



WINDSOR  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Desiree Primus: Share Your Windsor Story

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L.P Wilson, Windsor, CT

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**Michelle Tom**

OK. You'll be next.

**Desiree Primus**

Oh, there are the questions.

**Michelle Tom**

Oh yes, so this is – if you want to answer any of these.

**Desiree Primus**

OK, can you move that a little closer?

**Michelle Tom**

Oh yes, absolutely. This is to get people thinking about what they might talk about.

**Desiree Primus**

Oh, favorite teachers.

**Patricia Bruhn**

Desiree, you have any good stories from the bus stop or anything? I was just thinking about that.

**Desiree Primus**

Oh Wilson, how it was just packed? Both sides of Windsor Ave in Wilson?

**Patricia Bruhn**

I don't think I mentioned that.

**Desiree Primus**

And double Dutch in the morning. OK, let's do this.

**Michelle Tom**

Yes, let's just start with you saying your name and maybe how long you've lived in Windsor or maybe how long your family has lived here?

**Desiree Primus**

Sure. All right, my name is Desiree Primus. I grew up in Wilson. My family lived in Windsor for over 60 years. They both passed, but Windsor has always been a home to me. I've lived in other places, but it just, I mean, I just love Windsor, we're like a community. What can I tell you? I went to Windsor High School. We're filming here at the Community Center, but it used to be L.P. Wilson Junior High School. Windsor had two junior high schools at the time. I'm looking - my [00:01:00] favorite teacher from Windsor High School? I had several. So that would be Mary

Alexander who taught history, Lori Costa, and it's her birthday today. She taught English literature and, hold on, the librarian. Ms. Jennings at the time, but she's now Struthers, and she taught at Roger Wolcott School and Clover.

**Michelle Tom**

And so you went to Roger Wolcott and Clover?

**Desiree Primus**

Well, she taught at both of those schools.

**Michelle Tom**

And which schools did you go to?

**Desiree Primus**

Roger Wolcott.

**Michelle Tom**

Did you go to L.P Wilson?

**Desiree Primus**

Yes, so it was Roger Wolcott, then LP Wilson, and then Windsor High School.

**Michelle Tom**

Who is your friend here?

**Desiree Primus**

This is Biggie Smalls. My dog. He's from Brooklyn. He's a yorkie. He's four months old. He does have a Napoleonic complex. All right, I also have to say I have a twin brother, so we both [00:02:00] were at Roger Wolcott. Some of our classes, we were in together. Let's see. I would say my father, Clifford Primus, Congressional Medal of Honor winner or recipient for being one of the first Black Marines in World War II. Combat Division, first Black Combat Division. His brother was a Tuskegee airman, so two Congressional medal recipients in one family, which is very rare.

**Michelle Tom**

What's his brother's name?

**Desiree Primus**

Dr. Jay Primus. OK, so there's also the connection with the Primus's – or the Primus's – in Hartford. The Hartford Heritage Project and the Rebecca Primus Project is what I'm involved with right now. And it's just a lot. Rebecca Primus was one of the first Black teachers in

Hartford, schoolteachers, and then she founded a school in Maryland called the Primus Institute. [00:03:00] So there's lots of scholarship on Rebecca Primus, and with the Hartford Heritage Project, which is going on with Trinity College and Capital Community College, it's just phenomenal involving the Underground Railroad. So I'm reading all this literature and we're going to make it where it's attractive, fun, and accessible for everyone because we just need to know our history.

**Michelle Tom**

Could you tell us how you're related to Rebecca?

**Desiree Primus**

So that's the thing. I really don't know. [laughs] I really don't know. So I have cousins. They're reaching out to me. They have photographs of Rebecca Primus, and her father, Holden Primus. So we're all going to piece it together. My family, it's just, you know – and then there's that part with Pearl Primus, the famous dancer with the Trinidad roots. So we're going back with the slavery connection. There's a whole branch of family members [00:04:00] from Trinidad. And then with my mother's side, there's a branch of the family from Tennessee. But also, there's that whole Chinese part of our family. So they have these family reunions with both sides and it's just fascinating. So I'm uncovering this and it's a lot, but I enjoy it.

**Michelle Tom**

Yeah, I was working on – not your genealogy, but you mentioned Rebecca Primus, and so I had to do all this reading on her stuff.

**Desiree Primus**

Yes, yes.

**Michelle Tom**

I was like, yeah, she's fascinating.

**Desiree Primus**

Right.

**Michelle Tom**

So your father, Clifford Primus, he grew up in Windsor?

**Desiree Primus**

He originally is from Daytona Beach, Florida, and he lived not far from Mary Bethune. From Bethune Cookman, and as you know, she was part of that whole “black cabinet,” and [00:05:00] he would see Eleanor Roosevelt like right on the porch, and he was her paperboy – Bethune's. And so she would see my family members and she would yell out, “What are your goals today?”

So it was like all of this pride. If you're a Primus, you have to have pride. So I just want to share the stories and just make it meaningful, involve the art. I teach at Sand School.

**Desiree Primus**

So a lot of the students, they don't really know a lot of the history. So we're involved in the Carrie Saxon Perry mural. Carrie Saxon Perry, first African female mayor. So there's a lot going on. I want my students to be empowered to look and say I can do this because that neighborhood, as you know, you know there's a lot of poverty. But there's also pride, so that's me in a nutshell.

**Mike Cook**

I got a good one. Clifford and Memorial Day. This was maybe [00:06:00] 3-4 years ago now.

**Desiree Primus**

He was the – thank you! He was the Marshall in a Memorial Day parade. I went to council – a town council meeting, I told him about my father. They were like, “Never heard of him. Don't know anything about it.” So I was also a member of the Human Relation Commission in Windsor and we told the story and then we just made things happen with the recognition, and we want to also do other things as well. So you'll hear more about that.

**Michelle Tom**

OK, yeah. The Historical Society is doing a Veteran's Photo Share here at the Senior Center in November on Veteran's Day. So it would be really cool if you had any stories if you wanted to share them.

**Desiree Primus**

Sure, I would love to. He's been interviewed by the Windsor Journal. We have the recording. He did pass [00:07:00] two years ago. He was also interviewed at Central Connecticut State University with the project there, so I was always pushing for my dad at age – I mean he got honored at age 89, so he kept that history private. You know, there's some bitterness, but there's also pride.

**Michelle Tom**

Yes. Well, thank you so much. We really appreciate it.

**Desiree Primus**

Thank you, thank you, thank you. A pleasure.