

INTERVIEWER: My name is Linda Simmons Henry. I'm currently at the home of Mrs. Carrie Godette at 700 Third Avenue. Today is June 5, 2009 and we are a part of the *African American Voices Between Two Rivers* Project. Ms. Godette, I would like to ask you to tell me about your life and family here in the New Bern area.

MRS. GODETTE: I've lived here all of my life. I was born in Beaufort County May 1, 1919. But I have resided in New Bern for my entire life. I grew up in New Bern, attended West Street High School; graduated in the year 1937. I went on to enroll in cosmetology school in New Bern under Mrs. Mary Harris, worked in the cosmetology field for several years, and proceeded to the medical field. I worked for 33 years as a medical assistant for the late Dr. John E. Littman; also, Dr. Sidney Barnwell.

My brother and I (just one sibling) grew up right here in New Bern with our parents, Vennie and Edward Moore. My mother passed at the age of 52. My daddy lived to be 103. He passed away in 1999. After my mother's death, then he resided with me until his death.

I retired in and then I went on to work with the Croatan Forest Service. I worked there for 20 years. I retired from there in 2007, at the age of 87 (when I retired from working).

I have seen many changes here in New Bern. I can hardly recall them all. Things have changed tremendously since I grew up here in the city. I lived with my mother and father until I married in 1942. My husband has since passed away. I have been a widow ever since.

I remember before the projects were ever thought of, because we had to walk from First Avenue to West Street School. At that time, there were no projects. Elm Street went straight from Middle Street on through to West Street. I traveled that for many years, until I graduated from school.

I can hardly remember all of the things, all of the changes. At that time we had our colored grocery stores, colored restaurants, and other little businesses; doctors' offices, in that particular area that we now call Five Points. I remember when Moore's Barbecue was where the present Days Inn is now. Ms. Henrietta _____ ran one of the big cafes. Mr. Joe Bynum had a barbecue place. George Downing had a café. We also had a theatre on Queen Street. At that time, I think admission was 5 or 10 cents. That's been a great change in that

area. We had the drug stores, grocery stores, restaurants, and there was a fish market there. Actually, all black things were in that location (Five Points). A lot of places at that time, as we all know, we were not allowed into the stores to eat or go into the stores except to shop in the downtown area so we had to really stay in our realm (Five Points)

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the stores that were downtown (as you call it) that you were not allowed in?

MRS. GODETTE: Well, there was Kress', Charles Store. I'm not sure about McClellans. But there was a soda shop down on the corner in the Elks building that we just were not allowed to go in to be served.

INTERVIEWER: When did that change, in terms of beginning to allow blacks, African Americans in those stores?

MRS. GODETTE: Well, it first started out with the sit down strikes that we had down there.

INTERVIEWER: Who organized that?

MRS. GODETTE: That was a group of about 13 to 15 people. I think Barfield was among one of them. There were several and gradually, after that, even at that time when Moore's had his barbecue place in that area, we had to go to the back door to be served. We could not enter the first door. So, when the law was changed that he would have to serve blacks, he built out on the Weyerhaeuser Road, a place outside of the city limits, but I think he was glad to get back into the city when he made up his mind he was willing to serve the blacks.

We had many churches: Star of Zion, Mt. Calvary, Little Rock, St. Peter's Presbyterian Church, and Ebenezer, and Clinton Chapel, Trinity (I think that was one of the older ones). Now, I think we have churches on every corner. But those were basic. The Little Rock church at that time was over on Oaks Street. Rue Chapel has been there for a long time also.

INTERVIEWER: And you are a member of which church?

MRS. GODETTE: I'm a member presently of Memorial Baptist Church. I grew up in Star of Zion's Missionary Baptist Church. I changed over 50 years ago with Memorial Missionary Baptist Church which I presently belong.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the courses that you took while attending West Street High School? Who were some of the teachers?

MRS. GODETTE: History, Latin, English, Math, Biology. Mrs. Martha White, Mr. Danyus, Loretta Smith (she was the last one to pass a few years back). Mrs. Rivers taught me. We had so many come in: Mrs. Esther Powell, Mrs. Mary Styron, Mrs. Cordon, Adalaide Fisher, Mrs. Jennings.

INTERVIEWER: Who was Professor Barber?

MRS. GODETTE: He was the principal of the high school at that time. He had a daughter named Barbara who was one of my teachers.

INTERVIEWER: Who was Professor Barber married to?

MRS. GODETTE: I think his wife was named Mamie, Mamie Barber.

INTERVIEWER: Was she a teacher?

MRS. GODETTE: No. I don't recall her having taught.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of the communities, what were some of the names of the African American communities here in New Bern?

MRS. GODETTE: Duffyfield, South Front Street area. Here we were sort of centralized, with the Avenues, First, Second, Third Avenue. I've lived on First Avenue. I've lived on Second Avenue, and I guess I'll die on Third. I have spent my entire life on one Avenue to another.

INTERVIEWER: And it's within one mile?

MRS. GODETTE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any other communities here in New Bern?

MRS. GODETTE: Actually, the places where the hospital and drug stores are, that was wooded area. Pecan trees grew; people went up there to pick up pecans. It was nothing like you see it today. In fact, it was the city limits (my corner out here). The blacks went about as far as George Street. After George Street, you were going into the white community.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about the fire of 1922? Or, what was told to you about the fire?

MRS. GODETTE: I was told because I think I was too young to remember. I believe I was only a couple of years old at that time. The fire was down on the lumber mills; destroyed St. Peter's Church. My mother told me about these things. I remember them talking about the Depression. My father was a hard worker, so I can't say I have ever been hungry. But we were brought up on those black-eyed peas, neck bones, rib side meat and stuff like that. We weren't exposed to too many luxuries. That's why I try to eat what I want today. I couldn't get them back then, but I was never hungry and I was never outdoors. We rented all these years up until 50 years ago when I purchased my home here. But we rented from I.H. Smith (he was one of the old New Bernians here in the realty business).

INTERVIEWER: You rented from him?

MRS. GODETTE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: I think he was very wealthy in this area, in the real estate business.

MRS. GODETTE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So where is his business; is it located in Five Points?

MRS. GODETTE: Yes, right near Johnson's Cleaners. Bells Barbeshop is located there now.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little about the various different customs that blacks participated in, in the New Bern area.

MRS. GODETTE: The main focus was church. We had to go to church. We had to go to Sunday school. That was one of our main focuses. We didn't have a whole lot of social life. We did have little parties, at different houses, and things like that. During my teenage years, they had a place on Bern Street, near Whitley's Funeral Home (Rivers-Morgan) that was called the Red Cross Hall. We had to slip from our mothers to go up there and dance.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the dances called?

MRS. GODETTE: Charleston, the Black Bottom. The one I liked was the Swing. I loved dancing. I loved music.

INTERVIEWER: The different musicians ... did they come to New Bern, do you recall? Who were some of the black musicians that you liked?

MRS. GODETTE: Well, Mr. Abra Hyman, he would play the piano and we would dance ourselves silly. Later, when the piccolos came along, we would dance by those. It was a long time before the big orchestras came in.

INTERVIEWER: Where did African-Americans live when they traveled here? Did they all have to live at the Charlotte Room Hotel?

MRS. GODETTE: Yes, some of them did. We didn't have these fabulous hotels, so, if you came to visit me, you stayed with me. Sometimes, if there were too many of them, we had to sleep on the floor. You didn't know what hotels were. That's why I enjoy laying up in them now.

INTERVIEWER: What if you had different guest speakers at the church? Where did they stay?

MRS. GODETTE: They would stay in some of the members' homes. Different families were prominent and when they came around, they would entertain them.

INTERVIEWER: Who were some of the prominent families here in New Bern?

MRS. GODETTE: The Manns'. Dr. Manns was one of the doctors. The Rivers, the Fishers, the Whitleys (they owned a funeral home business), Isaac Smith, I.P. Hatch (he was in the funeral home business). Most of the rest of us were middle-class families. My daddy was not educated, by any means. I think he made it to the third grade. He was a hard worker and a good provider

INTERVIEWER: You had strong men back there who were good providers to their families, strong black men.

MRS. GODETTE: Raymond Vines was one, working at Belks. He educated his children. The Richard family, their father educated their children. I got my formal education on my own, more or less. When I did graduate, my father was not in a position to send me to college at that time. That's when I went into cosmetology. I worked downtown in those white peoples houses, taking care of children. That's how I made it through college.

INTERVIEWER: So, you attended

MRS. GODETTE: Mary Harris Beauty College.

INTERVIEWER: And that was locally here?

MRS. GODETTE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Good

MRS. GODETTE: It was on the corner of George Street and Queen Street, across from the police station. There is a TV repair station there now. It was the first black college here.

INTERVIEWER: Who was the owner of that?

MRS. GODETTE: Mary E. Harris. She was a Fisher.

INTERVIEWER: Was she related to Dr. Fisher?

MRS. GODETTE: I don't know. Her sister is still here, Helen Fisher, lives on Smith Street.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of the military, during WWII, what was New Bern like, the climate here, sort of like a military town between Cherry Point and Jacksonville?

MRS. GODETTE: For a long time, Cherry Point wasn't even here. But when they came in, they spruced up the town. I married one. A lot of other girls married the service guys. His home was originally in North Harlowe.

INTERVIEWER: North Harlowe? And his name was?

MRS. GODETTE: George, George Arthur Godette

INTERVIEWER: And he's originally from Harlowe?

MRS. GODETTE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Again, that was a conversation I had yesterday with Annie Gibbs, talking about Buckshot Nixon.

MRS. GODETTE: Oh, yes. He was one of the organizers of the NAACP. Barfield is kind of going along with it.

INTERVIEWER: Alfred Barfield?

MRS. GODETTE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of the activities that African-Americans participated in when they were not attending church? What was a particular Sunday afternoon like?

MRS. GODETTE: We walked down to the train station and watched the trains come in. I was allowed to cross Main Street. My parents forbade us to cross Main Street; that was considered another part of town. But we slipped over there to see boys sometimes. We would get to go to the movies, but there really wasn't a whole lot. We jumped rope, played horse shoes for entertainment. For a long time, we didn't know about radios. When we got televisions, I knew we were rich then. In fact, I knew we were rich when we got electric lights.

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Godette, what about the elected officials here in New Bern, African Americans in public office in New Bern?

MRS. GODETTE: I was so happy and proud when we finally got our first black mayor. And now I think we have 3 aldermen, which I had never witnessed in my lifetime. We have them on the commission board. Those things I never dreamed would happen. And to top it off, we've got a black president, Obama. I never in my wildest dreams thought I would see this day.

INTERVIEWER: And actually vote for him?

MRS. GODETTE: And vote for him. I'm with him 110% and I wish him the best. He has a full plate but I think he is capable of handling it.

INTERVIEWER: It's amazing to see his leadership on TV and to know that he is really serving his country very well.

MRS. GODETTE: Yes, and I am proud of it. I am proud of being an American.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of elected officials with the first African American here, I think it's Lee Morgan, to serve as Mayor of New Bern for a number of years, and having participated in that, has that brought about a lot of change for the betterment of African Americans?

MRS. GODETTE: I feel that it does. I like the image. And we have blacks serving downtown in all county offices. Dr. Bryant's daughter, Gwen, is a secretary down there, our own New Bernians. I never in my wildest dreams thought I'd live to see that, with the whites always in control.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little bit about your career as a health assistant nurse, working for Dr. John Littman and Dr. Sidney Barnwell. He's still living, isn't he? What was your experience like in spending time with them?

MRS. GODETTE: My first ambition was to be a teacher. When I finished school, I just thought being a teacher was something else. At the time, my parents couldn't afford to send me to college so I had to give up on that. And, as I said before, I took it upon myself to go to the school of cosmetology. I worked in that field for several years. Then along came Dr. Littman and I was hired as his secretary. I turned out to be (sometimes they call you the Girl Friday) the Girl Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. I was his secretary, then I got my medical assistant's license and went to the medical field. I was still doing his bookkeeping. But I thoroughly enjoyed. Right today I meet people on the street: "You're my nurse." I love them and they love me. They respect me wherever they see me today. They remember me, even little children: "You're that lady who gave me a shot one day." But I just loved it. I worked with the elderly and God has blessed me with patience, love, to care for all with all my heart. And I have acquired so many friends right out of his office.

INTERVIEWER: Where was Dr. Littman's office located?

MRS. GODETTE: It was located at 1038 Broad Street, in Five Points.

INTERVIEWER: And Sidney Barnwell's office?

MRS. GODETTE: Right across the street. He was adjoining Harmon's office in that building. When Dr. Littman retired, I was in the unemployment line for the first time in my life. My co-workers and everybody were confused. It was sudden.

Well, what are we going to do? My remarks were: "the same man that has been taking care of me is going to take care of me now."

I went to the unemployment office and drew one check. When it was time for me to go back again, Dr. Barnwell had hailed me in the grocery store. He said "What are you doing?" I told him I was in the unemployment line. He said he would see what he could do. A week later I was working. I had one unemployment check in my life and I worked with him until he moved away. He stayed away and that is when I went into the pharmacist's business as a receptionist.

INTERVIEWER: What was your relationship in terms of Good Shepard Hospital?

MRS. GODETTE: I was a dietician there during the time. I served as a dietician at Good Shepard Hospital after Dr. Littman had gone away to pursue his surgical degree. He interceded with me having a job over there where I served as a dietician.

INTERVIEWER: Who were some of the doctors there at that time?

MRS. GODETTE: Mr. Faison was the administrator

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Faison? Mr. O.T. Faison?

MRS. GODETTE: He's living now. He was the owner of Smith's Drug Store at that time. Alton Smith was the pharmacist. That was also in the Five Points area, in the same complex. The drug store is there now. I don't know whether or not it's active as a drug store (may be just a lunch counter). It was the only black drug store at that time. Way back, you had another drug store further down (I can't remember the name). I thoroughly enjoyed the medical field. I wish I could have gone on to get my RN. I survived.

INTERVIEWER: Right across the street was the African-American library, on West Street.

MRS. GODETTE: Yes, West Street. Ms. Lowe was there. Now it's now the Kiwanis Club. I am a member of the Kiwanis Club, Home and Garden.

INTERVIEWER: You are? I just recently joined.

MRS. GODETTE: I haven't been active for about a year but I was one of the old members from way back.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know Charlotte Ross?

MRS. GODETTE: Oh, yes, I remember her.

INTERVIEWER: What was she like?

MRS. GODETTE: Do you really want to know?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MRS. GODETTE: Well, I didn't have to be in contact with her, and I don't remember if my parents did, but I hear she could be very nasty when dealing with blacks. It went down against her. In her position, she was a little snobbish, to put it mildly. But we didn't have to go to her because my daddy was out in the log woods, cutting logs, and feeding us, and paying our rent, so we didn't have to go to her for any assistance.

INTERVIEWER: What is life now that you are 90 years and you are retired, what is a typical day like for you?

MRS. GODETTE: Well, when I wake up in the morning, the first thing I do is give thanks to God. Then, I look around and see his blessings, his mercy, and his showering upon me. First of all, I've got to give him credit for just being here. I try to live a quality life. I enjoy my church. I like to visit the sick and elderly (as if I wasn't elderly myself). I would like to leave this with the younger generation. Boy, if I had the opportunities you have today, I might be Ms. _____ or some of those people up there in the white house. I don't know what I might have ended up being, but I didn't have the opportunities. Please take advantage of every opportunity you can get. Education is foremost. Where I have gotten by with a high school education and a little extended college, you can't make it. You've got to get a college education and all you can get. There is no excuse. It's out there for you. If you want it, you can get it. I encourage every youth (it breaks my heart looking at them walking up and down the street, carefree, don't even have the slightest idea what their future will be like. This is all I have to say. Please take advantage of every opportunity you can get as you go through life. You'll never regret it.

INTERVIEWER: And having said that, Mrs. Godette, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me to come into your home, to hear the

wonderful stories about the history of African Americans in New Bern, North Carolina, and the wonderful wisdom and knowledge you have shared with us. Thank you so much.

This ends the interview.