



THE FIRST

Breaking through a racial barrier was only the beginning for Clarence Kregg.

The photos lining the Alumni Hall walls tell the story of a student body at Canisius that had been almost exclusively white since the schools founding through the 1940s. In 1950, **Clarence R. Kregg '50** became the first African American student to graduate from Canisius. He was also the first African American to play on the school's varsity football team. During high school, Clarence successfully managed the rigors of schoolwork, football, and his part-time job at the A&P supermarket.

Following high school, Clarence served in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Korean War. Despite being wounded during the war, he achieved the rank of Sergeant and earned an honorable discharge as a Veteran of Foreign War.

Clarence was also one of the first African American students to graduate from Canisius College where he majored in chemistry. He became a trailblazer in the field of analytical chemistry and invented several devices for measuring atomic weight over his 50+ years with Rohm & Haas (now Dow Chemical). Before he passed away in 2018, Clarence enjoyed being a father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great grandfather. He spoke with **Paul Cumbo '97** for the "Blue Doors" book before his passing, and offered the following insights:

As far as the school was concerned, I was a student who happened to be black. My color didn't enter into it. There just weren't a lot of black families who were Catholic back then, you understand?

I played football. There was one guy who didn't like me, a year ahead of me, but that's it. I made varsity my sophomore year, so we played together for two years. That was the only racial thing. I remember

Father Flood. He was kind of a mentor. I got in a fight one time, and he told me, 'The spoken word is mightier than the fist.' I've always remembered that.

I played for Coach Barnes for three years – right halfback. I wasn't first string, but one memory I have that's real clear is I played the St. Joe's game. I was on defense, and this guy came running at me. I was all set to tackle him, and he ran right past me. It was caught on film, and they played it on television later. It was so embarrassing! But we won. We were champions that year.

*I remember I learned to bowl in the bowling alley in the basement. My next two brothers started, but they didn't finish (at Canisius). My fourth brother, **Kenneth '58**, finished.*

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Classmate **Mark Russell '50** also shared a recollection about Clarence during an interview for the book:

We graduated one week before the Korean War started, and we heard a couple of years later that Clarence Kregg had been killed in Korea. So, every time we'd get together for a reunion, fifth, tenth, fifteenth, we would mourn poor Clarence Kregg, killed in Korea. Finally, our fiftieth reunion, down at the Saturn Club, in walks Clarence Kregg. Wow! So, we flock over to him, and we're like, oh my God! Clarence! And he said, "Gees. I didn't think you guys would remember me!"