

Laurita: I was always a serious child, so we didn't do much play. One of the questions I wanted to ask my mom before she passed was, "What kind of kid was I?" I remember studying all the time. I remember serving all the time. I remember cleaning the house and doing my chores. I don't remember a lot of play. We were to carry ourselves as ladies. We were to strive to do well. We were to love our families and love our community and to love God. We were expected to do the right thing and to do it well.

Lemar: Could you talk about your drive, the desire to make a difference?

Laurita: The '60s were just an incredible time to be growing up. As young people, we were encouraged to challenge. We were encouraged to march. I participated in shutting down the university, this university, with strikes and sit-ins so that more students that looked like me could come here and be successful. When I came here as a freshman, I was one of only 500 black students that were here in a very, very large university.

I had been told I would never get in, being an out-of-state student and colored, and so the privilege came with a responsibility to do well so that other black kids could come here. That was driven in us in our community, but the community also supported us in that responsibility, and we believed we could make a difference.

Lemar: You really have been a champion for women most of your life and career, especially in the workplace. Can you talk about work that you've done in that arena that you always think fondly upon?

Laurita: As an employee at the University of Michigan, I had the opportunity to participate in the review of university salaries in the early '70s. We found significant differences at the university of what it paid women and men. The university stepped up in order to create more equity. It felt really good to make a difference and to work for an employer that would address what needed to be done. This employer did the right thing.

On campus, we had marches in order to bring attention to the status of women. We started a professional development program that has now lasted over 30 years so that the same things that majority women were learning, we could apply to Native American, Hispanic, Asian, and African-American women on the campus.

Lemar: What are some of the things that you would say were your happiest times?

Laurita: My mother was a community servant. Working side by side with her, cooking for people that were hungry or homeless in the church brought happy moments because you could see the smile on some homeless person's face that is now fed when they were hungry. Graduating from the University of Michigan as an honor student here, that was a happy moment.

Lemar: Any advice you would give me as a parent?

Laurita: My advice is to just love your daughter and any future children. Make sure they have the opportunity to be successful but fail while you're there to support them. Create a

community for her. Be there. Be present for her. Then, there's a favorite song that we sang at my mom's funeral. If I could just make a difference for one someone ... She did that, and I hope I have done that.

Lemar: She was very proud of you, and I'm sure she's smiling right now.

Laurita: Yeah.