

INTERVIEWER: My name is Ms. Tiffany Dove. I'm an interviewer. I'm interviewing Mr. Otto White at the home of his daughter, Ms. Theresa Parmeley, 1914 Newsome Drive, and she is also present for the interview. Mr. White, can you give me your full name, when you were born and where?

MR. WHITE: Otto White, born in 1919, on Chapman Street. []

INTERVIEWER: Can you just tell me a little about yourself and your family?

MR. WHITE: We had a big family. We had 10 head. My daddy could take an apple and give all of us one slice out of it. Whatever he promised you, you got it. If he promised you a whipping, you got it and you wouldn't forget it.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of memories do you have of the times you spent with your brothers and sisters? Were they all boys or all girls?

MR. WHITE: There were 6 boys and 4 girls.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember most about your family and their involvement in the community?

MR. WHITE: We were a close-knit family. By the time we got out of school, we had work to do. We would take hogs from the warehouse to the store on Broad Street just before you turn on Miller Street and they would cut off their heads and feet and hasselet and give it to my daddy. He would make sausage, cut the fat up and make lard out of it. He would take and wash it and we all had to wash it. We had a bowl. If it wasn't clean when we put it in the rinse water, he would throw it back into the wash water where we had to do it over again.

INTERVIEWER: You said you shared with a neighbor?

MR. WHITE: Yes. They shipped hogs from Morehead (City); they would just kill them; they would not take the liver and things like that. My daddy would take them to the A & P Store. They would give us all the liver, hasselet, fat to my daddy. He would take it home and fry (the fat) it out and give our neighbors some. But we had the biggest family in the neighborhood.

INTERVIEWER: How has the community changed?

MR. WHITE: Well, you can live right next door to somebody and they could be killing something and you don't know anything about it; all you can do is smell it. My daddy and momma had more children than anyone on the street. Also, you had to go to church. It wasn't a matter of if you wanted to, you had to. I thought my mother and father were the meanest people, but you know what? They were the best people that ever lived.

INTERVIEWER: You were born before the great fire. Do you know if anybody in your family lived in the area when they had the fire in 1922?

MR. WHITE: I heard about it.

INTERVIEWER: But you don't know if anybody in your family lived in the area?

MR. WHITE: No, none of my family lived in the area.

INTERVIEWER: What schools did you attend and what teachers do you remember?

MR. WHITE: Miss Robinson was my second grade teacher; Miss Houston was my fifth grade teacher and Mr. Ernie Fisher was my first grade teacher.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember most about them?

MR. WHITE: When Miss Houston told you to get your homework out and you didn't do it, you would remember it the next time. If we had homework, my mother would sit and watch us do it. There were 10 head of us. I never remember going to bed without doing homework.

INTERVIEWER: When you were out on your own, what kind of work did you do? And, tell me about your family, your own family that you started.

MR. WHITE: My daddy got a horse and cart to haul furniture and I helped to hook up the horse for him to go to work. And he worked for Jarrett Jones. When school was out, I would go down there and wash windows. Five or six years later, he was laying carpet and installing oil heaters and I started helping him, laying carpet, putting in tile. Then when oil heaters first came out, there were protests. So, we would not install the heaters until the store closed. I told him he could go home and I would stay at the store.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned before that you had to go to church; that you had no choice, you could not say that you did not want to go. What church did your family attend?

MR. WHITE: Mt. Calvary

INTERVIEWER: Did you remain at that church?

MR. WHITE: No, we stayed there until my mother joined Little Rock.

INTERVIEWER: And what about when you were out on your own and had your own family? Can you tell me a little about that?

MR. WHITE: My wife's name was Sarah. She stayed way off. We got married very young. She stayed on Norfolk Street. When they started building the projects, her uncle had a two-room apartment and he decided he didn't want it. We were staying with Miss Carrie. My wife then said, "Let us have the apartment." We were in Craven Terrace. We cut wood and gave it to the neighborhood. God brought us a mighty long way.

INTERVIEWER: How many children do you have?

MR. WHITE: I have one girl and four boys.

INTERVIEWER: How many different areas of New Bern did you live in? You said you were born in the Chapman Street area. What can you tell me about those different areas, the different communities that you lived in?

MR. WHITE: We stayed with Miss Carrie. She was like a mother to us. We had a two-bedroom apartment in Craven Terrace and that's where our four children were born.

INTERVIEWER: You moved from Chapman Street to where?

MR. WHITE: To Main Street, and from Main Street to Cotton Street.

INTERVIEWER: Mr. White, did you have any family members that were in the military?

MR. WHITE: My brother was in the military

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything that he told you about the time that he was in the service?

MR. WHITE: He went in the Army and he came back home. He did what he was told. Whatever he was told to do, he did it. He was at Ft. Bragg. I told him I was glad he had come back home because he looked like he was sick.

INTERVIEWER: Were you going to go into the service?

MR. WHITE: Well, I went to Ft. Bragg, but they told me I looked so bad, so pitiful that they were going to send me back home.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you go to Ft. Bragg? Were you drafted?

MR. WHITE: Yes. I went and they told us to "go pick up those stumps." I didn't pick up the stumps and he asked me why I didn't pick up the stumps. I told him I didn't smoke. He told me "I didn't ask if you smoked. I told you to pick up them stumps; if you don't want to go back home, you'd better start picking them up".

INTERVIEWER: So you went down there on your own, or were you drafted?

MR. WHITE: I was drafted down there.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about the military, in general?

MR. WHITE: I think if a person wants to make a man out of himself, and he's not going to go to college, he needs to go into the military. I'm glad I didn't go to college. I didn't want to leave home. I had just gotten married, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember if there were any major sporting events in New Bern when you were growing up?

MR. WHITE: I remember the circus coming to New Bern on the train and they put up a tent. They put up a tent on Front Street.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of the things that you remember that happened in the 30's, 40's, and 50's? What stands out about New Bern during those times?

MR. WHITE: I know it was hot the day I got married.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything about the elected officials that were here in New Bern, the politicians that were here in New Bern?

MR. WHITE: We never kept up with politics.

INTERVIEWER: When do you remember the first African-Americans getting elected or involved in politics?

MR. WHITE: I remember Martin Luther King getting shot at the convention center. I remember when he got assassinated.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the segregated facilities that you could or could not go into when you were young?

MR. WHITE: When you went into the cafes, you had to use the back. Moore had those barbecues and you had to order through the side door.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember where you couldn't go into at all? Or were you able to go into those places but just use another way?

MR. WHITE: I don't know of any place where you couldn't go; you just had to go to the side door.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think of the election of the first Black President?

MR. WHITE: I think it just fulfills the bible; the top shall be the bottom and the bottom shall be the top. Long time ago, when Martin Luther King was here, you would never think that. Obama made it to the top. And I am so glad he did.

INTERVIEWER: And, in North Carolina, we have the first female governor. What do you think about that?

MR. WHITE: I don't even remember the first female governor.

INTERVIEWER: Beverly Perdue.

MR. WHITE: I don't keep up much with the politics. I just keep up with the church and family. We didn't go because we had work to do.

INTERVIEWER: What are the different types of work you've done after you got married?

MR. WHITE I laid carpet, worked on oil heaters.

INTERVIEWER: How long have you been retired?

MR. WHITE: I can't even remember. But, after my wife died, I didn't work any more.

INTERVIEWER: What have you done since you retired?

MR. WHITE: Wal-Mart and the oil heating and linoleum people calls me and says that I need to put up a phone (for advice)

INTERVIEWER: Next year, they will be celebrating New Bern's 300th anniversary. What do you think about that?

MR. WHITE: It's nice that they will be celebrating.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything that you would like to talk about in this interview that I didn't ask you?

MR. WHITE: No. I talked about the people calling me for questions about linoleum and carpet.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any words of wisdom that you want to share? Any advice for the younger generation

MR. WHITE: Stay in school. Honor your mother and father. Stay in church. God can take anything and make anything that he wants out of it. Take me for instance. I was nothing and he made me what I am.

INTERVIEWER: Well, Mr. White, thank you for sharing your memories of New Bern. Your voice has been an empowerment for this project.

MR. WHITE: I never had to write a note. I never had to borrow money for anything. My wife had a beauty shop in the home and I never had to borrow money. When there was death or sickness, you were on your own because you couldn't borrow. Do unto others as you will have them do unto you. And God can pull you from the bottom to the top.

INTERVIEWER: What have you done in the community?

MR. WHITE: I worked down in New Bern on the sick committee.

INTERVIEWER: How was that organized? Was it a group of people here in New Bern that just go together?

MR. WHITE: No. Do you know about the New Bern Men's Fellowship Choir? The sick committee was organized under the New Bern Men's Fellowship Choir.

INTERVIEWER: And you started that?

MR. WHITE: Yes, I am the founder.

INTERVIEWER: What does that committee do?

MR. WHITE: We visit the sick, and those less fortunate than we are. We have a meeting every month. You have to be a member of a church and, if you need help, we will consider your name to be on the list. I still have customers that I don't see every week. I do it from the heart. I help those that can't help themselves. We have two members of the committee who are sick and I visit them every week.

When my sister died, she left each one of us \$25000. And when I was asked what to do with it, I said put it in Theresa Parmley's name. I don't see any of that \$25000 now. But God has been good to me. I don't have anything to do but serve Him. One of the best things to do is to honor old folks and visit the sick. I like to help those who can't help themselves, and I've never been hungry.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I thank you again for doing this interview.