INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Dr. Sidney Barnwell. Today is June 13, 2009. It is approximately 4:35 p.m. and I'm at his home on Lincoln Street, in his dining room.

Dr. Barnwell, I thank you for this opportunity to interview you. I'd like to start out with your early childhood and your family background. Could you give me your age, date of birth, place of birth, and something about your family's background?

DR. BARNWELL: I was born the 23rd of September in 1926, in [ ] which is on the east coast of Guyana, which is in South America. Guyana is the new name for British Guyana because Guyana got its independence from Britain in 1966 and was renamed Guyana. I went to school in a Methodist school which was a Primary school and I went to high school in Georgetown, which is the capital of Guyana. I completed high school approximately in 1944.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, Dr. Barnwell, thank you. What are your parents names and can you tell me something about them and your grandparents?

DR. BARNWELL: My. Father's name was Caryl Barnwell. He was station master, which means he was in charge of a railroad station. My mother was a teacher. Her name was Elvenia Elias Barnwell. I was the 2nd of 4 children, all boys. We were educated in Guyana and I left Guyana in 1947.

INTERVIEWER: What are the most vivid memories you have of your early childhood, things like Christmas, holidays, funerals, church, and those things?

DR. BARNWELL: Well, it was very traditional. Christmas was celebrated as most children do all over the world, and the usual holidays. Golden Globe Methodist School, the school that I attended, was thought of as an academic school.

INTERVIEWER: What were your favorite subjects?

DR. BARNWELL: Well, I was not a keenly academic youngster. I was somewhat of a generalist. I found that there were many other students who were much sharper than me, but I was able to survive about the middle of classes. I was somewhat athletic. I was able to engage in cricket and I was somewhat of a sprinter, runner, and I was able to be designated as the fastest runner under 18. I remember that in the country. That was when I was in high school. School in Guyana was quite competitive. You had to take a national exam to graduate from

Primary school and a University exam to graduate from high school. Cambridge University in England was the examining body and they sent annual exams for students to take exams all over the British Empire at that time. It took about, especially during the second world war, 4 to 6 months before you could get the results of the exam, before you would know whether you had graduated from high school. But Primary school the exams were somewhat national and you could get results within 1 or 2 months.

INTERVIEWER: I know you are a doctor today. What stimulated you academically to pursue a medical degree?

DR. BARNWELL: When I was about 13, there were somewhat older, maybe 20 year old man, who wanted to emulate as youngsters because he was somewhat accomplished. One day he identified me and said "one day you are going to be a doctor." I somehow believed him. Prior to that, I always had the impression that I was doomed for some kind of outstanding career. I want to tell you this because I grew up in what was essentially a sugar estate. When I was about 4 years old, I went to the sugar estate. At that time, most of the workers were Indian, from Indian. They became indentured servants to Guyana, to the then British Guyana. The overseers were white folk from England. When I was about 4 years old, I saw a white overseer on a horse. I always felt that one of these days I had to be on that horse. Of course, when that older man, someone who was going to be a physician, that sort of charted a path on my way to becoming a physician. That identification by that older, well-respected man, sort of created the nucleus from which I was able to craft a career.

INTERVIEWER: So, you left Guyana in 1947. Where did you go then and what did you do?

DR. BARNWELL: I went to Howard University, for the sole purpose of studying medicine. I graduated from Howard Liberal Arts and then went to medical school. I graduated in 1955, from Howard.

INTERVIEWER: How was coming to America different from Guyana?

DR. BARNWELL: Well, it was a cultural shock. At that time, it was segregated. It was quite different, little things, like going into a white barbershop; you couldn't get your hair cut. I don't really get into the black restaurants, but you adjusted very quickly because the sole purpose was to study.

INTERVIEWER: Was there racial segregation in Guyana?

DR. BARNWELL: Guyana was unusual in that 52% of the population was from India. They came as indentured servants after emancipation of slaves in 1933 and 1934. Chinese came as indentured servants and Portuguese. So, when I came along and went to school, we were on an even par with Portuguese, Chinese, and Indians from Indian and we all competed. The sole dominant person was the Englishman.

INTERVIEWER: What is an indentured servant in Guyana?

DR. BARNWELL: Slavery emancipation, as I said, was in 1933 and 1934.What happened was the freed slaves moved off the sugar plantation. The British imported workers from India, China, and Portugal. They came under contracts. They were contracted to work for a number of years before they were free from them. They came as laborers under contracts and they are indentured servants.

INTERVIEWER: So, we go back to 1955 and Howard University. You graduated from the medical school. What did you do then?

DR. BARNWELL: I first started in dermatology at Howard, which was connected, a treatment hospital that was associated with Howard University. A treatment hospital came out of the Civil War and was somewhat subsidized by the Federal government. So at the treatment hospital where the Howard University medical school was located, I did a year of dermatology. I went back to Guyana and was asked to come back to study surgery in the United States because they needed surgeons in Guyana. At that time, of course, the elements of socialism were introduced in Guyana, which is another story. So I came back to study surgery. I finished surgery in the early 60's. I studied in Baltimore at Providence Hospital and Mercy Hospital in Philadelphia, and at Albert Einstein Hospital in Philadelphia. I completed that in the early 60's. I became certified and qualified as a diplomat of the American Board of Surgeons in 1963 and 1964.

INTERVIEWER: So, that was right in the midst of the Civil Rights? How did that strike you, the Civil Rights movement, here in America? What were your thoughts about it at that time?

DR. BARNWELL: When one is involved in the study of a specialist surgery, one does not have time to reflect on the civil rights, even though you knew where your

sympathies were. That's a total absorption of all of your time and energy. We did run into a few things. I got married in 1965. My wife is from Washington, DC.

INTERVIEWER: So your interests were not totally involved in medical school?

DR. BARNWELL: It was; you have other interests but your sole interest is pursuing your academic career. The Civil Rights issue did not come up until I came to New Bern. I got involved in the civil rights activities in this community.

INTERVIEWER: What year did you come to New Bern?

DR. BARNWELL: 1963. I was a surgeon in the VA Hospital in Tuskegee, Alabama, from 1963 to 1965. Then, Dr. Littman, who was a resident and was a doctor who was involved in the surgery residency program, was at the VA Hospital. We spoke about coming to New Bern and I told him I would come for a year because there was a black hospital here that did not have a doctor. So I came in 1965, supposedly for a year, but a year turned into 2, and the rest is history.

INTERVIEWER: So, you came to New Bern, as you said, in 1965 and that's when you became involved in the civil rights movement. How were you involved in the civil rights movement in New Bern?

DR. BARNWELL: Before I answer that, let me tell you something about the hospital. Good Shepard Hospital, which has a very, very interesting history and I think it should be recorded and memorialized because it came out of the fire in 1922. There was a Reverend Johnson who was the Rector, Priest, associated with St. Cyprians Church. At that time, of course, there was just one large hospital here, which was the white hospital. That was St. Luke's Hospital.

After the fire, because of the destruction, and the mayhem followed the whole thing, Rev. Johnson, associated with St. Cyprian's church, thought it necessary to have a hospital that took care of black folks. After the fire, injured and burned victims were treated in the basement of St. Luke's hospital. During the aftermath, lots of these patients actually were in St. Cyprians church as patients. St. Cyprians church was closed for a few months and served as a hospital. Rev. Johnson felt it necessary to explore the need for a black hospital here. He was able to get that going and it was built in 1938. Where it stands right now is a nursing home. That was quite a feat because the church and diocese and many charitable foundations, Duke endowment came together and donated money and the thing was built and opened in 1938. It served a whole generation of black folk in New Bern. I

remember Mr. Faison telling me years ago that Rev. Johnson was the first administrator. He died in 1946 and in that year Mr. Faison came as administrator. He was able to increase the beds from a few, maybe in the 20's, to a 58-bed hospital. In 1960, it was accredited by the American Crediting Agency. That was quite a feat. He and others were able to get anesthetists, pathologists, other specialists who treated folks at Good Shepard hospital. This man was able to get white doctors involved, to see patients at Good Shepard hospital. The initial three black doctors that were here: Dr. Martin, Dr. Mann, and one other black doctor, participated in the care of patients. The greater number of doctors were white doctors who helped to care for patients at Good Shepard Hospital. It was quite an accomplishment in those days to get a church involved in studying, creating, pursuing and succeeding in getting a hospital accredited, getting white people involved, and getting black people cared. That was a marvelous achievement. It needs not only to be recorded, but memorialized.

INTERVIEWER: It was quite a feat. Were you the first surgeon there?

DR. BARNWELL: Yes, but other surgeons who worked at St. Luke's, also worked at Good Shepard. I don't know where you were born, but most black folk, your age or a little older, were born at Good Shepard, and taken care of at Good Shepard.

INTERVIEWER: I received care there, but my whole family was born at home. Many black folk, probably most black folk, were born at home, because there was still a strong midwife system.

DR. BARNWELL: Yes, when I came here in 1965, I remember one midwife who delivered a child. But the mere fact that, in those days, an entrepreneur, a minister, a visionary could come together to do this is quite extraordinary.

INTERVIEWER: So that was unusual in any place in the country?

DR. BARNWELL: The accreditation was unusual by the joint commission. There were other black hospitals in the state, one in Wilmington, one in Raleigh, one in Durham, one in Winston-Salem. I think Charlotte had one. But to get accredited by the joint commission was quite a feat.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds unusual, too, that a town this small would have an accredited hospital.

DR. BARNWELL: Oh, yes, yes, I was impressed. So, when I came here in 1965, there were no black doctors here. Dr. Littman, who served as physician, left about 1964, so I came for a year, the year turned into 2. The hospital closed in 2 years after I got here (1967) and it merged with the Craven County Hospital. I was well received as a surgeon. I came as a certified diplomat of the American Board of Surgeons and I was well received by the Craven County Hospital.

INTERVIEWER: What is a certified diplomat of the American Board of Surgeons? What does that indicate?

DR. BARNWELL: Well, in the old days, someone would get 2 or 3 years of training as a surgeon, but then, especially black folk, were not given the opportunity to go further to get all the necessary requirements to be certified. I was fortunate to get that in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Although they were black hospitals, they were well certified to train surgeons. When I was first accredited and certified in the early 1960's, there were only 40 or 50 black men in the country who were certified. The official term is Diplomat – Certificate holder.

INTERVIEWER: What was your impression of New Bern when you came in 1965?

DR. BARNWELL: When I came, it was a country town. It was not only a country town, but on the positive side, there was so much potential here, with people who were civic minded, socially conscience, trying to do positive things for the community. I remember James Gavin was one who impressed me a lot. Buckshot Nixon, the Sampson's, many community leaders. There was a subterranean effort to make things better in New Bern. William Vale was such a person. I discovered I had a penchant for this type of thing. I was never exposed to it. I found that for me there was great joy in working with groups of people. As a surgeon, you work on a one-to-one basis. I, in the late 60's, early 70's, I worked in politics, as the person who was trying to get Howard Lee, who was running for Lieutenant Governor, was manager in this area. That took me into the Democratic Party. I was able to explore areas of interest. I had a potential for it but I never realized it. I found great joy in working with people. During my stay in New Bern, from 1965-1985, I was able to get away from just the practice of surgery, get into a lot of social ventures, which normally doctors don't get into.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of social ventures?

DR. BARNWELL: There are many. I was medical examiner for Craven County from 1972-1972. I was state board of elections for a number of years. I was on the humanities council for 3 or 4 years. I was involved in politics in trying to get local people elected. I found great joy in this. Tat made me not confine myself to surgery, but found myself working with the health department and family planning where surgeons don't engage themselves. I remember around 1969; the director of the health department came to see in my office and asked me to work in the health department in prenatal care. At first I said I hadn't done that since I was an intern. But he said these were all black patients. So, I worked in my office (2 afternoons) a week in the health department. So, I went afield in social ventures, areas in medicines that I found quite well, absorbing and satisfying a need. That, of course, meant I did less surgery, but I enjoyed myself a little bit more in these ventures.

INTERVIEWER: So, you came back to New Bern. Was that when you started raising your family? How many children do you have?

DR. BARNWELL: I have 3 children. Renee, my oldest, was born in 1959, in Baltimore. My second child, Maria, was born in Philadelphia and my third, John, was born in Tuskegee. All three came here in 1965.

INTERVIEWER: So, how did you find raising children down south here in New Bern? Was it difficult in those times?

DR. BARNWELL: It was because this was a transition from the old system, from segregation to the new desegregation and integration of schools. I remember when I came to the old Duffyfield school, my wife became very involved and she became president of the PTA and we enjoyed going to the old school in Duffyfield. Two or 3 years after integration they decided to close it. Then again, I got involved in efforts to maintain a school in the Duffyfield area because I could foresee the old establishment disappearing from our area. We had 10 or 12 grocery stores. We had involved most of the community in community affairs. Good Shepard Hospital was closed as were many black businesses. One outstanding business was Smith Drug Store which was a creature also of Mr. Faison. It was owned and operated by Mr. Faison. It's still there but it was the center of activity. So, with the closing of the school, I could see the beginning of the disappearance of these vestiges of stability in the Duffyfield area. That took us in to bussing, and all of the disappearances of the values the people had in the Duffyfield area at that time. So, what we have now is an influx of other things in the Duffyfield area: loss of the black identity and kids not doing as well in school as they did in the old days. We have the influx of drugs. Most of the principal leaders and people who

felt they had vested interest in the Duffyfield area have left. So, it is somewhat destitute right now. It don't have the stability, that old and honored kind of identity that came out of reconstruction days, the identity of people who belonged to the health lodge, Masonic lodge. They were free masons. People felt a pride in belonging. All of that is gone and it started with the disappearance of the old Duffyfield school.

INTERVIEWER: You've been involved in politics and you've been a stabilizing force in this community. What do you feel your most important contribution to the community has been?

DR. BARNWELL Out of necessity, I, for over 20 years, was the only black doctor in the area. When I say that, I have to say that I was the only black doctor within the community that stayed in the community for a length of time. Many of the doctors who came stayed only for a year or two. As a physician, I was an identity that young folks could look up to. The second was participating in the social life of the community. I was able to impart some degree of education of the medical area that probably benefitted many people. I'm hoping it did. The other thing is, I hope I am an inspiration to the young population of the area. I remember when I came back here in 1998; a lady from Pamlico County came up to me and told me that I was an inspiration to my children. You could always point to me and say, "well, one of these days you can be like Dr. Barnwell." And that gives me, of course, quite a feeling of joy to hear that kind of thing. So, the essence of this is that I am hoping that I inspired a lot of young people to get from point A to point B in their life.

INTERVIEWER: What would be your advice to young people today on how to be successful in life? What would you say to young people today? What bit of advice would you give them after 82 years of being on this earth, with all of the successes and experiences you have had?

DR. BARNWELL: Well, it all depends upon the person. When I speak to young groups, I usually tell them that they are very fortunate to be young in America because you have opportunities here for growth, _____, and advancement than most countries. People forget that. The second thing is there are so many opportunities to do this. If you aspire to be a physician, lawyer, or an Indian Chief, the opportunities are here for you. But in this decade and in this new millennium, there are so many distractions that were not here when I was a youngster. But in spite of that, if one focuses one's attention as one who wants to be the man on the horse, there are a very few things that can take you off that kind of focus and

attention. I think of Lola when she was here, she grew up here, and in spite of her lowly beginnings, became a physician, because that's what wanted to do. I think one needs to be focused; one needs to be surrounded by others who are inspired to do something. One of the great things about my growing up is that in my environment, everybody wanted to be something. Sometimes one deviates because of circumstances. But society in which you are brought up, the social emphasis, the Esaus, is for advancement of the individual and sometimes in this society it is difficult to get that. There are so many deviants, so many distracting elements. So one needs to, early on, be associated with people who are ambitious, people who are focused, people who want to make something of themselves.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Dr. Barnwell, I just want to say one other thing. In talking to some of the other people, they talk about what a great influence you had on the political life of this city and how you were probably one of the most instrumental people in getting our black elected officials and municipal officials on the board of alderman, and the mayor, and also what a great influence you had in the election of the first black representative in this area in over 100 years, Rev. Wainwright, who is in the legislature. What do you feel you greatest political contribution has been? You were also I believe, given the Governor's Order of Longleaf Pine. What are some of the other recognitions that you have had, and accomplishments?

DR. BARNWELL: Getting back to the first point, because of my interest in social advancement in the community, I spent a lot of time working with the grassroot people who can advance the careers of politicians. We were able to register people in the time of Buckshot and William Vale. Getting people to the poles was another thing we worked on. I wasn't in the singular part, but this was a collaborative effort. The essential thing was to get groups of people coming together for the same purpose. Unless you can get a collaboration between Group A and Group B working for the same purpose, you wouldn't accomplish very much. And some of the things in the political life, we were able to get people working together.

INTERVIEWER: I see that you've kind of taken some of that political strategy and is using it today in health strategy, community help. It's a very important part of your life now, isn't it? Could we close this interview with some of that discussion?

DR. BARNWELL: Since I came back here, and became the medical director of the health department, I've taken the medical department away from the 4 walls into the community. My purpose was to do that same collaboration and

cooperation with various groups: church groups, civic groups, and political groups, to work as one to improve the health status of folks. One of the things we started off with was prostrate cancer in black men. We were able to get the hospital, American Cancer Society, the health department, and various civic groups to come together to work together to do an annual screening to find early cancer in black men. Because of that, we were able to reduce the mortality in black men by half. Black men used to die 3 times as much as white men from prostrate cancer. That has been cut down to 1.6 times as white men. Now, we are doing that with other things: HIV, AIDS, hypertension, blood pressure problems, Diabetes, in the Duffyfield area. So, again, that's an interest of getting people to work together and I think the secret is, if you can get the government working with civic groups, church groups, and other interested private industry, we can accomplish a lot of things.

INTERVIEWER: Well, Dr. Barnwell, I want to thank you for agreeing to conduct this interview. It was very informative. Now it will become a part of the community's archives. Again, I want to congratulate you for your work in the community, your ability to network and collaborate with various groups that have gone across political, and social, and medical areas. You have made such a significant impact on this community. And we want to thank Guyana for loaning you to New Bern, NC

DR. BARNWELL Well, Mr. Bernard, you're very kind. It's been my pleasure.

INTERVIEWER: This ends our interview