis:** Well, that was some divine guidance possibly. Is there anything else that you'd like to share about your experience in the Delta Xi Chapter about the Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated?

**Jack:** Not really. I guess I'm thankful because of the sisterhood that I have and that some really key people are here. One thing unique about my experience, and I mentioned it but didn't, my sister pledged. We weren't twins but people thought we were, she was two years younger. Then my other sister pledged too, I think she may have pledged after I was there. We were known as the Jack Girls. We had the sister thing, a real sister. I had a real sister, I was actually roommates with at some point. For me, having the experience with my sister probably supplied what I needed. I didn't have a lot of really close friends when I was in college. That experience I think and also experiencing the chapter in Delta Xi with her it was unique. But it made it easier for me in terms of having my own network and having a family member and having my family in town. I don't know anybody else that had their family in town.

**Davis:** Well, this has just been wonderful. It's been a pleasure getting to know you and your story. I'm hoping that we can take these experiences and present them in a way that people can relate and take them in, and feel seen and heard vicariously through you. Thank you so much.

**Jack:** You're welcome. Absolutely.

**TRANSCRIPT END**